

Report of External Evaluation and Review

New Zealand Sports Turf Institute
Limited

Confident in educational performance

Not Yet Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 4 September 2013

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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

Name of TEO:	New Zealand Sports Turf Institute Limited (NZSTI)
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	163 Old West Road, Linton, Palmerston North
Delivery sites:	The only permanent delivery site is at NZSTI's facility in Palmerston North. Training courses are also delivered at hired venues in Auckland and Christchurch and other centres as required.
First registered:	24 March 2010
Courses currently delivered:	NZSTI is delivering courses and assessing unit standards towards Primary Industry Training Organisation (Primary ITO) qualifications in sports turf care and management from level 3 to level 6.
Code of Practice signatory?:	No
Number of students:	Domestic: in 2013, NZSTI is delivering training to approximately 180-200 learners
Number of staff:	Ten agronomists who are engaged in training for a portion of their time (between 10 and 45 per cent) and three full-time training management staff
Scope of active accreditation:	NZSTI has consent to assess unit standards towards the following Primary ITO qualifications: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Certificate in Sports Turf Management (Introduction to Turf Care) (Level 3)

- National Certificate in Amenity Turf Maintenance (Level 3)
- National Certificate in Sports Turf Management (Level 4)
- National Certificate in Sports Turf (Level 5)
- National Diploma in Sports Turf Management (Level 6)

Distinctive characteristics: NZSTI (originally founded in 1949 as a research Institute and first registered as a training provider as NZSTI Inc in 1993) provides consultancy, research and training services in sports and amenity turf planning, construction and maintenance. NZSTI is the predominant provider of training to the sports turf industry in New Zealand.

Learners are employed within the industry, including apprentices working towards the National Certificate in Sports Turf Management (Level 4). Training is via both distance learning (using paper-based and/or online resources) and face-to-face sessions (in either five-day block courses or one-day workshops).

The majority of learners are males aged between 18 and 45.

Recent significant changes: Until 2012, NZSTI also managed the New Zealand Sports Turf Industry Training Organisation (NZSTITO) through a management contract. In October 2012, Primary ITO was formed (incorporating NZSTITO, New Zealand Horticulture ITO, AglITO and Equine ITO). Staff changes in the training management area of NZSTI over the period 2011-2012 included the executive officer, training operations manager, training coordinator and training adviser. In addition, several key field staff transferred to Primary ITO. NZSTI is now privately owned and is part of a wider group of related businesses. In November 2012, a training development specialist was appointed.

Recent student numbers represent a significant downturn from previous enrolments, arising from the impact of the economic environment and

changes in the industry.

NZSTI is currently seeking approval and accreditation for a programme entitled Certificate in Sports Turf (Operations Management) (Level 5) which contains the National Certificate in Sports Turf Management (Level 5).

Previous quality assurance history:

Throughout 2011, NZSTI complied with the external moderation requirements of NZSTITO. Records indicate that moderated assessment materials required resubmission, with a particular focus on assessment design and question technique. In 2012, the standard-setting body became Horticulture ITO, as a result of ITO mergers. As the moderation targets of this organisation did not include the subjects delivered by NZSTI, there were no external moderation samples evaluated. Following consolidation of Horticulture ITO with Primary ITO, for 2013 the external moderation plan, including site visits, has been agreed with Primary ITO. Also, NZSTI has joined the Central Districts Moderation Group of Primary ITO, which consists of training providers from agriculture, horticulture and equine.

Other:

NZSTI has applied for the award of a quality mark (AgExcel) from Primary ITO. The outcome of this application was unknown at the time of the external evaluation and review.¹

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The focus areas selected for this external evaluation and review were:

- Governance, management and strategy
- Courses towards the National Certificate in Sports Turf Management (Level 4)

The first focus area is mandatory. The second focus area reflects the fact that the majority of NZSTI learners are apprentices working towards the qualification.

¹ Following the evaluation visit, Primary ITO confirmed that NZSTI met all the requirements to be awarded the AgExcel.

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 TEO has an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report, and any submissions received are fully considered by NZQA before finalising the report.

Two evaluators visited NZSTI over two days. Interviews were conducted in person with the managing director, training manager, training development specialist, two agronomist/tutors and 12 current students. In addition, phone interviews were held with three graduates, four stakeholders (employers and representatives of national associations) and a representative from Primary ITO. A wide range of documents and other resources was reviewed, including enrolment information, learner achievement and feedback data, course and assessment materials (both paper-based and online) and industry and organisational strategic and planning documents. Two further phone interviews were held, after the EER, with NZSTI's business development manager and the training coordinator.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Confident** in the educational performance of **New Zealand Sports Turf Institute Limited**.

As a longstanding provider of services to the sports turf industry, NZSTI has developed extensive networks with employers and industry associations throughout New Zealand and internationally. These relationships, together with the interdisciplinary capability of NZSTI's consultancy and research functions, underpin the educational delivery and training provision which is highly valued for its relevance and currency. Stakeholders contacted by the evaluators confirmed the expertise of the agronomists, who all contribute to some extent to the training activities. Evidence was available of the ways in which new knowledge or advice on topical issues is transferred from the advice and research functions to the training programme.

Trainees at NZSTI are all employed in the industry and are acquiring relevant skills and knowledge of the theory and science underpinning their practical tasks and their on-job training, as well as gaining an understanding of other sectors of their industry. Interviews with the second-year apprentices revealed that they appreciate the opportunities provided by the NZSTI block courses for networking and sharing information. They also gain transferable skills and confidence, which are useful in their day-to-day work. The training provided by NZSTI is crucial to enabling trainees to achieve their employment goals, which is attested to by the fact that the majority of employers in the industry have contracted training with NZSTI. In addition, New Zealand-trained sports turf professionals are able to gain employment overseas, and several NZSTI graduates have achieved employment with high-profile international events or sports facilities.

A high rate of course completions has been maintained at NZSTI over many years (more than 90 per cent). In the absence of any comparable provider for benchmarking, NZSTI has embarked on a review of assessment practice with a view to ensuring that results are valid and accurately reflect learning. Achievement data at course and unit standard level is now being carefully tracked and analysed with a view to reducing the number of re-sit attempts. Initiatives introduced by NZSTI include a 'student success intervention' after two unsuccessful attempts, and several changes have been made to teaching delivery. Evidence is beginning to emerge of the potential of these changes to improve learner achievement.

NZSTI has undergone significant organisational restructuring over recent years, and has focussed on repositioning itself within the industry as an independent service and training provider. The evaluators found a strong commitment to supporting educational performance, noting recent investments in staff and teaching resources. The agronomists are subject discipline specialists in the first

instance, and are developing competencies as teachers, as a greater level of rigour is being brought to programme design and delivery.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Not Yet Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **New Zealand Sports Turf Institute Limited**.

NZSTI has developed a framework and established several useful processes for self-assessment, in particular for analysing and using learner achievement data and learner feedback, in order to improve overall educational performance. However, the evaluation team found that while there are some examples of findings being used to make changes, limited evidence exists as yet of improvements in outcomes. Self-assessment is not yet sufficiently comprehensive or well enough understood by the whole organisation to justify a confident rating.

NZSTI benefits from the longstanding relationships of its staff with a large number of clients, and the regular opportunities presented by its research and advisory functions for meeting with stakeholders, which ensures close involvement with, and understanding of, industry developments and priorities. Some examples were available of NZSTI's responsiveness to feedback in relation to the course content and the delivery of training. Information related to training is shared as required in meetings and emails between managers, team leaders and training staff. A more systematic approach to capturing and reviewing information, involving all staff, who are currently distributed across three locations, would support NZSTI as it seeks to determine and address the needs of its stakeholders.

NZSTI has identified the need to improve teaching capability and overall educational performance, and has committed to the upskilling of its staff and the introduction of new training-related processes and resources. These include the appointment of a training development specialist to lead course and materials development activities, and a planned peer review process, to enhance individual teacher effectiveness. A more systematic approach to self-assessment could include providing opportunities for training staff to reflect as a group on key aspects of teaching and learning and to develop action plans for improving educational performance.

Findings²

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**.

Learner achievement at NZSTI is generally good. Learners are acquiring relevant theoretical knowledge and transferable skills which are useful in their day-to-day work. In addition to growing in confidence, learners are developing their ability to make observations and understand data, to develop plans and to solve problems. The evaluators also found that the learners who remain engaged with their programme of study make progress towards specific goals, such as completing qualifications and achieving career progression, including employment overseas. NZSTI is working closely with Primary ITO training advisors to actively manage those trainees who receive learning resources but do not commit to assessments. However, withdrawal data was not available during the evaluation.

Course completion rates at NZSTI traditionally have been very high (more than 90 per cent). Since 2011, NZSTI training management has sought to validate and improve learner achievement, noting that the number of assessment attempts by each student in each unit standard is a useful indicator. Assessment attempts have been tracked and analysed to identify trends and understand the causes. NZSTI reports that currently students take an average of 1.7 attempts across all courses, and a target of an average of 1.5 assessment attempts has been established. This analysis identified a correlation between the maths component of units and a higher-than-average number of assessment attempts. In response, additional context and practical applications of mathematical concepts have been incorporated into the delivery. NZSTI is introducing a 'student success intervention' involving a limit on the number of assessment attempts, followed by individual student counselling. It is too soon as yet to determine the effectiveness of these changes for improving achievement.

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

1.2 What is the value of the outcomes for key stakeholders, including learners?

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

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

NZSTI has built a good understanding of the sports turf industry over many years, primarily via its consultancy and research functions and historical role in relation to NZSTITO. The evaluators also noted NZSTI's reputation and leadership role within a number of industry organisations and activities, such as the Targeted Review of Qualifications (TroQ), membership of various national sports associations and contributions to industry conferences as well as to strategic direction setting for learning and development in the sports turf industry.

As the predominant training provider to the industry, NZSTI is also key to ensuring a skilled workforce across the full range of sports turfs and amenities. This includes supporting the training and development of apprentices as well as providing upskilling opportunities for qualified staff. Valued outcomes include providing a pool of staff with the technical and management skills to deliver high quality sports turf surfaces year-round using sustainable environmental practices at the lowest possible cost. Stakeholders contacted by the evaluators confirmed the expertise of NZSTI's specialist staff and the value of their contribution to the industry, as well as the relevance and usefulness of the training provided. This directly relates to the quality of public recreation and related facilities generally, as well as the provision of expertise in relation to specialist surfaces for particular sports.

NZSTI reports that the majority of New Zealand sports turf professionals have undertaken training with the organisation, although it has not historically tracked graduate destinations. While NZSTI is confident that the training it provides is supporting employment pathways, limited data is available on graduate outcomes. Anecdotal feedback suggests New Zealand-trained sports turf professionals are able to gain employment overseas, and several graduates have been appointed to high-profile international events or sports facilities. NZSTI is currently establishing an alumni association and building its presence in social media, and plans to undertake graduate and employer surveys within six months of trainees completing stage three of their apprenticeship. These are potentially useful initiatives for extending NZSTI's contact with graduates and increasing its understanding of the value of its training provision, and identifying areas for further improvement.

NZSTI generally relies on industry feedback being gathered in the course of routine contact between specialist staff and consultancy clients, or by drawing on established connections and networks. The value and utility of this ongoing stakeholder engagement could be enhanced by a more systematic approach to capturing anecdotal feedback and sharing key information across the organisation as a whole, recognising the distributed nature of the organisation and industry.

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**.

NZSTI is delivering training content based on contemporary best practice relating to turf management across a variety of contexts, and demonstrates a commitment to developing learners' technical and management competencies to meet industry needs. Examples of knowledge transfer from the consultancy and research functions to the training provision include incorporating research findings on a new topdressing compound into training materials, and developing a guide for the use of agrichemicals for the bowls sector. The breadth of the industry is addressed through the inclusion of context-specific case studies or examples such as those relating to sports turfs (golf, bowls, cricket, rugby, etc) and other surfaces (such as public recreational amenities).

In response to learner and stakeholder feedback, NZSTI has embarked on a significant process of reviewing and improving course materials, in order to ensure their currency and accessibility to a range of learners. This has included rewriting materials using plain English, redesigning layouts and incorporating colour photos, and ensuring a variety of sports turf contexts are included in the examples and case studies. The reworked materials (approximately 30 per cent at the time of the evaluation visit) have been well received by learners, as was evidenced by written and oral feedback.

NZSTI launched an online learning management system in March 2013 to support distance learning. (NZSTI reports that some learners do not have the necessary computer skills to access this system, and paper-based resources continue to be available.) This is intended to provide a platform for more frequent communication with learners and to foster engagement with the learning materials. Specific initiatives include planning and study tools (such as the phased release of content to ensure systematic progression through the material and a study calendar for managing study and assessment timelines). It is too early to determine the extent to which this delivery method will achieve these goals and meet learner needs. NZSTI has also developed additional products, such as a pocket-sized Disease Identification Guide, and the chemical calendar, which are useful workplace resources.

NZSTI collects written learner feedback at the end of each workshop and five-day block course. The questionnaire has been refined for 2013, in order to gain more meaningful information. The evaluators sighted evidence of NZSTI's careful analysis of the information, which has proved useful in identifying issues relating to teaching and assessment materials. Changes arising from this activity include providing additional support for tutors and revising materials for greater relevance or to reduce information overload, and NZSTI was able to provide evidence of

improved satisfaction and achievement. NZSTI reports that a course evaluation form is available online for learner feedback on the distance learning aspect of its training provision. However, as the online courses have only recently commenced it is too soon as yet to determine trends and areas for improvement.

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 **Adequate**.

The primary foci for the agronomists at NZSTI are their research and consultancy projects, and the evaluators found limited evidence of reflective activity on teaching effectiveness within this team. However, NZSTI demonstrates a commitment to building teaching capability. Initiatives include a requirement that all staff complete adult teaching qualifications during 2012, the management of performance issues identified through learner feedback, and the planned introduction of a peer review process. The recent appointment of a training development specialist is an important step, not just for course development and design, but also to foster a focus on teaching and learning within the organisation.

The learner management system, called Grow, was launched in March. The two staff currently teaching online courses are receiving individual mentoring on how best to support online learners, although a formal online teacher development programme has yet to be considered. NZSTI has developed a range of templates and guidelines to improve quality and standardisation in teaching activities such as PowerPoint presentations.

A focus on improving assessment practice includes improved assessment design and question techniques. NZSTI has sound internal moderation processes and has recently joined a regional cluster group of Primary ITO. It is complying with an external moderation plan for 2013. These activities together provide reasonable assurance of the robustness of NZSTI's assessment practices, which underpin the achievement data.

Written feedback and interviews with learners on site confirmed that they are generally very satisfied with the learning environment and the quality of the teaching. The overall level of satisfaction ratings, by course, has been in excess of 90 per cent since 2011. The targeted minimum of 70 per cent completions for individual unit standards will rise to 80 per cent in the next year, reflecting steady improvements in the ratings received. Teachers are using an appropriate mix of activities to maintain interest and engagement and to accommodate different learning styles, including facilitated discussions, practical activities and regular quizzes. Content is presented in a variety of ways, including PowerPoint presentations, comprehensive workbooks and practical examples (such as pieces of irrigation equipment or grass samples). Good relationships between staff and

students foster a comfortable learning environment and opportunities to ask questions or seek additional and other kinds of help.

In recent months, NZSTI has ceased holding scheduled and minuted training-related meetings, and has adopted a more informal approach, addressing issues with specific staff as they arise. Given that NZSTI staff members involved in training are distributed across three sites, this could result in inconsistencies and a fragmented approach to improvement initiatives. NZSTI reports that it has sought to ensure consistent course delivery in the regions by providing experienced staff to team-teach with regional staff on their first-time delivery of the subject. However, regular meetings (using communication technologies as appropriate) involving all tutors would provide useful opportunities for staff to share information and reflect as a group on aspects of teaching and learning (as they currently do for consultancy and research activities). This, together with periodic course reviews, could provide useful information on which to base action plans for improving educational performance.

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

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 **Adequate**.

NZSTI adopts a practical approach to guidance and support for learners, reflecting industry practice. Together with the training advisors of Primary ITO, NZSTI endeavours to positively influence learners' well-being and to help them achieve their goals. This includes supporting ongoing engagement with learning materials and assessment tasks, and focussing training on knowledge and skills relevant to their day-to-day work and career aspirations. While most learners are on apprenticeship programmes, several examples of NZSTI providing written advice on study options for individuals were sighted. Published course and enrolment information includes a career pathway map for progression through qualifications at various levels, and related employment opportunities.

Appropriate practical support is provided by NZSTI for learners who have been identified by the training advisors as having particular learning challenges, such as dyslexia, or literacy and numeracy deficits. Examples include the provision of reader/writers or the opportunity for oral assessments and the use of practical examples of mathematical concepts. Face-to-face delivery involves small groups (maximum of 12 students), which enables tutors to identify and respond to learners who are struggling. In addition, tutors use examples or describe situations that are relevant to the work contexts represented within the group. In these ways, learners who are practical people with varied educational backgrounds are supported in their study.

The evaluators noted that recent initiatives, such as the online learning system or the purchase and introduction of computing tablets and associated software for use

in face-to-face sessions, are accessible to only the subset of learners with the appropriate computer technology skills. NZSTI delivers introductory sessions on the technology and encourages learners to seek assistance from online tutors. However, continued support will be required to ensure the relevance and value of these resources for all students.

The evaluators found that NZSTI has a general concern with guidance and support rather than a targeted approach based on good information and analysis. This is reflected in a reliance on advice from Primary ITO training advisors and the individual trainer's personal skills and ability to identify learner needs and provide an appropriate level of support and guidance within the limited time available. NZSTI reports working with Primary ITO training advisors to understand issues for learners who withdraw. However, apart from a general focus on ensuring the relevance of the courses, there was little evidence of specific actions taken on trends in withdrawal data.

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 **Adequate**.

Since July 2012, NZSTI has been repositioning itself as a private provider of services to the sports turf industry and establishing the efficiency and sustainability of the organisation, as well as actively looking for opportunities to extend its training provisions, both domestically and internationally. The evaluators found good evidence of the commitment of governance and management to support educational achievement as part of that process. A clear strategy for the training provision, and its integration with the research and consultancy services, provides a good foundation for ongoing development and improvement of training at NZSTI. The strategy has been supported by a willingness to invest in teacher and course development and teaching and learning resources as well as improving academic and management processes. The owner and staff are drawing on their experience within the industry and on the organisation's strong reputation, in order to renegotiate relationships and roles and relationships with the ITO and key sporting bodies and clients.

NZSTI has developed a framework for self-assessment that was incompletely implemented into practice at the time of the evaluation. The collection and analysis of learner achievement data and learner feedback is being used to identify changes, although limited evidence exists of improvements in outcomes as yet. Self-assessment is not yet comprehensive or well understood at all levels within the organisation. As a small but distributed organisation, NZSTI faces challenges establishing effective communication practices that are inclusive yet efficient. The evaluators observed an informal and 'as-required' approach to communication,

which has supported the significant change programme of recent months. A more systematic approach to capturing and sharing information, and reflecting on what is learnt, from a range of sources about the educational and employment outcomes for learners and other stakeholders, would enhance NZSTI's self-assessment capability and overall educational performance.

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 **Adequate**.

2.2 Focus area: National Certificate in Sports Turf Management (Level 4)

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

NZQA recommends that NZSTI:

- Continue to develop and implement into practice its self-assessment framework
- Consider identifying practical processes for recording and sharing internally key information, particularly stakeholder feedback
- Clarify expectations and processes for ongoing individual and group reflections on teaching effectiveness, including the identification of improvements and assessing their impact on educational performance.

Appendix

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

Self-assessment and external evaluation and review are requirements of programme approval and accreditation (under sections 249 and 250 of the Education Act 1989) for all TEOs that are entitled to apply. The requirements are set through the Criteria for Approval and Accreditation of Programmes established by NZQA under section 253(1)(d) and (e) of the Act and published in the Gazette of 28 July 2011 at page 3207. These policies and criteria are deemed, by section 44 of the Education Amendment Act 2011, to be rules made under the new section 253.

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 programmes they own or provide. These criteria and policies are also deemed, by section 44 of the Education Amendment Act 2011, to be rules made under section 253. Section 233B(1) of the Act requires registered PTEs to comply with these rules.

NZQA is responsible for ensuring non-university TEOs continue to comply with the rules after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of programmes and/or registration. 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 EER process 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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