

Report of External Evaluation and Review

The College of Law New Zealand
Limited

Highly Confident in educational performance

Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 27 February 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:	The College of Law New Zealand Limited
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	Level 8, 3 City Road, Auckland
Delivery sites:	The College of Law also delivers training at hired training rooms in Hamilton, Wellington, Dunedin and Christchurch.
First registered:	5 December 2003
Courses currently delivered	<p>The College of Law is currently approved to deliver the Professional Legal Studies Course: Online (Level 6).</p> <p>The organisation also offers a New Zealand Law and Practice Examination Preparation course.</p>
Code of Practice signatory?	Yes
Number of students:	<p>Domestic: 660 students</p> <p>8 per cent Māori</p> <p>4 per cent Pasifika</p> <p>International: two</p>
Number of staff:	Eight full-time equivalents
Distinctive characteristics:	The College of Law is an organisation with five colleges, in New Zealand, New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, and Western Australia. It was established to meet the education and training needs of the legal profession.

The College of Law is one of only two PTEs in New Zealand that provides the professional legal studies course for Bachelor of Laws (LLB) graduates, a prerequisite to being admitted to the bar.

Providers of the Professional Legal Studies Course: Online must be accredited by the New Zealand Council of Legal Education, which has a statutory obligation to regulate the education and training required for admission to practise as a lawyer.

Recent significant changes:	The organisation recently appointed a new executive director.
Previous quality assurance history:	At the 2008 NZQA audit, The College of Law met all requirements of the quality assurance standard then in place.
Other:	There has been an ongoing issue of funding disparity between The College of Law and the other provider of professional legal studies, the Institute of Professional Legal Studies. The funding disparity has had a significant impact on The College of Law's course fees, to the disadvantage of students and employers who choose the course.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The scope for the external evaluation and review (EER) consisted of the mandatory focus area: governance, management, and strategy, and the main programme offered by the college: the Professional Legal Studies Course: Online (Level 6).

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 executive director of The College of Law supplied the EER team with a self-evaluation outline prior to the visit.

The evaluation team of two visited the Auckland site over two days. Interviews were conducted with the executive director, the director of programmes, adjunct instructors, members of the college board and advisory group, the administration manager, and graduates. A range of documentation was reviewed, including the business plan, course evaluations, notes from a focus group interview, board meeting papers and minutes, reports to the board and minutes, and a number of pages from the online teaching site.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **College of Law New Zealand Limited**.

The College of Law New Zealand has excellent achievement, with rates being consistently high. In 2010 and 2011, course completion rates were 99 and 98 per cent respectively, and qualification completion for both those years was 100 per cent. The college is working with highly motivated students who have recent experience of academic study; however, there is still a strong emphasis on ensuring that the students who participate are enabled to achieve, through the use of online learning and flexible delivery and a focus on good teaching.

The value of the qualification is not only as a prerequisite that enables graduates to be admitted to the bar, but also in the practical skills and knowledge taught, to transition students into work in law firms and accountancy practices. To understand skills acquisition, the organisation asks students to self-assess their skills and knowledge at the start and then again at the end of each course. Students report significant gains and attribute these largely to what they learned on the programme. These self-assessment results are supported by feedback from employers.

The college has strong employer links which are utilised to ensure that graduates are gaining the essential competencies required for junior lawyers beginning their careers. An indicator that the organisation is matching the needs of its stakeholders is the increasing market share that has been gained, from 38.25 per cent in 2004, to 51.5 per cent in 2008, to 58.6 per cent in 2011. This is despite having to charge students more as the result of a Tertiary Education Commission funding anomaly.

The organisation is continuously improving the programmes offered, including updating content and resources, reviewing the currency of content, working with the adjunct instructors to improve delivery, and commissioning a recent refresh of the website in response to graduate feedback.

Governance and management is strong. The organisation is well resourced and focused on matching the needs of graduates and employers. The college is a not-for-profit organisation which has an active board that meets regularly and reviews a range of performance data. The board is representative of employers and has representatives from New Zealand and Australia. While the relationship with the Australian group can create challenges, mostly there is strength in being part of the wider group which brings a range of expertise, opportunities to collaborate, and points of comparison.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **College of Law New Zealand Limited**.

The College of Law has good processes for self-assessment, using a range of data to measure key indicators of performance. This data is widely shared and informs organisational planning, programme reviews, and development. Bi-monthly board reports contain a range of information, including the director of programmes' report which outlines courses undertaken and contains summarised and analysed course evaluation and achievement data, results of the students' skills self-assessments, and moderation reports. Other mechanisms for reviewing performance include external moderation, regular meetings of course committees and an academic board, focus groups, and regular meetings with stakeholders.

The evaluation team saw good evidence that a range of data was used to make decisions about changes to content and delivery. Changes are frequently piloted and evaluated for their effectiveness before being rolled out to the wider programme. Course evaluations are done systematically and cover a range of factors, including teaching, course structure and design, accuracy of course materials, client service, relevance, and overall satisfaction. These evaluations are analysed and benchmarked against performance targets.

The College of Law is accredited to provide the programme by the New Zealand Council of Legal Education. This body conducts biannual reviews which require substantial documentation and evidence of quality processes. These regular programme reviews necessitate a thorough understanding of performance. Therefore, this organisation has a range of mechanisms that ensure it has a good understanding of performance and how well its programmes and activities are matching learner needs.

Findings¹

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**.

Students who study the Professional Legal Studies Course: Online consistently achieve well. The College of Law has had consistently high achievement across 2010 and 2011, with course and completion rates being 98-100 per cent. While this achievement can be largely attributed to the highly motivated students who enrol, there is good evidence that the organisation has a range of approaches to ensure that students are enabled to achieve well. These include a focus on effective teaching, the use of formative assessment to prepare students for summative assessment events, and flexible delivery.

The practical nature of the course means that students are achieving important skills relevant to their work as junior lawyers. The organisation is attempting to measure the skills gained by students during their progression through the programme, by asking students to complete a self-assessment at the beginning and end of the programme. The results from these assessments show that students perceive that they have increased their knowledge and skills significantly across the range of subjects covered. For example, in civil litigation students assessed their improvement to be over 300 per cent, all attributed to the programme. This data is supported by the feedback from graduates and employers who attest to the importance of the skills achieved.

Achievement data is collected and analysed by course and grade distributions. Currently, this data is not benchmarked across time and therefore it is difficult to understand, through this data, those courses that are most challenging for students.

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**.

The professional practice course is a key part of the process for law graduates to meet the criteria required to be admitted to the bar. So there is value in this programme for enabling students to move to this next phase of their career. A range of feedback collected by the organisation from employers, law firms, and

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

graduates attests to the value of this programme in the practical skills learned for enabling the lawyers to be better prepared for when they move into employment. A key indicator that The College of Law delivers valued outcomes is the increased market share that the college has gained, from just 38.25 per cent in 2004 to 58.6 per cent in 2011, and this despite their having to charge more than their competition because of a funding anomaly.

The organisation has strong links with a range of key stakeholders, including law firms, accountancy firms, and faculty within law schools around the country. The College of Law was established in New Zealand in response to an employer initiative led by a group of 12 large New Zealand law firms. The point of difference for the college was the programme being delivered through a blended delivery mode, enabling new graduates to complete their professional practice course while they were employed. The college has maintained these stakeholder links through regular meetings and board representation. There has been a recent move to reinvigorate the advisory committee. This and a more systematic approach to meeting with key stakeholders should strengthen the organisation's understanding of the valued outcomes it delivers.

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 College of Law works hard to match the needs of its students and other stakeholders. The flexible delivery makes it possible for law graduates who have already found employment to complete their professional practice course while in work. The organisation is continuously finding ways to improve its delivery, including moving to offering on-site courses in the evenings and weekends and a recent upgrade of the online learning portal in response to student feedback.

The programme is kept relevant and current through the use of a number of adjunct instructors, who are mostly current practitioners, delivering on site and online and ensuring the content delivered matches the reality of the workplace. Adjunct instructors are encouraged to share real-life examples with students to give them exposure to what to expect when they enter practice. Course committees and course evaluations are other mechanisms used to monitor the relevance and currency of the programmes. Furthermore, the organisation has recently decided to introduce practice area specialists to ensure course materials are regularly reviewed and updated by practitioners with the relevant field of expertise.

The online learning portal is increasingly using interactive activities and media, and it is hoped the refreshed site will be easier to navigate. On-site activities include a range of approaches including group work, role-plays, and presentations, which form part of the assessment. These activities are important for preparing students

for practice and dealing with clients. After every course, students are asked for feedback on their tutors, the course content, and the college in general. Survey data viewed by the evaluation team shows that students are highly satisfied.

1.4 How effective is the teaching?

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

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

The teaching delivered by the college is well managed. While the college has one full-time instructor, most of the teaching is delivered online or in block courses by adjunct instructors. New adjunct instructors are inducted into their role and then shadow existing instructors for a few weeks before beginning to teach. Every year the college hosts an instructor conference where matters of teaching and learning are discussed and workshops held.

The roles of teaching, marking assessments, and moderation are kept separate and this has a moderating effect across the courses delivered. There are strong feedback mechanisms between instructors, markers, and moderators, and any issues raised are quickly dealt with. Course committees regularly review quality through regular reviews and analysis of a range of information, including student evaluations, tutor and marker feedback, and moderators' reports.

All courses are carefully designed, following the pedagogical model of 'information, demonstration, application', and this runs across both online and on-site delivery. Formative assessment is used effectively to give students the opportunity to receive useful feedback that supports their preparation for summative assessment events. Teaching receives consistently positive student feedback, and this is yet another indicator that teaching is effective.

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 **Excellent**.

This organisation has good communication processes for ensuring students understand what they can expect from the programme and what is required of them. All students attend an orientation, which is based in their local area, to gain an understanding of the programme and the tools available to them to help them succeed. There is a point of contact at the college if students need extra support with study. Examples were heard of the college deferring assessments to enable a student to deal with a personal matter. While the quality of the information given to existing students is high, the organisation is working to improve the information that is given to prospective students. Some students complete their law degree

unaware that they have to do the professional practice course. The college is looking at getting better information to law students and improving its relationship with faculty and its communication with the law students' associations.

The organisation has had ongoing feedback about the online portal and the difficulty of navigating the site. In response to survey data, the organisation held a focus group with existing students and developed some recommendations for improvements. The recommendations have all been implemented by the company from its Australian central services; however, it is too soon to know whether students find the newly refreshed portal more satisfactory.

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**.

The College of Law has strong governance and management which is focused on ensuring that the organisation meets the needs of its key stakeholders. There is good governance, with the board comprised of New Zealand and Australian members meeting regularly to review performance data. The new executive director has existing networks in the sector and appears to have an open management style that ensures different perspectives are heard. The small group of permanent staff have worked for the organisation for some time, indicating they feel valued.

The organisation works within a tight regulatory framework; however, it is determined to ensure that within the prescribed boundaries, all efforts are given to ensuring that a quality programme is delivered in a way that best meets the needs of students and their future and current employers. There is good evidence of planning and development and this is well linked to sector developments and the needs of law firms and other workplaces that employ law graduates.

The organisation collects and analyses a range of data to inform planning and development and to assess its performance against key indicators. Reviews are systematic across a number of aspects of the college, including courses, the programme, future planning, and the board. There were a range of examples of how the organisation has worked to improve the quality and relevance of programmes and delivery, including updating content, making resources more available using Cloud technology, refreshing the website, and planning to offer relevant programmes for continuous professional development, which will soon be mandatory for legal practitioners.

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: Professional Legal Studies Course: Online (Level 6)

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

It is recommended that The College of Law:

- Benchmark course and grade distributions across time to better understand patterns of achievement.
- Develop a more systematic approach to meeting with key stakeholders, to be integrated into the college's quality processes.

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/>

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