

# Report of External Evaluation and Review

Alpha Educational Institute

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 28 August 2012

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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:	Alpha Educational Institute (Alpha)
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	8 Bishopdale Court, Christchurch
First registered:	9 April 1998
Courses currently delivered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• English for Academic and General Purposes (Level 4)</li><li>• Trinity Certificate for Teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (Level 4)</li><li>• High School Preparation</li></ul>
Code of Practice signatory	Alpha is a signatory to the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students for students aged ten years and under, students aged 11-13 who are not living with a parent, students aged 14-17, and students aged 18 years and upwards.
Number of students:	Domestic: nil International: nine
Number of staff:	Four, mostly part-time
Scope of active accreditation:	As above
Distinctive characteristics:	Alpha has a unique role among English language schools as it has memoranda of understanding with a number of Christchurch high schools and

prepares students for entering into local high schools as mainstream students. For this reason, Alpha adopts a timetable that follows the school terms. It allows for a maximum class size of 12 students.

Recent significant changes: Since the Christchurch earthquakes, Alpha has had a significant drop in student numbers, from 75 students at maximum to 35-40 students in good times, to nine at present. The current campus can accommodate 90 students. As its premises were not damaged in the earthquakes, Alpha has opened up its campus to other languages schools and several educational agents whose premises were not fit for purpose after the earthquakes.

Previous quality assurance history: Alpha met all requirements at the last two NZQA quality assurance visits (under the audit system) in 2005 and 2008, with one exception in 2008 which was remedied at the time of the audit. The 2005 audit included an evaluation of the Code of Practice and Alpha met all requirements of the Code at that time. Alpha has external moderation with Trinity examiners which provides an external benchmark.

## 2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The following focus areas were selected for evaluation:

- Governance management and strategy
- International student support
- English for Academic and General Purposes
- High School Preparation

Governance, management, and strategy and international student support are mandatory focus areas. English for Academic and General Purposes and High School Preparation are focus areas that include all the students currently enrolled at Alpha.

### 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 evaluation team included two lead evaluators and occurred over one day. The evaluators spoke to the two directors (one of whom is also the director of studies), the institute manager, all four tutors, all the students on site (bar one who was in hospital at the time of the visit), the deans of international students at two local high schools, and the director of an international college attached to a local high school. The team looked at a range of documentation from student files, including Oxford Placement Test results, surveys completed by students about tutors and programmes, feedback from high school preparation schools, directors reports, homestay records, minutes of meetings, and business and strategic plans.

# Summary of Results

## Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Confident** in the educational performance of **Alpha Educational Institute**.

Students attend Alpha for anything from four to 40 weeks, with the average length of stay across all programmes being nine weeks. All students have individualised learning plans, and they set and regularly review goals in partnership with their tutor. Students achieve well against their goals of language acquisition, improving subject knowledge, and understanding of the New Zealand way of teaching and learning. Students also achieve well in the formal testing provided by Trinity TESOL, the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Trinity TESOL results, with an average of one class per year over the last 12 years, show a success rate of 98 per cent, significantly above sector benchmarks. Alpha is the only South Island Public Test Centre for TOEIC which offers tests in all four skills. Specific levels of achievement from these tests may be required for a student to gain entry to their university of choice on their return home.

All students are tested on arrival and departure with the Oxford Placement Test which provides a useful measure of English language progress over time. The evaluation team sighted results over several years showing good progress in English from this pre- and post-testing. Alpha has developed a niche with the High School Preparation programme offered to a number of high schools in Christchurch. The programme is of mutual benefit to Alpha and the schools. For example, if a high school does not have sufficient student numbers for a class, or the student's English level is deemed to be too low, they are able to refer the student to Alpha which works with the student until they are ready to enter a mainstream class at a high school. In this way, the school does not lose an enrolment and Alpha gains a student. Another advantage for the student is that they will receive one-to-one tuition and support at Alpha, accelerating their academic progress and shortening the time before they are ready to return to the high school. This advantage was affirmed by ex-students, staff, directors, and deans of international students at the high schools contacted by the evaluation team.

These stakeholders also commended Alpha on its professional approach, helpfulness, willingness to make time for all students, and regular reporting of student progress. In addition, there were unsolicited endorsements from ex-students, in the form of postcards and emails, about the opportunities that studying at Alpha had provided for them, including the ability to learn in a New Zealand classroom and the ability to understand the language used in subject-specific areas, such as maths or science.

The staff at Alpha are well qualified, many holding degrees and postgraduate qualifications. The current academic staff members have from eight to ten years service with Alpha, indicating a significant level of commitment to the organisation. This commitment is reciprocated by the directors at Alpha who work in an inclusive and responsive manner at all times, an approach that has been particularly useful in the post-earthquake environment, where the ability to collaborate has been essential for the survival of the business and that of others.

## Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Alpha Educational Institute**.

Alpha has effective systems for recording and maintaining accurate, up-to-date student data and information. The campus manager is in the process of setting up an electronic database which will allow the organisation to collect and collate data more efficiently. Alpha collects regular feedback from students, staff, and external stakeholders through formal and informal means. The evaluation team sighted evidence of accurate, purposeful record-keeping, including the review of any actions taken.

The evaluation team noted that Alpha works with students from other providers and has made good progress with the majority of these students, in large part because of the belief system shared by all the staff which is based on Christian principles, including respect for all individuals. This shared philosophy has included Alpha being generous with its campus facilities post-earthquake by accommodating other providers and individuals with a safe workplace, and through the ability to continue to enrol students and maintain a viable business. This support is extended to the local community where the directors live and work and where several ex-students have opened their businesses.

The evaluation team sighted the results from a range of formal testing, such as IELTS and TOEIC, indicating students are achieving well. It also sighted reports from the moderation of these exams and comments from examiners, all of which demonstrated that Alpha is very well regarded by these external standard-setters. The English language school sector in Canterbury has been reduced from 40 to nine providers still in operation, indicating that Alpha's reputation (both locally and internationally), the determination of and commitment between management and staff, their willingness to work collaboratively with others across sectors, and financial management and genuine passion about working with international students have formed the foundation of its continuing operation.

# Findings<sup>1</sup>

## 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**.

There are two groups of students currently studying at Alpha: adult and teenage learners. The adult learners stay for an average of 13 weeks. Both groups of students have individualised learning plans and are tested on arrival and departure with the Oxford Placement Test (which can be related to IELTS bands), which provides a useful measure of English language progress over time. The evaluation team sighted results over several years showing good progress in English from this pre- and post-testing.

Because the English for Academic and General Purposes programme for adults is of varying duration according to each student's needs, completion rates are not appropriate as a measure of achievement. Student satisfaction levels are a better measure of learner achievement. The evaluation team sighted many examples of solicited and unsolicited feedback from ex-students indicating satisfaction with the academic and general support offered. The on-site students, while only eight in number, affirmed that the organisation takes an individual interest in each student to meet each student's need to either gain access to their high school of choice or gain the IELTS or TOEIC scores required to progress their study at home or in New Zealand, or to enable them to apply for permanent residency in New Zealand. An external measure of success in comparison with other providers is the Trinity exams that Alpha offers. Of 12 courses run over 12 years, the pass rate has been 98 per cent, significantly above sector benchmarks.

The High School Preparation students are teenagers, and have an average stay of five weeks. This programme is unique in Canterbury and is beneficial to all stakeholders, especially now that student numbers in high schools are fluctuating and budgets are tight. Apart from the English language learning, this group of students is also introduced to the New Zealand school system, including subject knowledge in areas such as maths, science, and social studies. This includes an introduction to the English vocabulary they will come across in these subjects. A recent graduate from the High School Preparation class noted that this had been particularly useful as he was able to keep up well in class as he understood the terminology used by the teacher. The last three international students who graduated from Alpha had all progressed to year 12 in mainstream classes.

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

Alpha also offers holiday programmes for students who need an English boost prior to sitting IELTS in their own country, and some after-school programmes, usually one-to-one for individual students who need extra tuition. The organisation benefits from recommendations and repeat business. All students receive a progress report at the end of each term, outlining both academic and general observations about progress, including social factors such as the ability to work with others. Students also receive certificates of attendance.

Alpha has effective systems to capture student achievement and will benefit from the introduction of electronic record-keeping, particularly as a way to capture student information in one, easily accessible location. All levels of education provision in Canterbury are facing uncertain times. Alpha is providing an essential service for local high schools, enabling them to refer individual students for one-to-one tutoring, confident that Alpha will refer them back to the school when they are suitably prepared. By its own analysis, Alpha's current student numbers do not provide a sustainable long-term future. However, Alpha has shown itself to be resilient and adaptable and is well placed for any uptake in international student numbers.

## 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**.

By providing students with opportunities to be assessed through Trinity, TOEIC and IELTS students receive an internationally transferable exam result that can be used in New Zealand and their country of origin. Rigorous moderation of these exams by external examiners provides confidence in their value and credibility for both the students and the organisations in which they hope to enrol for their chosen programme of study.

Alpha's ability to accommodate individual students and provide one-to-one attention enables high school deans and directors of international study to refer students to a suitable foundation programme. High schools contacted stated that they are confident that Alpha students will be well prepared, academically and socially, to undertake high school study when they are referred back to the high school, making for a smooth transition for all concerned.

The evaluation team sighted a number of unsolicited cards and letters from students which were all very positive about their time at Alpha and the progress they were making towards their goals. Alpha also benefits from repeat business which is a measure of its success and reputation. The organisation is working across the international student sector in Canterbury (the director of studies having recently returned from a joint marketing trip to Japan), and has shown itself to be inclusive of and responsive to others.

### 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**.

Alpha is committed to looking after the students' whole experience while at the organisation. This includes orientating them to the New Zealand way of life and schooling through activities and outings. Tutors adapt to meet individual student needs, and there is a genuine concern for the individual welfare of all students. A good example of this is the time Alpha takes with students with disabilities, such as Asperger's syndrome or mental health issues. The director of studies described working with some of these students to enhance their learning opportunities by being totally accepting of them as people and allowing them to progress at their own rate. Collective staff values provide consistency in student management, building trust and confidence and laying the groundwork for learning to occur.

The English for Academic and General Purposes programme is graded from elementary to advanced levels, and students are placed in the appropriate class as a result of entry skills testing. The morning sessions cover speaking and listening and focus on reading and writing as well as grammar accuracy and vocabulary development. The afternoon sessions concentrate more on fluency, listening, vocabulary extension, and everyday English usage.

The High School Preparation programmes are regularly discussed informally by the director of studies and the deans and directors of the high schools. Students' academic levels are assessed prior to entry to their course at Alpha. This close matching is also helped by the previous teaching experience Alpha tutors have in the New Zealand secondary school system. There are also regular formal opportunities when these stakeholders meet.

The evaluation team found a consistent picture across all stakeholders of programmes and activities meeting collective needs. With the low student numbers and the current staffing, students' needs are individualised, although low student numbers can make it more difficult to arrange a variety of group activities, both in and out of class.

## 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**.

All the staff at Alpha are well qualified in their fields, with degrees and postgraduate qualifications, and are all ESOL-trained. The academic staff members have worked at Alpha for eight to ten years, and the evaluation team was impressed by their passion for teaching and for the students. They are formally observed regularly by the director of studies, and the outcome of these observations is used to determine future professional development. A very useful feature of the tutor observations is that the tutor can negotiate with the director of studies and request observation of a particular teaching skill or practice. The outcome of these observations is discussed with the tutor and used to build greater competence and determine future individual and 'all-of-staff' professional development opportunities. Tutors are given variety and changes in the level of the students they teach. This builds professional confidence and provides variety.

There are comprehensive and well-written procedure manuals for tutors, and the tutors prepare teaching plans each week which are reviewed by the director of studies. The evaluation team noted that Alpha has a range of excellent resources, such as a well-stocked resource room, with one tutor commenting that the resources were superior to those he had access to when he worked in a high school. Students confirmed that the tutors are always well prepared for class, are helpful and friendly, and are available to give extra individual out-of-class support when required.

Tutors commented that they work with students to help them think critically, which is challenging for the students as most of them have been taught by rote and to replicate what the teacher says. The tutors teach innovatively, for example imbedding maths or science content and terminology in English teaching. All the tutors reported that they were well supported and consulted by the directors; one tutor commented that, 'Alpha is the best place I've ever worked'. Colleagues are also very supportive of each other, including sharing resources and ideas freely. Staff are very loyal to the institute and deeply appreciative of the efforts management has made to keep them employed post-earthquake.

The evaluation team saw evidence of systems for moderation, analysis of student evaluations of the tutors and the programme content, and records of professional development which confirmed that the quality of the teaching and learning experience at Alpha is exemplary.

## 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**.

Alpha is an English language school which has been in business for 18 years. The evaluation team sighted all the documentation required to be compliant with the Code of Practice, including the yearly review. The student handbook is comprehensive and includes all the information a student might require, including complaint processes.

A very useful tool for students is the 'adjustment scale'. Students are told about the types of feelings that people experience, at different times, when they join a new culture. Students track their happiness levels on a graph and commented that this helped them to realise what to expect at various times, for example that it is natural to be homesick at first and that for most people this feeling will pass. This tool also allow the students to express their feelings more openly and share them with others, which helped them to keep focussed on their English language goals.

Homestay is contracted out to a long-standing and reputable provider of homestay accommodation. The evaluation team sighted evidence of records of conversations with homestay providers and regular reporting to parents. The director of studies is available 24/7 to students and continues to support students post-study with Alpha. The recent Facebook page developed by Alpha has provided an additional way for students to stay connected to the institute, and vice versa.

Comprehensive and effective student support is offered at Alpha. This was confirmed by schools and current students and tutors, and further evidenced by high school students spoken to by the evaluation team who attributed their progress at high school to the confidence and self-belief they had developed as a result of the guidance and support offered to them at Alpha.

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

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

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

Alpha is a well-established institute focussed on learners. This focus is supported and informed by an advisory group, local community involvement, liaison with local high schools, membership of organisations such as CANTESOL (the Canterbury branch of the TESOL Association of Aotearoa New Zealand), where the director of studies was on the committee for 12 years. The director of studies regularly relieves other academic staff and is a teacher first and foremost, with a postgraduate diploma in second language teaching. Alpha has a deserved

reputation for being able to manage and teach students with high needs and has willingly enrolled students from other providers who could not cope with them. The institute has a niche in terms of English language schools in Christchurch as it is the only one providing foundation education for students not ready to cope with high school education.

Alpha belongs to Study Christchurch, an umbrella organisation with members from all sectors that deal with international students, such as high schools and institutes of technology and polytechnics. The New Zealand Government is supporting the rebuild of Christchurch and has committed \$4 million to promote study in Christchurch. The director of studies recently returned from a trip to Japan with Study Christchurch and was enthusiastic about the possibility of enrolments as a result of this trip. Alpha also offers a number of scholarships to support students and has allocated three of these to date.

The organisation has responded proactively to the destruction caused by the earthquakes by sharing the campus and resources with five other organisations, including two language schools and educational agents. It also accepted a number of students post-earthquake, at no cost to the students. As part of the newly updated post-earthquake risk plan, Alpha is computerising all its data and duplicating these records off site as well.

Alpha has shown itself to be proactive and adaptable in very difficult times for the international student market in the Canterbury region. This has included the directors using their personal resources and the director of studies making herself available for other work off campus, such as providing professional development for a group of Korean teachers at a local high school and marking postgraduate diploma in teaching papers at the College of Education, University of Canterbury. These activities help the institute financially and keep it connected with the wider international student sector. The directors have embraced the new spirit of cooperation and collaboration evident in Canterbury since the earthquakes and have managed to continue in business as a result of the ethos of the institute and strong shared values.

## Focus Areas

*This section reports significant findings in each focus area, not already covered in Part 1.*

### 2.1 Focus area: Governance, management, and strategy

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

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

### 2.2 Focus area: International student support

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

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

### 2.3 Focus area: Intensive English for General and Academic Purposes

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

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

### 2.4 Focus area: High School Preparation

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

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

# Recommendations

There are no recommendations arising from the external evaluation and review, other than those expressed or implied within the report.

# 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](http://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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