



Report of External Evaluation and Review

Auckland English Academy

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 19 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:	Auckland
Type:	Private training establishment.
First registered:	1991
Number of students:	Queen Street site – 100 Howick site – 40 All international
Number of staff:	18
Scope of active accreditation:	Auckland English Academy (AEA) was first established in 1988 and delivers Communication English and International English Language Testing System (IELTS) programmes
Recent significant changes:	AEA changed ownership in April 2010 and is presently engaged in a merger with ICL Business School, another private training establishment, also owned by the purchaser. The new managing director is also the managing director of ICL and is a shareholder of both organisations. His appointment as principal took effect in August 2010. Senior management roles in AEA have been assigned to former ICL staff, and AEA senior management have taken teaching and pastoral care roles under the new ownership. All AEA teaching staff are retained.
Previous quality assurance history:	The previous NZQA quality assurance visit by NZQA was an audit in February 2007. AEA met all but two requirements of QA Standard One, the standard then in force. The unmet requirements related to governance

and management (sign-off of the Chartered Accountant Professional Attestation) and the Code of Practice (one requirement not met).

Other:

The merging PTEs have distinct histories and cultures. AEA's primary focus has been on Communication English, a large proportion of its present student body being youthful learners on short-stay visas to New Zealand to learn English. Few of its students are involved in the IELTS programme. ICL, in its educational role, focuses predominantly on IELTS, with a smaller group of Communication English learners.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The agreed scope of the external evaluation and review of Auckland English Academy included the following two mandatory focus areas:

- Governance, management, and strategy
- Student support including international students.

A third focus area includes all students enrolled in IELTS and Communication English programmes.

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/for-providers/docs/eer-policy-conduct.pdf>

The evaluation team for this EER of Auckland Education Academy comprised one external lead evaluator and one external evaluator. The team visited AEA for two days at its two sites, Auckland central and Howick.

Staff, students, and external stakeholders were interviewed as part of the EER.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **confident** in the educational performance of Auckland English Academy.

Courses are moulded around learners' needs, with realistic learning outcomes and levels of attainment, monitored day by day throughout the student's tenure. Teaching is supported by weekly activities and school meetings, and by dedicated homestay support. Students and their agents express generally strong satisfaction with the process and with the learning outcomes achieved. Teaching staff have expressed appreciation of improvements in resources and the teaching environment so far achieved by the new management team.

While there is ample evidence of excellent teaching at AEA, some important omissions pose an ongoing risk to educational performance, most notably the lack of a professional development policy. This has been noted by the managing director. As a first step towards reversing this neglect, all teaching staff have been offered funding to attend an external English teacher training day.

Students' progress is well planned and monitored, and they receive formal progress reports and final achievement reports. Student complaints are generally noted and responded to, and persistent complaints have recently been quickly addressed by the new management team. However, a formal complaints policy has yet to be installed. The new management team is aware of these and other concerns and is systematically addressing them.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **confident** in the capability in self-assessment of Auckland English Academy

With a recent comprehensive review of AEA, the management team has made determined steps towards improving self-assessment, with urgent remedial action planned or under way, and important changes in self assessment already installed. A serious omission, the lack of a professional development policy, has been urgently addressed, financial support has been offered for membership to a professional body, and a systematic programme of monthly meetings to discuss teaching and learning issues has been established. As yet there is no established process for translating individual student achievement into a coherent report of organisational performance, but a format for comparison between student progress in successive years has been piloted, and may well be effective in a programme notoriously resistant to measurement.

The new management has therefore made important progress in the development of a comprehensive self assessment capability demands, but has had neither time nor opportunity to address some long-term weaknesses.

Self-assessment in the teaching domain is linked, although not exclusively, to ongoing student assessment and progress reports, daily, weekly and monthly. Outcomes not specified in course assessments, such as increased well-being, confidence, and cultural

awareness, are well known and supported by teachers, but the task of measuring these is a challenge yet to be seriously addressed.

Teachers are required continuously to review their own performance, but until now have been subject only to annual observation and appraisal, or in some cases, none at all. The programme of monthly meetings on teaching matters is therefore an important development for teacher self review. Monthly student evaluations give feedback to teachers, although not specifically on teaching practice.

While the students' needs are paramount, a broader awareness of the longer term outcomes in education, employment, or other purposes, would significantly enhance self-assessment. Teachers are intimately aware of the aims and challenges of their students, but there is at present little consultation outside the triangle of PTE/student/agent about the longer term value of outcomes. Communication with parents and schools of international students has been considered, but withheld until now in recognition of the critical role of agents in these relationships.

Most positively, in the aftermath of the merger, management has already demonstrated a commitment to addressing these matters and is doing so in appropriate ways. .

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 **Adequate**.

AEA teachers are sensitive to the needs and aspirations of individual students, and strive to balance these with practical factors, such as capability levels and the time available for study. Progress is recorded daily and weekly in mock tests and monthly formative tests, in preparation for a summative IELTS test. Three AEA teachers are IELTS examiners. A feature of the IELTS programme is a two-stage course, English for Academic Purposes (EAP), with strategies for study in a tertiary context. For each IELTS test, student achievement is measured in terms of the advance in IELTS grading. IELTS scores are unequivocal, but achievement in the IELTS programme varies according to length of stay, starting levels of competency, and individual targets.

Students of Communication English may progress from Elementary to Advanced levels in that programme. While not directed toward a summative IELTS test, Communication English contains elements of the IELTS programme. An English for Employment class is also offered, focussing on preparation of CVs, interview skills, and a variety of generic language and cultural aspects of the workplace.

An achievement informally acknowledged and valued, but not subject to formal evaluation, is the development of a positive attitude toward learning, growing confidence in an English-speaking culture, and a personal sense of achievement. These are all valued outcomes for AEA, in fact a core feature of their kaupapa, and teachers interviewed by the evaluation team were aware of their importance. These outcomes were clearly in evidence to varying degrees, in both in the less advanced and more advanced students interviewed at the EER.

Records of achievement in IELTS scores over specific periods of study are kept, but are not at present factored into a generic assessment of the PTE's outcomes. A variety of assessment models is being considered by the new management, who acknowledge that records of achievement could be a source of reliable information for self-assessment, in particular for benchmarking against earlier and subsequent performance. Consultation with other providers would also offer valuable benchmarking opportunities and provide a forum for continuing self-assessment.

Useful feedback is provided by education agents, several of whom are located nearby and easily accessed. Among those contacted by the evaluation team, the response to questions on student achievement was uniformly positive. This is valuable information, since the academy does not have direct contact with students' communities or families of origin. Agents are seen to be reliable communicators and mediators.

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

Therefore, while performance in student achievement is evidently strong, there is room for development of a more informative self-assessment process, giving more insight into the PTE's present performance, and offering scope for 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 **Good**.

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

The achievement of IELTS grades is a priority outcome for only a small group of AEA students. However, IELTS assessments and requisite skills are to a degree embedded in all programmes. The IELTS suite of tests is widely known and accepted, and valued in education.

In all programmes, the value of the outcomes is considered unique to each student, and although teachers know students personally and monitor their progress, there is little follow-up of graduates in their post-course destinations, either to employment, however transient, or further education.

Student evaluations focus mainly on the learning environment, and while value may be inferred from the level of satisfaction scored, the evaluation form contains no questions about the relevance or utility of the learning outcomes in the student's personal or vocational context. Anecdotal evidence from students and their teachers is plentiful, and perhaps given force by a continuing supply of new students, often friends and family members of past students.

AEA relies on agents in New Zealand and abroad for information about the value of outcomes to their clients. Since there is a wide choice of organisations offering ESOL courses, agent satisfaction and loyalty may be reliable evidence of the value of outcomes.

The advisory board concept developed by the managing director for another programme could provide a valuable forum for discussion on the value of outcomes.

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 needs and aspirations of students are assessed and recorded at enrolment. A placement test, soon to be improved, is used for this and is the guiding document for ongoing review. Daily and weekly testing and discussion function as continuous needs assessment, culminating in a monthly test and questionnaire. This is followed by individual counselling.

A wide range of activities and resources is provided both for formal learning and for cultural and recreational activities. For example, the school-age students at the Howick site are offered the choice of cultural and recreational activities each afternoon or a structured language programme. Teachers are free to plan their own teaching and experiential activities, according to student aptitude or need. Extramural activities in a variety of city or nearby locations are planned and offered weekly, and students are encouraged and helped to make use of local amenities, for example the library, transport and health services, theatres, and other entertainments.

Variable timetables are provided to suit individual needs, and may be switched at a week's notice. There is an open door to management to discuss learning or other problems. There is a general assembly on Friday, at which student graduations are celebrated. This is followed by a staff meeting at which student promotion and difficulties with programmes may be raised and discussed, and action taken as agreed. Staff may attend student gatherings to discuss issues. On one occasion, a student petition, supported by agents, was delivered to the new managing director, who addressed it promptly and reported back to the student body.

Student evaluations record a good level of satisfaction with the learning environment, but little on the quality of learning. A mid-point rating of three, unless qualified by a complaint in the comments section, is regarded as satisfactory. This may risk complacency. The gap between three and five may contain valuable information and opportunity or improvement.

Agents often act as a conduit between students, parents, and AEA staff, and agents may be used to discuss needs and emerging concerns about programmes or other arrangements.

Staff have a rich fund of anecdotal information about students, and about their own teaching activities and resources. This is shared when opportunity arises, but a more focussed, formal sharing would provide greater insight into student needs and the range of resources available to meet them.

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 **Adequate**.

Teachers on permanent contracts have university degrees and qualifications in teaching English as a second language (TESOL). Relief teachers are employed on a temporary basis to cover for staff absences. Most have university degrees and all but one a TESOL qualification. Courses are designed with clear goals and learning outcomes and delivered using current ESOL practice, reflecting the New Zealand culture and context. Daily and weekly teaching logs are kept by each teacher, and teachers meet with the principal weekly, mainly to discuss teaching issues. They maintain an ongoing, personal appraisal of their own performance, recording a nil to four satisfaction rating. A class observation and appraisal is scheduled annually by the senior tutor. The appraisal may focus on such features as collegiality, extracurricular activities, aspirations, and achievements. Observations may take place more frequently, especially if a problem with teaching exists. However, reliance on an annual observation and appraisal is meagre evidence of the quality of teaching, especially with a moderate-sized teaching group, supplemented where required by relieving staff, among whom mutual observations, discussions, and mentoring could provide valuable opportunities for improvement.

A range of teaching resources and materials is available, including websites, E-lab software, DVDs, out-of-school activities, and resource books. Teachers are encouraged to improvise and personalise teaching for the learning group and for individual learners, using materials, activities, and subjects chosen by the tutors or contributed by students. This is customary practice at AEA and freely used by the seven teachers interviewed. During the evaluation visit, teachers were visibly engaged in one-to-one teaching or mentoring sessions with individual students. Students interviewed at the evaluation said this was a valued practice and they would like more of it. School facilities are available after classes, and students take advantage of the library, the PCs in the common room E-lab, or sit in classrooms in self study until the school closes at 6pm. A daily self-study period is also a standard feature. Daily and weekly assessments are opportunities for individual feedback and mentoring, and the monthly test is also a scheduled counselling event for each student.

Students interviewed, both in groups and individually, were positive in their comments about teaching. They submit course evaluations after the first week, then monthly until the end of their studentship. While space is provided for free comment, the evaluation forms use a five-point scale with questions focussing predominantly on the learning environment. The information they provide is useful from one perspective, limited from another. Teachers rely predominantly on course assessments and informal feedback for guidance on the quality of their teaching. Agents interviewed by the evaluation team were positive about the quality of learning. An audit by English New Zealand is one instance of external moderation, but more frequent and systematic external moderation is needed to ensure quality course design and assessment and to bring improvement and innovation. The merger with ICL may be an opportunity to begin the process.

Until now, ensuring that teaching practice is current has been left largely to individual initiative. There is exchange of anecdotal information and advice during breaks in teaching,

and a schedule of extended monthly meetings to discuss teaching and learning matters, with a designated theme for each meeting. Internal professional development activities are organised periodically, but the new management's offer of funded external training signals the instalment of a credible professional development programme. This should redress a major omission that has been a potential risk to the present high quality of teaching.

While the quality of teaching remains high, partly as a result of judicious selection of long-serving staff and of the innovative philosophy of the previous management, self-assessment is at present insufficiently robust to protect existing standards or to bring improvement. Review of teachers' performance is infrequent, and there is little or no peer observation or formal collegial discussion of teaching and learning. These are missed opportunities for evidently gifted teachers to meet and learn from each other.

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**.

About 30 per cent of AEA students use homestay accommodation, at least for the early part of their residency. AEA is meticulous in the management of this often complex programme, and has achieved high trust with its agents. Information gathering and exchange, arrangement of accommodation, dealing with immigration, insurance and other documentation, airline ticketing, meeting students and introducing them to host families, are scrupulously carried out. The operations manager is directly involved in this process and cooperates closely with the homestay specialist, a senior staff member with full-time responsibility for the programme. This staff member liaises with and mediates between hosts and students, counsels students on aspects of New Zealand culture, advises about local services, rearranges accommodation if required, and keeps agents fully informed of the status of each student.

Each Monday, students are formally welcomed to AEA and tested to determine entry levels to programmes. Current students are given a role of introducing new students to the school and city environment. Friday morning meetings, attended by all students, serve as a celebration for graduates, an introduction for beginners, and a first opportunity to test, however briefly, their speaking and listening skills, encouraged by their peers. This is a valuable feature of a collegial environment in which students freely mix and speak English (the stipulated language), and talk informally to teachers.

All students are invited to Friday excursions to sites outside the centre, or may engage in private learning with a teacher present.

Students are encouraged to make use of local Auckland and Howick community facilities, and may be helped in this by resident exchange students. While formally offered monthly, in conjunction with the monthly test and evaluation questionnaire, counselling is available at any time, and referrals may be made to specialist services when required. Student evaluations particularly focus on the culture and environment of AEA, and the friendliness of the environment and approachability of staff are features often mentioned. A good

number of students were seen chatting in the classrooms well before the scheduled class time, and they spoke warmly about the support they receive, most affirming that they would recommend AEA to their family or friends.

These activities are features of a long-term dedication to student welfare and a welcoming and watchful learning situation where the needs, challenges, and problems of students are respected and responded to, and continuing care is taken to help each student achieve well.

Prompt attention is given to student complaints, but the lack of a coherent complaints policy is a notable omission in an otherwise excellent student support process. This omission has been targeted for swift attention by the managing director.

1.6 How effective are governance and management in supporting educational achievement?

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

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

The strategy for the merger between AEA and ICL is to maintain two separate educational entities, sharing where possible the best of both. AEA is expected to function as a distinct component of a bipartite organisation, with its existing culture and vision retained and enhanced. AEA will exchange with ICL any systems and processes that may improve outcomes, and integrate these where appropriate, for example in the delivery of IELTS programmes and in generic management systems. This strategy had been partly realised at the time of the external evaluation.

The managing director has initiated reviews of five distinct areas of AEA's activity. These have been the basis of a programme of improvement, with some significant changes already in place, notably renewal and expansion of e-learning resources and a first step in a professional development programme for teaching staff.

The new managing director has both governance and management roles. Governance and management are separated by a hands-off approach to day-to-day management, whose functions are delegated to the senior tutor and operations manager. There is commitment at governance level to retaining the strengths and distinctive character of AEA while introducing necessary improvements, notably in self-assessment. The reviews of AEA systems were an early initiative to locate the strengths of the organisation, such as the quality of teaching and student support, and outstanding weaknesses, most conspicuously the lack of a professional development policy, an effective teacher appraisal process, and a formal complaints policy. Other weaknesses identified were flaws in recording assessments and the lack of a coherent organisation-wide summary of learning outcomes. The reports are comprehensive in scope. Further developed, and infused into the culture of the organisation, they would become valuable instruments for organisational self-assessment. While the new management team is committed to improvement, their brief tenure means that a number of pre-existing management weaknesses inevitably remained at the time of this external evaluation.

A quality management system and an internal code of practice currently exist, to which the managing director is to add a 12-point vision/action statement, “to build and maintain an environment where learning, innovation, creativity and independence flourish”. This statement well reflects the existing AEA philosophy. The intention is that it be freely interpreted in teaching practice and provide guiding principles of self-review. Practical evidence of this approach was given by teachers interviewed by the evaluation team, as observed in the new management’s quick response to present needs, such as the immediate introduction of professional development, replacement of poorly functioning equipment, and improvements to the teaching/learning environment.

A complaints policy is planned, but not yet in effect. Some graduate follow-up already exists and may be further developed with the new communication technology used by the senior tutor. Other developments being considered are external benchmarking and moderation and a possible arrangement with agents for closer contact with families and communities of students. Although the results of these initiatives cannot be known in advance, they are evidence of the emergence of a stronger self-assessment culture throughout AEA.

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 **Adequate**.

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

2.2 Focus area: Student support including 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: IELTS and Communication English

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

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

Recommendations

Further actions

The next external evaluation and review will take place in accordance with NZQA's regular scheduling 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/for-providers/keydocs/index.html>

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