

Report of External Evaluation and Review

Maria Montessori Education
Foundation

Highly Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 15 March 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:	113 Mt Eden Road, Mt Eden, Auckland
Type:	Private training establishment
First registered:	2008
Number of students:	Domestic: eight International: two
Number of staff:	Two part-time staff
Scope of active accreditation:	Maria Montessori Education Foundation (MMEF) currently delivers the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education (Level 6). This diploma is a programme of study which trains people to teach three to six-year-olds by the Montessori methods.
Sites:	No additional sites.
Distinctive characteristics:	MMEF brought the internationally recognised AMI Montessori teaching qualification to New Zealand in 2009. This qualification was developed by Dr. Maria Montessori based on the Montessori philosophy. Concepts of the Montessori philosophy include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Freedom for self-directed learning• Preparing the learning environment• Observation and indirect teaching• Purposeful activity – the child's work

- Multi-age groups.

The diploma was designed to be delivered face to face with a minimum of 140 hours of supervised practical teaching. Identical courses are delivered worldwide. AMI is the standard-setting body for the qualification, provides guidance for the courses, and coordinates the “train the trainers” programme. The first cohort of students is due to complete training in January 2011.

Recent significant changes:

The start date for the second cohort of students studying the diploma has now been deferred to January 2012 as a result of:

- significant changes being made to the mode of delivery in response to stakeholder feedback
- increasing the training faculty to include two Montessori trainers from Australia
- reduction in government funding for the early childhood education sector as a whole which has affected stakeholders’ ability to sponsor students to do the course.

Previous quality assurance history:

MMEF was previously quality assured in 2009 by NZQA under the quality audit system. MMEF substantially met the applicable policies and criteria for ongoing registration of private training establishments. The one audit requirement not met related to governance and management, specifically goals and purposes.

Other:

Before MMEF could deliver the training in New Zealand, AMI had to be assured of the following:

- Sufficient demand for trained Montessori teachers in New Zealand, with jobs available for them on completion of the qualification
- Appropriate premises with the space required for the setting-up of Montessori teaching
- Appropriate and adequate teaching resources
- An AMI-qualified teacher with at least five years’ experience of teaching in a Montessori school who was prepared to take over the training of subsequent cohorts on successful

completion of the train the trainer programme¹.

After these assurances were gained, AMI sent an experienced trainer from overseas (there are no AMI trainers in New Zealand) to deliver the training to the students and train a trainer. AMI's support also includes sending external examiners to assess the final exams and marking of students' assignments throughout the course.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The scope of the external evaluation and review of MMEF included the following focus area:

- AMI 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education

This is the only qualification delivered by MMEF.

The mandatory focus areas were:

- Governance, management, and strategy
- International students.

The three focus areas above were sufficient to give the evaluators an accurate representation of performance across the organisation.

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 evaluation team for this EER comprised one lead evaluator and one team evaluator. The team visited the PTE for one day at its site in Auckland.

The staff, students, and external stakeholders interviewed as part of the EER included:

- MMEF staff: course assistant and director of training.

¹ The AMI trainer course requires a qualified AMI Montessori teacher to work alongside the director of training (who is delivering the course) as a course assistant for three courses, with at least two directors of training, and to complete assignments and materials from a trainer's perspective.

- MMEF students: current domestic and international students.
- External stakeholders: three owners of Montessori schools who are all sponsoring a student on the current AMI 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education programme. They have also taken other students into their schools for their observed teaching practice. One owner is also a member of both the MMEF management and advisory teams.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **Maria Montessori Education Foundation**.

Through the AMI 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education programme, MMEF students gain a useful qualification and valuable skills. All students in the first cohort who completed the programme have successfully gained the qualification, grown in confidence, and are now well prepared to teach children in accordance with Montessori principles. Self-assessment shows that the students, staff, and school owners endorsed MMEF's philosophy of a holistic pedagogy of encouraging child development.

In addition to the students' academic and psychological growth, there was strong evidence that students gained valuable life skills such as respect, concern, awareness of own behaviour, having order in one's life, time management, and learning to share and not be competitive. These skills gained by the students are integral to the Montessori philosophy underpinning the teaching of children in the classroom.

The employment prospects for graduates with this internationally recognised diploma are very favourable. There was evidence from the qualified Montessori teachers spoken to at the review that the qualification is valued highly and graduates are sought after to fill teaching positions around the world. The early childhood Montessori qualification is currently on the immediate skills shortage list in New Zealand. All graduates of the course have secured employment with their original school and sponsor in New Zealand and Australia, gained a new position in a Montessori school, or are in the process of making a choice of teaching roles in overseas destinations.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Maria Montessori Education Foundation**.

Self-assessment conducted by MMEF is both appropriate and effective for the small size of the organisation and its module-based delivery. MMEF has successfully implemented both formal and informal processes for identifying educational needs. For example, student feedback highlighted the value of "directed practical" sessions (in which students review the progress made by themselves and peers). In response, MMEF increased the frequency of these sessions and notes that, as a consequence of this change, overall student confidence as trainee-teachers has increased. However, because this is the first programme to be delivered, the range of data that MMEF can draw upon in the interests of future improvement is necessarily limited. The evaluation team is confident that the commitment MMEF has already shown in responding to the needs of its current students will, over time, be matched by a comprehensive awareness of wider stakeholder needs.

At an organisational level, MMEF is committed to the ongoing provision of AMI training in New Zealand. There are, however, several factors to address to increase student enrolments,

thus ensuring the ongoing sustainability of the programme. Partly as a result of recent funding changes in the early childhood education sector as a whole, the extent of ongoing local demand for the Montessori diploma has yet to be re-established, even though the shortage of Montessori teachers is still evident. MMEF could address some of this uncertainty by analysing current “market demand” for the training and identifying new opportunities to attract enrolments as these relate to its field of training. This more strategic focus would better enable MMEF to realise its primary goal of having more fully qualified Montessori teachers working in New Zealand Montessori schools.

TEO response

Maria Montessori Education Foundation has confirmed the factual accuracy of this report.

Findings²

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**.

The achievement rate of the Montessori teacher training qualification delivered by MMEF is very high. All students who have completed the AMI 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education programme have gained the qualification. The programme is module-based and designed to be delivered over a period of 18 months to incorporate teaching practice in Montessori schools. The exemplary attendance and achievement rate reflects students' commitment and the value they place on their training considering the challenges that this mode of delivery brings for students in balancing many other commitments.

In addition to their academic achievements, the students have gained in confidence as a result of acquiring many life skills such as time management, awareness of their own behaviour, and respect for others. The value of these skills is discussed further in section 1.2 below.

MMEF celebrates an achievement rate from the first cohort of students that compares equally with other international organisations delivering the AMI 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education. As this is the only programme of its type in New Zealand, MMEF compares its retention and achievement rates with identical programmes delivered throughout the world. Thorough self-assessment of achievement shows that the teaching practice and timely completion of assessments compare equally with other courses and the achievement rate is being maintained at above 80 per cent.

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**.

All Montessori school owners consulted highly valued the outcomes gained by the students after they have completed the programme. The employment prospects for graduates with this diploma are very favourable because identical courses of high quality and standards are delivered worldwide and therefore recognised internationally. Early childhood Montessori qualifications are also currently on the New Zealand skills shortage list, demonstrating the need for more qualified Montessori teachers. All graduates of the programme due to be

² The findings in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation's activities.

completed in January 2011 either already have employment or are currently choosing a position in a Montessori school.

The evaluation team concurred that, in addition to academic achievement, evidence clearly showed that students gained many valuable life skills such as being kind, courteous, and respectful in dress and general conduct. These attributes are paramount to the underpinning philosophy and conduct of encouraging child development in a Montessori classroom. Many of the students compared the AMI training experience to their early childhood education degree programme and, although the Montessori training was in-depth and challenging, they said it was very rewarding and gave them a greater knowledge and understanding of children's potential and the respect required to nurture positive development.

The PTE was specifically established to deliver the AMI 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education because the management team and founders of the trust recognise the value of having qualified AMI Montessori teachers in New Zealand. The challenge for MMEF is that, although this qualification is the benchmark qualification for early childhood education Montessori teaching, it is not yet recognised within the state system in New Zealand for funding purposes, making it difficult for school owners to sponsor employees in the future.

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 **Good**.

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

The programme and the specific activities designed within it have matched the needs of the first cohort of students very well. The AMI Montessori education programme has a solid reputation of delivering quality and relevant training that produces well-rounded graduates with a high standard of Montessori teaching ability. Self-assessment shows that the programme design, mode of delivery, and its clearly defined activities that have given the students an in-depth understanding of child development have prepared them well for the classroom.

MMEF delivers the training in modules over a period of 18 months which allows the students to return to their school or visit other schools for their teaching practice in between the block weeks of face-to-face delivery. This practice has proven to be successful in consolidating and enhancing skills and knowledge as they are learnt. There was also strong evidence to support the effectiveness of the face-to-face delivery method in having valuable, hands-on, practical sessions in a simulated environment which acclimatises the students well to their role.

Review of the programme is ongoing and has already provided MMEF with findings to inform changes for improvement. An example of a change made was the introduction of more directed practical sessions to enable students to self-review their performance and

discuss it with their peers. This has already proven to reduce nerves and help the students to grow in confidence.

Although the AMI 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education has a proven track record of quality training, it is the first programme to be delivered in New Zealand and MMEF has yet to develop a comprehensive understanding of how well the adapted design of the programme has met Montessori schools' needs.

While MMEF has established an advisory group with relevant stakeholders, the full value of the feedback and input from this group is yet to be realised.

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 AMI director of training who is currently delivering the programme is an inspirational teacher and actively attracts and engages the students in learning. The director has a wealth of experience and knowledge in Montessori education, has a sound reputation in the sector, and is highly respected worldwide. The director is also training the course assistant to deliver the course in the future.

The knowledge and skills of the trainers remain current and relevant. The director of training and the course assistant are engaged in a variety of education activities within Montessori schools outside of the time spent with the MMEF students. This gives them first-hand experience of current needs within the sector.

The Montessori education programme adopts a number of teaching styles that successfully deepen the knowledge of the Montessori philosophy and subsequently enable the students to develop an understanding of children's development potential. There was evidence that the requirement of students to write their own material and develop their own resources has assisted them in taking charge of their own learning and developing valuable research skills.

Self-assessment demonstrates that there is a consistently high level of quality in assessments. The robust process MMEF follows to ensure that the assessment of assignments is consistent provides useful feedback for the students which assists them to move ahead.

The evaluation team heard and saw evidence that confirms the benefit students receive from the one-to-one tuition provided by the director of training and her ability to work with each person individually, developing their skills to their own potential.

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**.

The students are well supported by the MMEF trainers while on the module training and in their place of work. There was strong evidence to show that the students are well supported by the staff at MMEF. The support offered is appropriate to the students' needs and is in the form of emails, phone calls, and face-to-face teaching both during the training modules and while the students are in the workplace. An example of this support is when the trainer worked one-to-one with a student over a period of time to assist them in reflecting the philosophy of Dr. Montessori in a more coherent way within their teaching material.

All students said the expectations of the programme were made very clear prior to enrolment and, although the level of challenge the programme would pose could not be anticipated, the programme has met expectations well.

Thorough and comprehensive self-assessment through constant communication with students and their schools and a more formal evaluation process clearly demonstrates the excellent support given by MMEF staff.

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**.

The vision of having more qualified Montessori educators in New Zealand is driven by the passion of the MMEF staff and its management team. The management team are all qualified Montessori teachers and were instrumental in establishing the MMEF private training establishment. The commitment shown by both MMEF and AMI has enabled them to bring the programme to New Zealand for the first time.

There was strong evidence that current students were well supported. At an organisational level, MMEF is committed to the ongoing provision of AMI training in New Zealand. There are, however, several factors to address to increase student enrolments, thus ensuring the ongoing sustainability of the programme. Partly as a result of recent funding changes in the early childhood education sector as a whole, the extent of ongoing local demand for the Montessori diploma has yet to be re-established, even though the shortage of Montessori teachers is still evident. MMEF could address some of this uncertainty by analysing current "market demand" for the training and identifying new opportunities to attract enrolments as these relate to its field of training. This more strategic focus would better enable MMEF to realise its primary goal of having more fully qualified Montessori teachers working in New Zealand Montessori schools.

Self-assessment is ongoing, comprehensive, and genuine and has led to worthwhile improvements. However, this would be strengthened by a greater understanding of whether

the course matches the needs of the schools and students in New Zealand and a more robust organisational-level self-assessment of business planning for future training.

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 students

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: AMI 3-6 Diploma in Montessori Education

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

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

Recommendations

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

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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