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# Report of External Evaluation and Review

## Alpha Educational Institute

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 2 June 2016

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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)
First registered:	1998
Location:	8 Bishopdale Court, Christchurch
Delivery sites:	As above
Courses currently delivered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• General and Academic English</li><li>• Academic English Plus (strands include Aviation Studies, Farming, Equine, Exam Preparation)</li><li>• High school preparation</li><li>• After school tuition</li><li>• School holiday programmes</li><li>• Teacher professional development (short courses)</li><li>• Group programmes (short courses)</li></ul>
Code of Practice signatory:	Alpha is signatory to the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students for students aged 10 years and under, students aged 11-13 who are not living with a parent, students aged 14-17, and students aged 18 and upwards.
Number of students:	Domestic: nil International: during 2015 Alpha delivered English

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language tuition to 158 students – 15 EFTS (equivalent full-time students); approximately 20 per cent from each of China and Chile; approximately 10 per cent from each of Japan, Taiwan, Thailand, Korea and Brazil; and the remainder from Argentina, Hungary, Indonesia, Italy, Nepal, Colombia, France, India, Peru and Vietnam. At the time of the external evaluation and review (EER), there were 25 students enrolled, mainly Chilean and Colombian.

Number of staff:	Four full-time and two part-time staff (including four teaching staff and a homestay coordinator)
Scope of active accreditation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intensive English for General and Academic Purposes (Level 4)</li><li>• Trinity Certificate for Teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) (Level 4)<sup>1</sup></li></ul>
Distinctive characteristics:	<p>Alpha is a small, specialist English language school with a focus on pathway English language tuition, in all English language proficiency levels, to prepare students for further study.</p> <p>Alpha has agreements with four PTEs to deliver English language pathways programmes with additional subject-specific strands. Programme content and duration are determined in consultation with partner PTEs. Alpha's adult students, other than those who enrol as part of a pathway programme, are generally short-term, enrolling for an average of three weeks.</p> <p>Alpha adds value to the community through memoranda of understanding with a number of Christchurch schools and prepares international students for entering local high schools as mainstream students. In addition to English language tuition, students receive introductory subject knowledge in mathematics, science and social studies. Programme duration depends on the needs of individual learners.</p>

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<sup>1</sup> Alpha's validation by Trinity lapsed in 2012, due to a lack of enrolments.

Recent significant changes: Alpha has continued to experience low student numbers following the Christchurch earthquakes, and since the previous EER. Alpha has responded by developing further English Plus strands and delivering short professional development courses for teachers of English as an additional language.

There has been some turnover in tutorial and administrative roles.

In late 2014, Alpha assumed responsibility for homestay services previously out-sourced to a private provider, and appointed a full-time homestay coordinator. Homestay services are also provided to a small number of other education providers.

Following the earthquakes, Alpha opened up its campus to other language schools and several educational agents requiring premises. At the time of the current EER, two agencies retain office space on the premises. The two remaining language schools closed during 2014.

Previous quality assurance history: At the previous EER in 2012, NZQA was Confident in the educational performance and capability in self-assessment at Alpha.

Other: At the time of the current EER, Alpha advised NZQA that negotiations were underway for new investment in the PTE, to provide increased capacity for marketing and programme delivery, including new premises.

## 2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The following focus areas were selected for evaluation:

- Governance, management and strategy, which is a mandatory focus area
- International student support, as all enrolments are by international students and Alpha has assumed responsibility for homestay provision since the previous EER
- English for Academic and General Purposes, which is the course under which Alpha offers a range of study options to school-age and adult students.

### 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 Alpha over two days. The evaluators spoke to the two directors (one of whom is also the director of studies), the institute manager, four tutors and a selection of students on site (seven). In addition, phone interviews were conducted with the homestay coordinator, representatives of three partner PTEs, and two high schools and two ex-students.

The evaluators reviewed a range of management, academic and support services documentation, including learner outcomes information, progress reports, student records (online and hard copies), teaching records and resources, feedback from students and other stakeholders, plans and meeting minutes.

# Summary of Results

## Statement of confidence on educational performance

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

- Alpha has good evidence of learners making progress in English language acquisition. Comprehensive and detailed reports, which are regularly provided to learners and other stakeholders, are strong evidence of Alpha's understanding of how well learners are achieving. These reports provide both empirical and descriptive information in relation to the full range of English language skills achieved by each individual. These reports, together with the small number of IELTS (International English Language Testing System) results available, confirm that students are achieving well in the context of a general expectation of progress which takes account of individual backgrounds and motivations and study durations. Detailed information is also provided on achievement in subject areas for those students enrolled for English Plus programmes.
- Alpha has evidence from a range of sources of valued outcomes for students. Alpha's English language students are well-prepared for further study, including entry to mainstream classes in local high schools and completion of tertiary programmes (such as farming, aviation and equine studies). Younger learners are acquiring relevant social and study skills, attitudes and attributes for the New Zealand education system, settling well into mainstream classes and achieving NCEA. Adult learners in English Plus programmes are achieving proficiency in the specialist subject content and terminology, which enables them to succeed in their target programme.
- Alpha communicates frequently with external stakeholders and has a very good understanding of their needs and expectations. Stakeholders interviewed by the evaluators expressed a high level of confidence in the quality of teaching and learning and confirmed the valued outcomes being achieved.
- Alpha provides a positive learning environment for a wide range of learners, who enrol for a variety of programmes and durations. Learner needs are met through a flexible approach to programme content and delivery by experienced and effective teachers. A high level of pastoral care and guidance enhances learners' well-being and contributes significantly to very good outcomes. Notwithstanding these positive findings, a review of process documentation indicates that further attention is warranted to ensure compliance in every aspect of the Code of Practice for Pastoral Care of International Students, including a full understanding of role responsibilities in relation to the Code.
- Low student numbers have posed significant challenges for governance and management since the previous EER. Despite the resulting challenges for sustainability, the organisation has a strong and collegial culture and has been

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responsive to stakeholders, developing new programme strands and short courses, such as professional development for teachers. However, some important activities have not occurred reliably in recent years, such as programme reviews and performance appraisals. Where they do occur, incomplete records are available, such as for internal moderation. While these gaps have some impact, they are not critical weaknesses and NZQA is prepared to express confidence in Alpha's educational performance.

## Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

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

- Alpha maintains and reports reliable data on learner achievement at an individual level. There is also some evidence of analysis of achievement for English Plus cohorts from one partner PTE, and several review documents focusing on identifying improvements for future intakes.
- Feedback is gathered from students via end-of-course surveys, and Alpha reports that these are reviewed and discussed, although little evidence of this activity taking place was available. However, several examples were provided where feedback helped to inform teaching approaches and support interventions for individual students in subsequent courses.
- Teachers report that they work collegially on a day-to-day basis, sharing ideas and resources. Staff share information and review learner progress and well-being at weekly meetings. The minutes show that the focus of these meetings is primarily operational, and there is limited evidence of reflection on the effectiveness of teaching or discussion on improvements to teaching or service provision. Weekly teaching records do not provide space for individual reflections on what worked well, or not. Apart from team teaching during the holiday programmes and on the English Plus farming course, no peer or manager observations were routinely scheduled, over the past two years, for providing feedback on teaching effectiveness.
- NZQA finds that Alpha is gathering and using information to understand achievement and to identify improvements for individual learners. There is a general reliance on informal communication and responsiveness at an individual level, which generally reflects the size and nature of the organisation. A more purposeful approach to review activities, including stronger evidence of information-gathering and improvements, would strengthen Alpha's capability in self-assessment. This will be particularly relevant in the event that planned growth is achieved over the short to medium-term.

# Findings<sup>2</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 **Good**.

There is good evidence that learners at Alpha are making good progress in improving their English language skills and developing their confidence and ability in everyday communication as well as academic skills for further study.

Assessment of learner achievement is made in the context of a systematic testing regime and a general expectation regarding rate of progress for foundation learners, taking account of individual backgrounds and motivations and study durations. A review by the evaluators of a sample of individual records for learners enrolled for three months or more shows improvements. This is based on beginning and ending achievement in Oxford Placement Tests plotted on an English as a second language ladder (mapped against IELTS bands).<sup>3</sup> For a small number of students, IELTS results are available which indicates that those learners have achieved or exceeded their target scores and gained admission to further study.

In addition to this achievement data, detailed progress reports provide comprehensive evidence of learner achievement. For adult students enrolled in intensive English Plus programmes, these reports describe grammar, vocabulary, reading, writing, listening and speaking skills (based on clear criteria and descriptions). They also provide general comments on overall progress and motivation. Additional reports are provided for subject-specific learner achievement. For example, in the case of English for aviation studies, detail is provided on content covered, and an assessment of the level reached in relation to pronunciation, structure, subject-specific vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and interaction. For students enrolled in high school preparation, the English progress report provides an assessment of the level of performance in writing/reading, listening/speaking and grammar/vocabulary, and a general assessment of effort and participation. A similar approach is taken to the science, mathematics and social studies topics. Additionally, an assessment is completed of the student's skills for success in the New Zealand high school learning environment. This reporting reflects Alpha's focus on individual achievement and provides useful information for the learner and other stakeholders.

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

<sup>3</sup> Unless specifically requested, Oxford Placement Tests are only available to students enrolled for more than three weeks.

Alpha reports that student satisfaction with their learning experience and progress is the most important indicator of achievement for very short-term students (three weeks or fewer). Evidence of this was available in feedback forms, cards and emails and anecdotal information.

Alpha primarily monitors and records individual progress and achievement. Oxford Placement Test scores have been collated and reviewed for two cohorts of English Plus farming students, and this information has contributed to discussions with the primary programme provider about the programme and some changes for future intakes.

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

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

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

Alpha is successful in supporting students to progress to further study, at high school or other tertiary organisations. Evidence of students gaining admission to target programmes and making good progress in those programmes is gathered through ongoing relationships with students, in person or via social media, and regular communication with education providers.

External stakeholders report their confidence in the quality of teaching and learning at Alpha and satisfaction with the preparedness of Alpha students for further study. Younger learners are acquiring relevant social and study skills, attitudes and attributes for the New Zealand education system, settling well into mainstream classes and achieving NCEA. This was particularly valued in the case of several students who had initially presented with learning difficulties and social and behavioural challenges, but were able to pathway to appropriate learning programmes at high school. Adult learners in English Plus programmes are achieving proficiency in the specialist subject content and terminology, which enables them to succeed in their target programme.

Alpha is small and relies on information gathered through routine communications to understand the needs and expectations of external stakeholders. This is generally effective, as evident from the high levels of satisfaction expressed and repeat business. However, several stakeholders interviewed by the evaluators indicated that they would welcome the opportunity to participate in a more structured process for gathering feedback, which might provide Alpha with further useful information for improvement.

### 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 effectively meets a wide variety of needs and study purposes through small classes and a flexible approach to programme content and delivery. Alpha's programmes of intensive English for Academic and General Purposes provide for core English language tuition plus a range of subject strands. Teaching and learning resources for these strands have been developed in consultation with partners and with reference to relevant texts and standards. Stakeholders interviewed by the evaluators confirmed their satisfaction with the resource development process and the relevance of the material.

Learner needs are met through a good variety of classroom activities which are effectively targeted to their needs, including one-to-one tuition. Initial diagnostic assessments of English language ability and a discussion on learners' goals are used for placement and to develop individual learning programmes. The evaluators heard about content and activities being adjusted in response to the needs and interest of individual learners. Alpha also reported that additional support is provided through after-school tuition and extension resources. A structured testing and reporting regime informs regular progress reports. External stakeholders all confirmed the usefulness of the detailed reporting provided by Alpha which clearly sets out strengths and areas for further improvement.

Alpha has a number of survey forms which it uses to gather feedback from students. Teachers involved in delivery of the holiday programmes described how this feedback is used to inform future programmes. Discussions on feedback gathered in this way are largely informal and primarily used as a source of information on individual student needs. This reflects Alpha's current educational provision which is primarily individualised programmes. This approach could be strengthened for group programmes by periodic reviews of how effectively programmes are meeting needs and reflecting changes in content, resources and teaching practice.

### 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**.

Learners at Alpha benefit from a small team of qualified and experienced teachers who create an effective learning environment for a wide range of students. Alpha is a small PTE and teachers work closely together to share ideas and resources, and to monitor learner progress. Teaching records and learner feedback show that teachers tailor their approach and material to achieve the best outcomes for

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students and that teachers and learners relate effectively to one another. A systematic approach to assessment of English language acquisition is based on classroom texts and standardised proficiency tests at regular intervals. Results are clearly described in comprehensive progress reports. Speaking and writing tests are subject to internal moderation, although records of this activity are not maintained.

Teachers are supported to identify personal goals and professional development opportunities annually. Although there are some examples of professional development activities being discussed at weekly meetings, there is limited evidence of individual or group reflection on the effectiveness of teaching or ideas for improvement. Weekly teaching records do not provide space for individual reflections on what worked well, or not. Apart from team teaching during the holiday programmes and on the English Plus farming course, no peer or manager observations were routinely scheduled over the past two years for providing feedback on teaching effectiveness.

Overall, the evaluators found that teachers are collegial and professional and that learner outcomes and stakeholder feedback indicates that teachers are generally effective. While informal oversight and support is provided on a day-to-day basis by the director of studies, there is a general reliance on staff expertise rather than a systematic approach to review and improvement which would provide the director with greater assurance of teaching effectiveness.

## 1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

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**.

All staff at Alpha share responsibility for the academic and pastoral care of learners to ensure they have a positive learning experience and achieve their personal goals. Students feel well supported by Alpha, have easy access to staff, and receive regular feedback on their progress. Minutes of weekly meetings and student records provide ample evidence of effective systems for tracking progress and ensuring the well-being of individual students. Stakeholders interviewed by the evaluators reported that pastoral care is a strength of Alpha. They express a high level of confidence in the support available to students of all ages and the positive impact of this on students achieving their study goals.

The evaluators saw evidence that most requirements of the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students are met. Any concerns or issues that are identified are addressed promptly. Alpha provides a homestay accommodation service for the students. Communication and support is available to learners and homestay families and the coordinator is responsive to any feedback offered. Students report that they are generally satisfied with their homestay experience.

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However, interviews with staff and a review of process documentation indicates that further attention is warranted to ensure compliance with every aspect of the Code of Practice. Particular attention should be paid to record-keeping and improving the knowledge and/or engagement of staff with the Code, and the annual review process.

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

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

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

The governance and management of Alpha is appropriate for the size of the organisation. Effective leadership and communication ensure all staff feel valued. A collegial culture and willingness to respond positively to opportunities for new programme strands and short courses has sustained the organisation, despite ongoing low student numbers. Stakeholders verify that the organisation has a strong reputation and makes an important contribution to the local education sector.

As a small organisation, Alpha generally relies on informal communication and processes for monitoring educational performance. The quality of the learning outcomes indicates that the focus on individual progress and well-being is generally effective and is largely meeting stakeholder needs. However, some important activities that underpin educational performance have not occurred reliably in recent years, such as performance appraisals. Where they do occur, incomplete records are available, such as for internal moderation.

Alpha's approach to review and improvement reflects the size and nature of the organisation, although useful learnings could be gained from formalising important activities that underpin educational performance. A more comprehensive and purposeful approach would strengthen capability in self-assessment, particularly in the light of potential planned growth. This would include better capture of relevant information and evidence of ongoing improvements in learner outcomes.

## Focus Areas

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

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

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

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

### 2.2 Focus area: International student support

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

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

### 2.3 Focus area: Intensive English for Academic and General 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**.

# Recommendations

NZQA recommends that Alpha Educational Institute:

- Review and strengthen its self-assessment framework, involving staff at all levels of the organisation, to systematically gather and use reliable information to identify improvements.
- Review compliance with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Pastoral Care of International Students and ensure that relevant staff are engaged throughout the process, including the annual review of the Code.

# 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](http://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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