

Report of External Evaluation and Review

New Zealand Sports Turf Institute
Limited

Highly Confident in educational performance

Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 13 May 2015

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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, learners, prospective learners, 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, Palmerston North
Delivery sites:	One permanent delivery site – head office as above, and staff also in Auckland, Hamilton, and Dunedin.
First registered:	24 March 2010
Courses currently delivered:	One approved course: Sports Turf (Operations Management) (Level 5) NZSTI also delivers components from the National Certificate in Sports Turf (Levels 3, 4 and 5) under contract to the Primary Industry Training Organisation (Primary ITO).
Number of learners:	219; male (94 per cent), New Zealand European (83 per cent), Māori (8 per cent) and Pasifika (0 per cent)
Number of staff:	11 FTEs (full-time equivalents) and one part-time
Scope of active accreditation:	As above
Distinctive characteristics:	NZSTI was originally established as a research institute in 1949. Now, as a registered private training establishment, NZSTI also has a research and consultancy function, being approximately 70 per

cent of its business, with training making up the remaining 30 per cent. Training covers New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) levels 3-6 for industry learners of Primary ITO, and employees of golf courses, bowling clubs and other organisations using a sports turf surface.

The majority of training is at level 4 on the NZQF, delivered via five-day workshops through the winter months as well as distance learning offered via an online learning platform or a paper-based alternative. This training consists of 26 sports turf 'subjects', seven of which are delivered online. NZSTI does not enrol the industry trainees, who are signed up with Primary ITO. These learners complete their industry training agreement under the support provided by Primary ITO. In this context, NZSTI contributes to the training but has no trainee graduation or completion figures as such.

The training is generally for roles that involve maintaining sports turf grounds which include: greenkeepers for golf, bowling, croquet grounds, council sports and school grounds staff. NZSTI delivers the off-job components which are a combination of theory and practice and mainly elements from unit standards. Most practical components are delivered and assessed on the job by employers who are ITO-registered workplace assessors. Off-job training is mainly during May-August due to the seasonal nature of greenkeeping.

All this training takes place within New Zealand. However, NZSTI provides consultancy and research, which includes a training component to the sports turf industry in Australia, Singapore and Malaysia. The organisation is currently performing curriculum review and development services for Singapore's Centre for Urban Greenery and Ecology to address their training resources requirements for the Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications.

Previous quality assurance history:

NZSTI was most recently evaluated by NZQA in May 2013, resulting in NZQA being:

- Confident in NZSTI's educational performance
- Not Yet Confident in NZSTI's capability in self-assessment.

The 2013 evaluation report included the following recommendations:

- 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.

NZSTI engages with Primary ITO for the external moderation of its assessment materials and assessor judgements. Primary ITO has confirmed that NZSTI's assessments are fit for purpose and assessor judgements are at the national standard.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

This evaluation included a review of off-job training, which is the only training offered by NZSTI, as well as organisational governance and management, a mandatory area included in all external evaluation and reviews.

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.

The team of two evaluators visited the NZSTI national office for two days and interviewed the managing director, management, tutors, learners and external

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stakeholders, including employers/assessors of the industry learners, and Primary ITO staff. The evaluation team also reviewed a wide range of the organisation's policies, records, meeting minutes and programme-related documents and online content.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

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

Reasons for this confidence are summarised as follows:

- NZSTI learners achieve at very high rates, close to 100 per cent. Most learners complete the course and are signed off as competent in most components of the course. The only students that do not complete, have withdrawn from their apprenticeship with Primary ITO, which is outside of NZSTI's control.
- There is strong evidence that learners gain significant value from the training, contributing directly to the quality of greenkeeping, and to their employment and career development.
- NZSTI's consultancy and research functions contribute significantly to ensuring the training closely matches the needs of learners and other stakeholders.
- Teaching is of high quality. Most teaching staff hold agronomy degrees, and all have completed a National Certificate in Adult Education and Training (Level 4), with some currently progressing to complete the level 5 certificate. All tutors are also consultants to the sports turf industry, and are actively developing reference materials and technical guides supporting current best practice, which students also benefit from having access to.
- The organisation has strong and well-implemented processes to ensure its assessment processes and practices are fit for purpose and at the national standard.
- Strong learner support processes are in place and are appropriate for both the short-course nature of face-to-face training and the online training components.
- The organisation's leadership strongly supports an entrepreneurial and innovative organisational culture, maintains a strong academic focus, and has a clear student-centred approach.
- The evaluation team considers that NZSTI is an innovative educational institute, with its research and consultancy functions contributing significantly to the value of its education provision, for example the consultancy work and research results in new analytical products for the industry, as well as training programmes. Currently, Māori learners' progress at slightly slower rates than other learners, and the organisation is exploring further support for this group.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is Highly **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **New Zealand Sports Turf Institute Limited**.

Reasons for this confidence are summarised as follows:

- NZSTI has made significant progress since the previous external evaluation and review in developing and strengthening its organisational self-assessment.
- The organisation has a clear culture of innovation, commitment to ongoing improvement, and a culture of openness.
- NZSTI has a comprehensive understanding of the sports turf industry, Primary ITO requirements, student needs, and its own performance strengths and areas for improvement.
- A significant bank of comprehensive performance data has been built up and significant progress has been made in the analysis of this data to bring about improvements to learners' learning.
- Strong organisational self-assessment has resulted in a range of improvements, for example teaching resources, data management systems and analysis, online learning platform piloting and implementation, development of an excellence examination in response to industry requests, and high and improving trainee achievement rates.
- Further work is still progressing, for example in the fine-grained analysis of learner achievement, such as comparing achievement rates of different groups of learners by delivery mode or by region, towards equity of progress. However, as noted, achievement rates are close to 100 per cent, indicating all trainees needs are met
- The evaluation team considers that the organisation has developed and implemented a well-considered and strong approach to organisational self-assessment appropriate to its context. All personnel displayed an openness of enquiry and reflection, essential for effective organisational self-assessment.

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**.

NZSTI's learners are enrolled with Primary ITO in industry training agreements. Forty-eight per cent of the learners' training is delivered under contract with NZSTI. There was clear evidence that nearly all of the learners who remain in their apprenticeship achieve the theory and practical components of training delivered by NZSTI; achievement is close to 100 per cent. Some learners do leave their apprenticeships, however this matter is the responsibility of the Primary ITO. There is some evidence that Māori learners, who make up approximately 8 per cent of the total student group, progress at a slower rate than other learners. The organisation is beginning to monitor and support these learners to ensure they achieve at similar rates to other learners.

The database indicates that a number of industry learners withdraw from sports turf apprenticeships, either to enter other careers or other training options under Primary ITO. These withdrawal statistics were not considered within this evaluation because they relate to Primary ITO rather than NZSTI achievement or completion rates. There was no indication that learners withdraw from training in response to NZSTI courses.

The nature of the achievement at NZSTI is a combination of completing whole unit standards and elements of some unit standards, with the balance of the learning outcomes being learned and assessed on the job as is normal for industry training. Learners are gaining knowledge, skills and attitudes that are credible, robust and relevant from tutors and an organisation that is recognised as being at the forefront of industry practice because of its 65-year history in the industry and extensive current published research and consultation activities in the sports turf industry across New Zealand, Australia and parts of Asia.

A review of NZSTI's records and database, indicated the organisation has developed a comprehensive and complete set of achievement data and has recently strengthened its capability to carry out a wide range of analysis processes to interpret patterns and trends for ongoing improvement. The one somewhat concerning pattern is Māori learners' progress at rates slower than other learners, although they still complete at the same high rate. The organisation needs to monitor this group and formulate plans to address this issue. To some extent, NZSTI would be in a better position to address needs and lift the rate of progress

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

for Māori learners if they received the already completed needs assessment from Primary ITO, which occurs at the beginning of their apprenticeship.

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**.

Learners and the industry gain significant value from the training. This is well evidenced, through both a formal post-training survey conducted by NZSTI and consistent and coherent anecdotal feedback from the organisation's consultancy work which involves the majority of New Zealand sports turf organisations. The value gained by learners at NZSTI is the underpinning theory and a range of practical skills not gained 'on the job'. The value add components are, for example, the knowledge and skills gained by individuals, gaining a fuller understanding of the underpinning theory and cutting-edge technology, career advancement and application of their learning, beyond the minimum expectations described within the unit standards of the National Certificate in Sports Turf.

This added value is largely a result of the organisation being a research-based institute, as well as providing a consultancy service within New Zealand, Australia and parts of Asia. There are clear indications at this evaluation that the knowledge and experience gained through NZSTI's consultancy business contributes very significantly to the training delivery and the outcomes of training. Examples include research papers published or presented at conference, an industry journal and monthly online newsletter, and independent technical (disease identification) guides produced for those working in the industry. Primary ITO commented that 'no one comes close to NZSTI', which is reflected in their engaging of NZSTI to develop the Sports Turf Industry 'Excellence Award' examination in response to industry demand, and adopting the NZSTI online platform instead of developing their own and exploring other joint initiatives with them.

In addition, the NZSTI managing director has approved funding to support learners, such as a scholarship for a PhD student, and has invested resources to develop the excellence examination.

Further indicators of the added value and the quality of industry knowledge is the fact that NZSTI was the accredited body to certify grounds for the recent Rugby World Cup in New Zealand, as well as for bowling greens for major events.

NZSTI's self-assessment in this area is coherent and comprehensive, informing a range of valued and already-noted initiatives. Extensive learner surveys are conducted as well as appropriate analysis and application of learnings for ongoing improvements. These surveys show a high proportion of learners being highly satisfied with their training and the value they gained. The organisation has

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conducted a specific piece of research exploring (and confirming) the value of training to sports turf organisations and employers, as noted already.

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's programmes and activities closely match the needs and requirements of industry and learners, in part at least because the PTE delivers training to components of the NZQA National Certificate in Sports Turf. As noted, NZSTI extends the knowledge and skills of learners well beyond the minimum requirements for the unit standards through its research and consultancy business.

All learning activities are closely matched to the real workplace situations of the learners. For example, numeracy is taught through learners calculating the amount of fertiliser required for an area of turf; learners are taught to identify a weed or disease by photographing their workplace environment. Learners apply the theory to their practical work experiences, which also provides an effective process to limit and monitor cheating or plagiarism, as the evidence provided is authentic to their work situation.

All learners are sent on training by Primary ITO as part of their overall industry training programme. NZSTI times its courses to match employers' and learners' needs, offering mainly five-day, face-to-face block courses during the winter months as this is the only quiet time when the learners can be away from the workplace. However, these once-a-year training events are supported by ongoing online training, with a paper-based distance learning programme for those with poor Internet access.

The organisation is meeting and often exceeding the expectations of Primary ITO. This is further evidenced through current negotiations which will renew the contract from 1 July 2015.

The gap in performance and self-assessment in this question relates to the organisation having less than complete knowledge and analysis of learners' performance on their online subjects and why Māori learners are not progressing as quickly as others. However, as noted nearly all learners achieve all components.

Self-assessment overall in this area is strong, with various new initiatives being introduced through pilots after careful analysis and planning, based on current good practice research. An example is the online delivery platform, which was gradually introduced. Improvements were made to the look and feel of the website and the supporting documents, style and layout of learning materials. Learners can opt in or out of the online delivery, and it suits some more than others (currently around 60 per cent have taken up the online option). The requests for assistance with

online delivery are however falling, indicating the support processes have been effective.

1.4 How effective is the teaching?

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

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

Teaching staff have appropriate subject knowledge, and adult teaching qualification. Staff hold Bachelor's or higher degrees in agronomy, as well as having completed the National Certificate in Adult Education and Training (Level 4). Some are extending this to complete the level 5 certificate.

Teaching staff are experienced and active in the New Zealand (and overseas) industry as consultants, thus maintaining currency with industry best practice. The organisation is contracted, for example, by New Zealand Golf and Bowls New Zealand to provide consultancy services. Further to this, many staff are involved in publishing research papers and presenting papers at related international conferences.

Teaching and assessment material is exemplary. There was evidence at this evaluation of recently developed or improved teaching materials incorporating a range of techniques and technology, including use of YouTube clips, interactive group activities, real workplace examples, and online Internet-based learning. Primary ITO values the teaching materials and expertise that NZSTI staff bring.

Appropriate checks are made on assessment tools to ensure their fitness for purpose, and the assessment judgements of different tutors and sites are compared to ensure they are at the national standard. External moderation through Primary ITO confirms that NZSTI is assessing at the national standard and only minor modifications have been required in recent times. The evaluators noted that a frank openness and reflective culture was in evidence across all personnel interviewed. In general, staff are long-serving, with some over 30 years, and well respected by learners and industry, indicating commitment and integrity. As noted, tutors are actively involved in ongoing professional development, for example through conferences and their own research. Performance appraisals occur regularly, with peer observations being a primary tool. Staff interviewed at this evaluation noted that this feature is particularly valuable. The organisation's database includes tutors' reflections on issues and solutions, and these are available for all staff to see.

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**.

Learners are very well supported in this context of short block courses and online or distance learning. This was evidenced through student survey ratings noting a high level of satisfaction, supported by the overall high achievement, with nearly all learners completing most assessment tasks.

The online programme includes supporting documents for new learners to online study as well as guidance on good study techniques. Both of these aspects offer effective support and relevant information for learners who have in the past not generally experienced a high level of success in study. The online programme also offers discussion forums, and staff regularly phone learners who are not actively engaging regularly. These processes appear to be mostly effective in what is in effect a new learning experience for many.

Learner progress is reported quarterly to learners and supervisors, and internally to the NZSTI board, providing a comprehensive support network for learners. Primary ITO is provided with a monthly progress report and the ITO's training advisors can access similar data before visiting a learner. Learners who appear to struggle with lessons or tasks in the block courses are offered one-to-one support by the tutor, which is ensuring learners complete and achieve successfully. Tutor-learner ratios are kept to a maximum of 1:18 (as defined in the Primary ITO contract), ensuring overall close attention to individuals.

Overall student support and the organisational knowledge of when learners require support, and the effectiveness of support systems, are also strong.

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 **Excellent**.

The board and senior management at NZSTI provide exemplary leadership and have created an open and reflective learning organisational culture, and gained a respected standing in the sports turf industry within New Zealand, Australia and parts of Asia.

The organisation has a clear purpose and direction to be the 'pre-eminent provider of information [knowledge] to the sports turf industry that is cost effective based on good consultancy, efficacy research on what works where trainees know why they do what they do'.

NZSTI is the only New Zealand tertiary education organisation with qualified practising agronomists teaching to New Zealand-recognised sports turf qualifications. The organisation has clearly stated values, goals and business planning, that effectively focus on education planning and learner achievement.

NZSTI has appointed well-qualified staff as researchers and tutors, and has supported them to develop and gain skills and knowledge in adult education theory and practice. Professional development is ongoing in the form of research and related conferences, as well as NZQA and Ako Aotearoa workshops and seminars.

NZSTI staff have directly engaged with NZQA and Primary ITO in leading sector groups within the current review of national qualifications (Targeted Review of Qualifications (TRoQ)). These are proactive and effective processes to maintain currency in industry knowledge and changes in the New Zealand tertiary education sector.

The organisation has, since the previous external evaluation and review in 2013, built on its existing system and made a range of changes to support ongoing improvements, the most significant already noted in this report. The appointment of a specialist in curriculum design with specialist skills and online learning and extensive experience in the tertiary sector is further evidence of the organisation's commitment to strengthening its performance and self-assessment capability. An improved student management system and an academic board have been established, providing the data and analysis and support for academic improvements.

The organisation has established and maintained a very good relationship with Primary ITO and, as noted, is currently negotiating a new contract for the delivery of off-job training for sports turf industry learners.

Appropriate budgeting and support are provided for updating, renewing and extending teaching resources, purchasing practical, hands-on teaching aids, and establishing the online learning platform, 'Grow'. The evaluators noted that teaching resources and equipment, including an extensive library, were of a high standard. The library includes an extensive selection of texts and publications related to agronomy that supports both the consultancy and training sides of the business.

NZSTI's approach to self-assessment has developed significantly in the past two years. The organisation's self-assessment practices are highly coherent and suited to their context, such as the extensive data and analysis of learner progress and achievement and surveying of learners' satisfaction responses. Much of this self-assessment activity is directly connected to the organisation's comprehensive and detailed improvement plan developed after the most recent external evaluation and review. There was clear evidence at this evaluation of close monitoring of this improvement plan and regular reporting to the organisation's board of directors of progress towards achieving a range of improvements.

The area for improvement in self-assessment is the equity of progress and achievement across all learners and teaching modes. However, the evaluators acknowledge the complex environment that NZSTI is operating in, notably the delivery of only 48 per cent of the learners' overall industry training plan, elements of some unit standards (with the balance learned and assessed on the job), and seasonal constraints (with block courses delivered in the three winter months to suit employer operations). In this complex context, the evaluators consider that NZSTI is providing very well-considered, research-backed training, adding considerable value to the sports turf industry in New Zealand, Australia and parts of Asia, as well as to sports turf industry trainees.

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 **Excellent**.

2.2 Focus area: Off-job training for sports turf apprentices

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

NZQA recommends that NZSTI:

- Continue to further develop its self-assessment capability across all modes of delivery, and in particular explore the underlying reasons for Māori learners making slower progress towards completion of their training.

Appendix

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

External evaluation and review is conducted according to the External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013, which are made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

Self-assessment and participation in external evaluation and review are requirements for maintaining accreditation to provide an approved programme for all TEOs other than universities. The requirements are set through the NZQF Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2013, which are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

In addition, the Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 require registered private training establishments to undertake self-assessment and participate in external evaluation and review, in accordance with the External Evaluation and Review Rules (EER) 2013, as a condition of maintaining registration. The Private Training Establishment Registration Rules 2013 are also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.

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 External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013.

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).

The External Evaluation and Review (EER) Rules 2013 are available at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/assets/About-us/Our-role/Rules/EER-Rules.pdf>, while information about the conduct and methodology for external evaluation and review can be found at <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction/>.

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