



Report of External Evaluation and Review

Links Training (2008) Limited

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 12 October 2010

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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:	Palmerston North
Type:	Private training establishment
First registered:	NZQA first registered Links Training (2008) Ltd (Links) in June 2009. A predecessor company, Links Training Ltd, had been registered since October 1999.
Number of students:	Domestic: 36 equivalent full-time students (EFTS); International: None
Number of staff:	Three full-time equivalents
Scope of active accreditation:	Community support services and first aid training
Sites:	Most training takes place at employers' premises and Links uses venues in Levin for first aid training.
Recent significant changes:	Links Training (2008) Ltd was formed in October 2008 and accreditation was finalised with NZQA in June 2009. The new owner had previously worked for Links. Careerforce (Community Support Services Industry Training Organisation) has now embedded the national certificate courses in community care within workplace training. This has diminished Links' role in helping to deliver these qualifications.
Previous quality assurance history:	Links training (2008) Ltd has no previous quality assurance history.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The agreed scope of the external evaluation and review of Links Training (2008) Ltd (Links) covered the National Certificate in Community Support Services, first aid training, and the mandatory focus area of governance, management, and strategy.

The National Certificate in Community Support Services and first aid training are essentially the core of Links' business.

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/>

An NZQA lead evaluator and an external evaluator conducted the evaluation at the Links office over one day.

The evaluation team spoke to the owner/director, two students, one of whom was now also an assessor/verifier, and the office administrator on site to gather evidence of Links' performance and self-assessment capabilities. The team had full access to all the necessary documents and electronic records.

Links Training (2008) Limited has had an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report, and NZQA has included the submissions received in finalising the report.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Confident** in the educational performance of **Links Training (2008) Limited**.

Learners at Links achieve a good rate of course completion. For example, nine of the 13 students who were eligible to complete the most recent national certificate course in diversion therapy have done so. The completion rates for first aid courses are very high.

Learners at Links acquire useful skills and knowledge and they learn how to learn. There was evidence of a number of learners, some initially resistant to training, whom Links helped to overcome their resistance and supported them to gain unit standards and, as one learner said, become “learners for life”.

While good evidence exists that Links is meeting the needs of learners and employers with quality training, the size of the operation and its limited range of outcomes are not sufficient to justify a rating of highly confident.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Links Training (2008) Limited**.

Links has processes that work effectively by helping learners identify learning needs and achieve outcomes important to them and their employers. Students interviewed by the evaluation team said that Links’ tutors were capable and responsive, enabling them to obtain qualifications and achieve progress in their workplace.

To this end, the director and staff of Links are well connected with key people and organisations across the health and disability sector in the Manawatu-Horowhenua area. Links’ staff members demonstrate sensitivity to industry needs, although they do not record formally the way they respond to and meet those needs.

The new owner has yet to set in place a strategic plan for Links, mainly because of pressures constantly to generate business, which leaves little time for the reflection, analysis, and writing work to form a strategic plan. An effect is that Links has not anticipated and responded to changes in the form of externally mandated community support services training.

As a small PTE with few staff, Links’ self-assessment is largely informal, although it is effective in producing incremental improvements. As it develops proactive response strategies to anticipate and manage changes, Links will need to determine what further information it needs to gather formally, enabling it to achieve worthwhile strategic change objectives.

TEO response

Links Training (2008) 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**.

Learners at Links achieve a good rate of course completion that they (and their employers) are pleased with. For example, nine of the 13 students who could have been eligible to complete the last national certificate course in diversion therapy have done so. The learners studying for this diploma had typically left school early, some of them 20-25 years previously. Few had any qualifications and most had a low opinion of their ability to learn. Those who did not complete the certificate had effectively withdrawn from the course by not sending in assignments for some months, although Links had given them every opportunity. The completion rates for courses in first aid are very high.

Links' learners acquire useful skills and knowledge and learn how to learn. The learners interviewed reported that they and others who were initially resistant to training in order to gain unit standards, are now gaining them, largely because of the tutors' persistence in helping them to become "turned on to learning". Many learners are now undertaking further training.

The learners at Links reported that gaining qualifications that certify their competency to practise in the health and disability community care sector is of great value to them and their employers. Through the courses taken at Links, learners gain national certificates and many move on to diploma studies.

The effect is that employers are gaining a growing, trained workforce, which enhances their capacity and capability to deliver quality care and in the process also enhances their reputations. For employers, maintaining a system of on-the-job training acts as a potent driver for positive organisational development.

Trends in the achievement of NZQA qualifications are hard to identify, since the health and disability sector qualifications have changed significantly over recent years. Links' reaction to the changes has been to concentrate on the needs of the learners.

As a small PTE with only a few staff members, Links uses largely informal, but effective, self-assessment to help learners meet their learning needs and achieve desired learning objectives and valued qualifications.

In order to remain proactive and successfully manage change, Links will need to determine what further information it needs to gather formally, thereby enabling it continually to

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

improve performance capability and achieve worthwhile outcomes. The information should take two forms:

- For the organisation – to continue operating as a thriving and viable PTE
- For the clients – to effect the timely achievement of quality qualifications that enhance employer capacity to perform well and deliver quality services.

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 **Good**.

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

Gaining qualifications that certify their competency to practise in the health and disability community care sector is of great value to the learners and their employers. Learners gain national certificates and many move on to diploma studies. An important result is that employers are building a trained workforce, which is enhancing the care that the employers are able to provide and their reputations as capable community care providers. Again, a key effect is that maintaining a system of on-the-job training acts as a potent driver for positive organisational development.

Course evaluations provided good evidence of two outcomes valued by first aid learners at Links: (i) a first aid certificate necessary to do their work; and (ii) the development of confidence to do their jobs through scenario-based training that is pertinent and relevant. The flow-on effect is peace of mind for employers because they have employees who possess (valid) first aid qualifications, which employers need to meet Department of Labour guidelines.

Self-assessment in this area again is mostly informal; Links' staff members know personally the value of the learning outcomes that result from Links-provided training, both to the learners and to the employers for whom they work. This informal approach to self-assessment is a function of the small scale of the Links operation.

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 training that Links provides matches, and is responsive to, the needs of the learners and their employers. Links delivers relevant programmes and courses, and it does this in a manner that is timely, responsive, and personalised to meeting the learners' needs.

In particular, Links' first aid and revalidation programmes are responsive to community needs. Additionally, Links runs well-attended public programmes, along with training for

Gateway students, those training for early childhood programmes, and across a range of employers.

Client feedback indicates that these programmes are also relevant, focussed on meeting needs, and personalised.

Links maintains a database enabling it to inform qualified individuals when their revalidation is due. The effect is that Links draws upon a sizeable pool of adult learners in the sector to attend Links' revalidation courses.

In this way, Links contributes positively to the community and the sector, by assisting people to keep up to date and competent to provide first aid in the community and in workplaces.

It was evident in Links' documentation and from verbal reports that Links' training, delivered in the workplace, enables Links-enrolled trainees to engage with the qualifications system and achieve two outcomes of value: (i) meet their needs for training through the regular, structured learning sessions that Links provides in the workplace; and (ii) achieve useful qualifications crucial for their work.

Links' well-established connections with key people and employer organisations in the health and disability sector of Manawatu-Horowhenua, and regular consultation with them, enables Links to:

- offer and deliver training programmes closely matched to meeting community needs; and
- do so with a wider range of individuals, employees, and employers than would otherwise be possible.

For example, two community trust organisations have engaged Links to provide a programme of monthly professional development sessions, focussed on providing knowledge, skills, and abilities of continuing relevance.

1.4 How effective is the teaching?

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**.

Links' tutors and learners relate effectively to one another. The feedback from the learners, both in the evaluation sheets and in interviews, attested to tutors going the extra mile to engage with the students and foster their learning.

Positive relationships thereby formed have contributed and are contributing to: (i) individual learners embracing the concept of learning for life; and (ii) the development of learning cultures in the organisations with which Links works.

Assessment of learning, integrated into Links' training, is valid, fair, and consistent. Links' staff and other similar training providers in the Manawatu-Horowhenua area meet fortnightly to moderate each other's assessments. The results of external moderation of

assessments by Careerforce and NZQA are very good. Effective assessment practice supports the learners and gives them and their employers confidence in both the quality of the training and in the qualifications gained.

Links' training is down to earth and practical, and it is practice-based. Community support services training is workplace-based and abundant evidence exists in Links' records (and from conversations with staff, who provided access to the records), that Links works hard to incorporate into its programmes and courses the practices and policies of individual employers. In this way, tutorials align examples of practice with common tasks in the workplace.

Notably, first aid training is scenario-based. Links' tutors take pride in their ability to construct relevant scenarios for the different groups they teach. This makes the learning meaningful and relevant, and it engages and sustains learners' interest to learn.

Again, the self-assessment in this area is largely informal. For example, course evaluations are scanned rather than formally summarised, but this is appropriate to the size of the organisation at this stage of its development.

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 **Good**.

Students get the kind and quality of study information and advice they need through Links Training. To this end, Links provides a comprehensive student handbook. The students interviewed spoke highly of the individual study and qualification planning advice they had received from Links' staff. This advice and support has enabled learners to make appropriate study decisions and complete the qualifications they want and need.

Responding to individual students' specific needs is Links' *raison d'être*. Staff and students gave many examples of situations where: (i) students had approached staff members directly for assistance, or (ii) Links had noticed learners' lack of progress and took steps to address this, for example by identifying and helping students deal with related issues, concerns, and causative factors.

However, recognition of prior learning for community-support service workers is problematic. Many learners have acquired skills over the years, but to progress further they need to demonstrate success with forms of assessment more academic than they have previously experienced. Links has worked hard to mitigate barriers to learning that inhibit qualification completion, but acknowledges that it needs to do more work in this area.

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**.

Links needs to assign more resources to developing its governance and management. The director is not only the owner, but also the manager and one of the tutors, so to date has not been able to assign the amount of time she would wish to address matters of governance.

Links' mission is: "to offer professionally presented learning, linking work related training and public interest courses to the National Qualifications Framework, allowing people to reach their personal goals". Links' administration and way of operating (for example, its emphasis on personalising learning) embeds the mission into its day-to-day operations and professional practice. However, the director acknowledges that she has yet to address ways to translate day-to-day operations and practice into a strategic direction for the company for the next five years.

Links has reacted relatively slowly to recent changes in community support services training, and it is still coming to terms with new requirements and ways to maintain and grow its student base. An important challenge is identifying how Links could establish its place within the embedded training model that the ITO, Careerforce, is now operating.

Links' current involvement in providing specifically targeted programmes and courses, although educationally rewarding, is not generating sufficient income, given the time and resources involved; first aid courses generate only a modest income.

Links is sufficiently informed of emerging changes in the sector. Better communication with Careerforce and strategy discussions involving all staff may generate a range of options permitting Links to again thrive and implement its mission fully.

The director and staff successfully manage Links as a small PTE. Staff work closely with the director using an efficient administrative subsystem; it is noteworthy that communications and relationships are open and supportive, with the director providing effective leadership and clear direction, but in a way that draws upon and values staff members' experience and expertise.

The small size of Links means that the staff and director listen to and respect each other's views and feedback, and act upon them.

The quality and quantity of resources assigned to support Links' programmes and courses are appropriate and, being relevant and up to date, they support the staff to teach and the learners to learn effectively.

Links' informal and formal self-assessment processes are appropriate to the size and nature of the organisation. Self-assessment is ongoing. Computerised office and other systems provide the data storage and processing capability that Links' personnel need. These systems contain data that can be used to generate up-to-date and relevant information as required to monitor and evaluate performance, in a timely way, and as needed to suggest and make worthwhile improvements.

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: National Certificate in Community Support Services courses

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

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

2.3 Focus area: First aid courses

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

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

Recommendations

NZQA recommends that Links (2008) Ltd:

1. Assign more resources to developing its governance and management
2. Develop a strategic plan, perhaps through discussions involving all staff, to generate a range of options
3. Be more proactive in responding to changes in externally mandated community support services training with a view to identifying its place within the embedded training model that is now operating
4. Determine what further evaluation information it needs to gather formally, to enable it to:
 - a. continue operating as a thriving and viable PTE
 - b. effect the timely achievement of quality qualifications that enhance employer capacity to perform well and deliver quality services
 - c. monitor and evaluate its performance and formulate worthwhile strategic change objectives.
5. Review systems for recognition of prior learning.

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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