

Report of External Evaluation and Review

Ashburton Learning Centre

Highly Confident in educational performance

Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 2 February 2011

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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

Location:	71 Park Street, Ashburton
Type:	Private Training Establishment
First registered:	2008
Number of students:	120
Number of staff:	Nine full-time staff, 12 volunteer tutors
Scope of active accreditation:	TEC Working funding Literacy Aotearoa funding
Sites:	One as above
Distinctive characteristics:	Ashburton Learning Centre has evolved from a literacy and numeracy assistance organisation to a private training establishment (PTE) with nine full-time employees and up to 12 volunteer tutors delivering contracted training.
Recent significant changes:	Structural changes, including separation of governance and management. Manager's position created that is accountable to a governing advisory committee. New reporting framework introduced, tracking students progress through individual learning plans (ILPs), with feedback on outcomes to stakeholders: Ashburton Workplace Literacy, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and Specific Learning Difficulty Assessment services.
Previous quality assurance history:	At the last quality assurance visit by NZQA, an audit (2008), the first since registration, Ashburton Learning Centre did not meet one requirement of QA Standard

One, the standard in force at the time. This related to governance and management, and has since been addressed.

Other:

Ashburton Learning Centre also offers a learning programme in te reo Māori and other aspects of tikanga Māori for a growing Māori population in the region

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

Literacy and numeracy is the primary focus for Ashburton Learning Centre, e.g. workplace literacy, and family and community learning (for which there is an expanding demand in a changing community).

ESOL is a new development and a challenge for this TEO, with a growing population of immigrant learners.

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 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/>

One lead evaluator interviewed staff and students, and was on site for a day, accompanied by an observer from the NZQA EER team.

Ashburton Learning Centre has had an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report, and submissions received have been fully considered by NZQA before finalising the report.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of the **Ashburton Learning Centre**.

Ashburton Learning Centre (ALC) meets its contractual outcomes to funding bodies and achieves excellent levels of course completion in literacy and numeracy programmes. It has strong relationships with local employers and community agencies and receives a continuing flow of referrals from these sources and from ex-students. Feedback from employers and community sources on the value of ALC programmes is uniformly positive.

While delivering high quality learning in terms of measurable outcomes, ALC is also strongly focused on less easily measurable “added value” outcomes, such as improvement in confidence, communication, and self-belief for learners. These are both a prerequisite for good learning and an outcome of success in that students in the programme express delight and surprise at the quality of the learning, applauding the accessibility of the teaching, the relationship with teachers, and the life-changing effects of the programme.

Ashburton has recently become a destination for Māori from North Island locations, and ALC has responded with the employment of a local Māori teacher to set up classes in te reo Māori and a repertoire of learning in tikanga Māori. This programme has been warmly received and well attended.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of the **Ashburton Learning Centre**.

Self-assessment of ALC’s provision for external stakeholders is conducted through a suite of monthly and bi-monthly meetings with advisory and interest groups representing a range of community interests, and through day-by-day formal and informal contact with employers, community agencies, and families.

Self-assessment of teaching runs step by step with the programme, beginning with a comprehensive consultation to assess and record students’ needs and goals in an individual learning plan (ILP), and continuous tracking and reviewing of progress and delivery through to completion. Needs assessment is ongoing, and midway changes in strategy, including a switch of tutors, are made as required. Teachers are required to plan and review their own teaching. Answers to questions in an annual formal student review are analysed and used in planning.

All staff are qualified teachers of literacy and numeracy, and ALC has a vigorous, ongoing professional development policy, with both internal and external opportunities for updating skills and knowledge and achieving further tertiary qualifications.

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 **Excellent**.

Around 50 per cent of ALC's students are migrant workers engaged in ESOL learning, and 50 per cent literacy and numeracy learners with a wide variety of learning challenges, including serious and lifelong reading disorders. In 2009, cumulative achievement levels in all ALC courses in line with individual learning plans (ILPs) were excellent for such a group. Of 120 students enrolled, 91 met all their goals, ten withdrew with partial completion of goals, and six without seriously engaging in the programme.

Contributing to these outcomes, and also consequent upon them, is the achievement of personal goals, bringing increasing confidence and willingness to learn. These may feature prominently in the ILP and are highly valued by ALC. This was affirmed by enthusiastic reports of life-enhancing changes from students interviewed at the EER. Comments included: "I find I can focus better"; "I talk to the others now"; "I feel like one of them"; "It's like I can breathe"; "It's a totally different future for me now".

Self-assessment mirrors the learning in a complex sequence of learning progressions, with session plans and evaluations reflecting on the performance of both tutor and student. These plans are monitored by the tutor/student supervisor and formally reviewed monthly. Lack of progress may lead to a change of teaching strategy or reallocation of tutors to individual learners.

Teachers are intimately aware of developmental changes in their students. Though often life-changing, these changes are more elusive to measure than quantifiable assessment results and lack recognition as fundable educational outcomes. In ALC, as in many educational contexts, this neglect might be remedied with more systematic observation and recording of these "soft" outcomes, to provide better evidence of their relationship to contractual outcomes. ALC is considering ways to achieve this. Assessment relies at present on a prodigious fund of informal, anecdotal, and historical information and feedback from students and other interested parties, sometimes a confidential matter between teacher and learner.

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

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**.

ALC began as a voluntary organisation to address a perceived need for literacy and numeracy learning in the Ashburton area. The key stakeholders were, and still are, the learners, some learning English as a new language, many with a history of failure in mainstream education and consequent inability to progress in employment.

ALC has contractual relationships with funders and quality assurance agencies, notably Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ), the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), Adult and Community Education (ACE), Literacy Aotearoa, and NZQA. Students with a demonstrated need and interest are accepted as a matter of course, and any shortfall in funding is compensated by the use of qualified volunteers in literacy training.

There are long-term, personal relationships with local employers and community groups. The value of ALC programmes in the workplace is exemplified by an agreement (initiated by a former student) with a prominent local industry to sponsor employees to attend the courses. ALC is on first-name terms with police, counsellors, and community agencies, all contributing in various ways to the welfare of students and their families. Evaluation of outcomes from external stakeholders includes feedback from the workplace, follow-up information of students' progress in employment, and a schedule of monthly and bi-monthly meetings with advisory and community interest groups.

Student learning is recorded in the schedule of progressions reviewed monthly by the management group, and used for revision of ILPs and/or teaching strategies. Students are consulted continually about their progress and their view of the teaching, and an annual four-page student survey of ALC is analysed and deployed in future planning.

With a growing population of Māori in the Ashburton region, many distant from their home hapū and marae, ALC employs a tutor specialising in Māori achievement, conducting courses in te reo Māori, and organising occasions for powhiri, karanga, karakia, waiata, whakapapa, and other tikanga. Anecdotal feedback from these occasions has been positive.

ALC is considering further developments in self-assessment, for example cumulative annual reports covering a wider range of outcomes than at present, and a reprise of the initial assessment interview for an end-of-course analysis by each student. These improvements would complement an already comprehensive self-assessment process and enable ALC to benchmark its own achievements year by year.

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 student initial assessment interview is a needs assessment resource for the creation of an individual learning plan, which is consulted and monitored session by session and reviewed monthly by the tutor/student supervisor. A wide variety of perceived literacy needs is identified, from such detailed items as the appropriate use of suffixes, to global skills such as “reading with better attention”. Often, as one student reported, unacknowledged or unsuspected needs are unearthed and addressed. A change in teaching approach or content, or a possible switch of tutors may be made at any time to ensure a good fit for often changing needs.

Learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, are specifically targeted, focussing on the enhancement of existing skills and aptitudes, and for one student interviewed, producing unforeseen benefits and prospects for himself and his family.

Continuous tracking of day-by-day learner achievement, with feedback from employers, apprentice coordinators, placement locations, community agencies, and families provides a picture of learner achievement that is lucid and complex and not always measurable in well-defined terms. Anecdotal accounts of learners’ experiences are collected and may be displayed, with the learner’s permission, in prominent places in the centre.

Teachers and management formally and informally review the progress of every student in terms of their ILP. Student evaluations are analysed question by question, and the entire body of collated information, both internal and external, is used for immediate and future planning. Success is confirmed by contractual outcomes and by the strong endorsement of added value by students, employers, and community agencies.

Systems and formats for converting “soft” outcomes into measurable progressions are being developed elsewhere in the sector. ALC has already identified contributing factors to this form of analysis and has expressed interest in pursuing it further.

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**.

Learning may be one-to-one or in groups of up to 12 members. The perceived advantage of group learning is the opportunity to practise communication skills and to cooperate and learn from others, often a challenge for students more used to isolation. Family members may be included in sessions, both to contribute to the learning and to benefit from it.

Tutors are assigned by the tutor/student supervisor to achieve the best possible match with the needs and aptitudes of students, a relationship which is continually monitored, reviewed, and amended as necessary.

Every teaching session is planned, reported, and evaluated in terms of progressions worked on, and reviewed at an agreed date by learner and tutor. Progress is reported monthly to the tutor/student supervisor, who may advise or initiate a change of strategy as required.

Course design, delivery, and assessment are moderated informally by colleagues, formally by ALC management, and externally by funding and quality assurance bodies. Teachers share rooms, compare methods, observe and mentor each other, and discuss teaching matters at a weekly tutor meeting. Programmes are reviewed in-depth at monthly staff meetings, and remedial action taken as required.

“Added value” features of the programme are reviewed by discussion between learners and tutors, by feedback from whānau and local communities, and by the annual student questionnaire.

All teachers, permanent and voluntary, have the Aotearoa Certificate in Adult Literacy Tutoring and the National Certificate in Adult Literacy and Numeracy Education. “Where am I going?” is the motto question for an energetic self-assessment policy, supported by a generous range of professional development options. In-service training is an ongoing feature, with two-hour, monthly internal training sessions for staff and volunteers and a variety of external professional development events, for example a monthly hui at a local marae and funded training opportunities with Literacy Aotearoa or TEC. Enrolment in degree programmes is encouraged and partially funded.

This is a meticulously designed and monitored programme. Its success is clear from contractual outcomes and a fund of positive feedback from workplaces, interest groups, and from the students.

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**.

Guidance and support is integral to the teaching. The steering document is an initial assessment interview which explores and records the needs, interests, and goals of applicants. This is supplemented by an ongoing search for inexplicit needs and a continual effort, systematically pursued, to create the most appropriate learning environment for each learner.

Students are encouraged to share frustrations and difficulties. Family members and other support people are welcomed at learning sessions, a strategy sometimes stressful and sometimes resulting in a positive change of attitudes and removal of background barriers to progress.

Success is warmly acknowledged, with awards, certificates, and celebrations if the learner permits them. Public display may be muted or abandoned to avoid embarrassment to those who feel shamed by disability, for which reason ALC makes little effort to advertise its location, tactfully providing a small removable sign to inform new applicants that they have indeed arrived.

Learner support and guidance can be adduced from outcomes, but student feedback, including anecdotal accounts and personal histories, gives evidence of a more substantial value and purpose in the teaching-learning relationship. Comments from students interviewed at the EER include: “These people are tops”; “They are doing a wonderful job”; “This is the best in my lifetime”; “The teachers are caring people, God’s gift”; “These people care”; “What a change from being at school”.

Feedback on “soft” outcomes received daily from employers, community agencies, and families, and from the students themselves, is shared freely among staff, discussed in weekly and monthly staff meetings and used by the tutor/student supervisor as an indicator of the fitness of student/tutor relationships. While this feedback is effective, and while formal collection of such data could be counter-productive, a cumulative profile of student and community feedback, with more clearly defined indicators, might signal trends and be a useful contributor to benchmarking.

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**.

A recent clarification of the ALC structure has produced an exemplary interface of governance and management for an organisation of this size, clearly separating the two, but including staff in sub-committees with functional responsibility to the governing body. So while line management is clearly defined, all staff may directly communicate with the governing committee on matters of policy. This provides opportunities not only for discussion on the translation of policy into action, but also for ongoing assessment of all functional relationships in the TEO.

The governing committee widely represents community interests and endorses and actively supports the vision of the manager. It meets monthly and is a valued advisory group on policy matters and a promoter of ALC’s programmes. A product of this structure is a strong network of relationships with the community, including a highly productive agreement with a prominent employer and, in a recent change of location, provision at short notice of training premises and resources.

The manager reports to the governing committee, and with judicious appointment of key staff has created a flat management structure, sharing key roles and decisions, maximising available expertise, and ensuring effective succession should the need arise.

Sharing of knowledge and decision-making, with a rigorous focus on outcomes, permeates the entire organisation and its self-assessment, most significantly perhaps in the ongoing discussion with students on goals and achievements and the underlying system of progressions.

The kaupapa of consultation was also clearly evident during the EER visit, which the manager willingly used as a forum to discuss potential improvements, especially in relation

to self-assessment. This is an exemplary model of governance and management for an organisation with limited resources and a continually evolving constituency of clients.

Focus Areas

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

2.1 Focus area: English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

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: Literacy and numeracy learning

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: 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**.

Recommendations

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

Further actions

The next external evaluation and review will take place in accordance with NZQA's policy and is likely to occur within four years of the date of this report.

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

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