



Report of External Evaluation and Review

Thoughtplanters Limited

Highly Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 18 January 2011

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MoE Number: 7875
NZQA Reference: C03094
Date of EER visit: 2 and 3 November 2010

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:	6 Baker Street, Dunedin
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
First registered:	2008
Number of students:	Domestic: Thoughtplanters Limited (Thoughtplanters) delivers training events (typically two or three days of training) to around 140 trainees.
Number of staff:	Six full-time equivalents
Scope of active accreditation:	Thoughtplanters is accredited to deliver unit standards towards the advanced National Certificate in Horticulture (Level 4).
Sites:	Thoughtplanters delivers training events at appropriate training locations from Auckland to Invercargill.
Distinctive characteristics:	Thoughtplanters Limited and Horttraining NZ Ltd are two separate companies that share the same governance, management, policies and processes, staff, resources, and materials. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thoughtplanters delivers “off-job” training events to trainees signed up on training agreements with the NZ Horticulture Industry Training Organisation (Hort ITO). The majority of these trainees are gaining unit standards towards the arboriculture strand of the National Certificate in Horticulture (Level 4). Thoughtplanters is responsible for the training and assessments of unit standards that make up less than 40 per cent of the full national

certificate. Completion rates of the full national certificate are not known to Thoughtplanters.

- Horttraining (not a registered PTE) delivers identical training to learners enrolled with a local polytechnic. In this instance, Horttraining manages the completion of all the unit standards in the national certificate and a local diploma. Most trainees are employed in the industry and are assessed both on the job and off-job during the training events.

Recent significant changes: Thoughtplanters Limited has changed its name from Greenscene Training Limited as it was known at the last NZQA audit.

Previous quality assurance history: The PTE was previously quality assured in 2009 by NZQA under the audit system. It had not yet delivered training at that time, so there was insufficient evidence to fully ascertain compliance with some elements of QA Standard One, the standard then in force.

Other: In 2003, a small group of senior people within the horticulture industry formed a company to offer horticultural training. Coming from within the industry, they had identified a skill gap and their vision was to provide their industry with qualified employees who had gained skills through an industry-driven curriculum. This group currently works under three company names: Thoughtplanters Limited and Horttraining, as mentioned above, and Thoughtplanters Singapore, where the company has been developing relationships for some time and has a strong presence. Thoughtplanters is the only registered PTE of the three companies. Such is the reputation of the Thoughtplanters' training model that the organisation is exploring other opportunities in other countries worldwide.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

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

- Arboriculture training

This is the main training that Thoughtplanters delivers on behalf of Hort ITO.

The mandatory focus area is:

- Governance, management, and strategy.

The two 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 of Thoughtplanters Limited comprised one lead evaluator and one team evaluator. The team visited the PTE for one and a half days at its site in Dunedin.

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

- Thoughtplanters' staff: CEO, business development manager, academic manager, one trainer in person, two trainers by telephone, and the administrator.
- Thoughtplanters' students: current and past students.
- External stakeholders: a small number of employers and a representative from Hort ITO.

Thoughtplanters Limited has had an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report, and submissions received were 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 **Thoughtplanters Limited**.

Trainees' achievement of competence in arboriculture knowledge and skills as a result of the training events is very high. Of the trainees that attend the training events delivered by Thoughtplanters, 85 per cent are successful in gaining the level of competence required to achieve the relevant unit standard(s).

The knowledge and skills acquired by the trainees deepen their overall understanding of their tasks in their role and increase their confidence. The close relationship that Thoughtplanters has developed and positively maintained ensures that the skills acquired by the trainees add value to their role within their companies.

Completion of the National Certificate in Horticulture (Level 4) opens up many opportunities for the trainees because the qualification is recognised and respected internationally. There was strong evidence to show that trainees had secured positions overseas in countries such as the UK, USA, and Germany.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Thoughtplanters Limited**

Thoughtplanters has a positive approach to self-assessment and a genuine desire to continually look at how they can do better. Self-assessment processes are appropriate for the size and the nature of the organisation.

Thoughtplanters is a small team who bring a wealth of horticultural industry and training experience to their role. Effective and ongoing communication, both internally and with their external stakeholders, has ensured that the combination of formal and informal evaluation and review processes is driving the actions taken for continuous improvement. An example of a change for improvement in response to the industry and trainees was the extension of the chainsaw training from two to three days to ensure the trainees were fully competent.

Greater analysis of achievement data would strengthen the overall self-assessment by measuring patterns and trends over time and across training events and trainers. Management has recently invested in a new student management system that would enable this level of analysis to occur.

Given the geographical spread of training and the trainers, a more systematic approach to assuring consistency of assessments would mitigate the possibility of poor quality assessment practice. Although this has not been an issue for Thoughtplanters to date, it would reduce the risk of it occurring in the future.

TEO response

Thoughtplanters Limited has confirmed the factual accuracy of this report.

Findings¹

1.1 How well do learners achieve?

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

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

Trainees' achievement of competence in arboriculture knowledge and skills as an output of the training events is very high. A sample of trainee achievement showed an average of over 85 per cent of trainees are successful in gaining the level of competence required to achieve the relevant unit standard.

The evaluation team heard from the trainers, employers, and trainees that the training builds an understanding of arboriculture and its science. This has subsequently led to increased trainee confidence in their ability to carry out the scope of tasks within their role.

Achievement of unit standards towards the national certificate has improved over the past few years as the training material and resources are continually reviewed. Hort ITO confirmed that completion rates for the off-job unit standards are now better than the on-job achievement rates.

Although Thoughtplanters is fully aware of the achievements gained at each training event, there is not currently a systematic and comprehensive self-assessment of achievement data. Greater analysis of achievement data would strengthen the overall self-assessment by measuring patterns and trends over time and across training events and trainers. Management has recently invested in a new student management system that should enable this level of collation to occur and provide rich data for analysis to contribute to purposeful changes for continuous improvement.

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 management and trainers at Thoughtplanters are well connected with the industry and collectively have a good understanding of the value of the qualification to their trainees and the industry. The evaluation team saw and heard strong evidence to support the trainers' interconnectedness with industry through their own careers and representation on key associations, committees, and boards of stakeholders prominent in the horticulture industry. Key stakeholders include the New Zealand Arboriculture Association (NZAA) and its

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

subcommittee NZ Education and Training, the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), and Hort ITO.

The training delivered by Thoughtplanters is valued highly by Hort ITO. Thoughtplanters has ongoing contracts with the ITO and has become one of the ITO's two preferred providers. The organisation was once part of a pool of 13 providers of horticulture training across New Zealand.

Completion of the national certificate, which Thoughtplanters delivers a part of, opens up many opportunities for its graduates. These include:

- Recognition and respect for the qualification overseas. There was strong evidence to show that trainees had secured positions overseas in countries such as the UK, USA, and Germany.
- Insurance deductions for companies who have staff with the qualification, making the graduate more valuable to their employer.
- Local body councils' requirement for qualified staff for their contracts.
- Achievement of the national certificate as a criterion to become an approved contractor with NZAA.

Through informal and formal networks, Thoughtplanters has an acute awareness of the value of the qualification it is contributing to and continues to listen to and liaise with industry to ensure the training leads to a positive outcome.

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**.

Thoughtplanters' staff are well respected for their knowledge, experience, and expertise in the horticultural field. They have all come from the industry so understand what the industry wants and needs and can readily respond and adapt to its trends.

The national certificate was created by the industry through Hort ITO and has had strong involvement from Thoughtplanters in its continuous review. Ongoing contracts with Hort ITO reflect that Thoughtplanters is meeting outcomes and the needs of the contract.

The training model, which was designed in consultation with industry, includes one and two-day courses delivered nationwide. This model meets the needs of the industry and the trainees well. The training content is current, relevant, and up to date and includes a range of activities to engage the trainees in learning. Trainers are effectively engaging with trainees at all levels of academic ability. All trainers have now completed the National Certificate in Adult Literacy Education (Vocational) which has helped them to explain complicated and complex information in easy-to-understand language and successfully assist trainees with literacy needs.

There is thorough self-assessment and review of each training event and its contents. Feedback is sought formally from the trainees at the end of each training event, and this data, along with feedback from the trainers and employers, contributes to the review of each training event. Changes are implemented immediately, thus demonstrating Thoughtplanters' commitment to responding to industry and learners' needs. An example of change made was the lengthening of the chainsaw training days from two to three days. This was made in response to trainee and employer feedback.

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 **Good**.

Teaching delivered by Thoughtplanters' trainers is very effective and results in the majority of trainees being deemed competent in their assessment to achieve the relevant unit standard.

Trainers employed and contracted by Thoughtplanters have been hand-picked from the industry. Each of them brings a wealth of experience and expertise in both the horticultural industry and adult training. There was strong evidence to show that the trainers are well respected by the industry and their trainees and demonstrate their vast knowledge and passion for their industry.

The trainers hold relevant international and national qualifications and continue to keep up to date with industry through their strong industry links.

Evidence from self-assessment shows that the trainers use a variety of teaching methods which successfully engage the trainees in learning, and that during the training days the trainers build a positive and inclusive environment for learning through their excellent relationships with the trainees.

Given the geographical spread of training and the trainers, a more systematic approach to assuring consistency of assessments would mitigate the likelihood of any poor quality assessment. Although the positive results from the external check of consistency of assessment carried out by the Hort ITO shows this has not been an issue for Thoughtplanters to date, such an approach would reduce the risk of inconsistencies occurring in the future.

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 level of trainee support given by the trainers at the training days is excellent, although the degree of face-to-face guidance and support is limited due to the training being delivered over only two or three days. There was evidence to show that outside of the training days the trainers offer effective support for trainees by email and telephone.

Trainers offer regular, constructive feedback to the trainees, and if literacy needs are detected at the training days, the trainer will contact the Hort ITO to recommend literacy assistance for the trainee. The trainers' teaching experience and additional adult literacy training enables them to effectively communicate with all levels of academic ability.

Staff at Thoughtplanters are looking forward to being able to offer more efficient guidance and follow-up of assignments and training day attendance with the new student management system.

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**.

The clear strategic vision and purpose set by the governance and management of Thoughtplanters is driven by the industry and successfully implemented by the trainers. The open leadership style and open-door policy evident in the organisation has enabled the vision to be owned and positively supported by all staff.

The key focus of continual review of the content and training delivery reflects the organisation's positive approach to supporting the trainees' successful achievement of the national certificate. The evaluation team saw evidence of management working closely with industry to ensure the delivery of training is appropriate and meets the needs of both trainees and the industry.

Over the past few years, the improved policies and procedures have streamlined the content and delivery of the training which has given the trainees and trainers clearer goals. Greater analysis of achievement data from each training event would strengthen the overall self-assessment by measuring patterns and trends over time and across training events and trainers.

Management has recently invested in a new student management system which would enable this level of collation to occur and provide rich data for analysis to contribute to purposeful changes for continuous improvement.

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 **Good**.

2.2 Focus area: Arboriculture training

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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