



# Report of External Evaluation and Review

Aspiring Language Institute

Date of report: 15 June 2010

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# Purpose of this Report

*The purpose of this external evaluation and review report is to provide a public statement about the Tertiary Education Organisation's (TEO) educational performance and capability in self-assessment. It forms part of the accountability process required by Government to inform investors, the public, students, prospective students, communities, employers, and other interested parties. It is also intended to be used by the TEO itself for quality improvement purposes.*

## Brief description of TEO

Location: Merivale, Christchurch

Type: Private Training Establishment

Size: 29 students, five staff

Sites: Christchurch

Aspiring Language Institute (ALI) is a private, English language school which was established in 1989. It was first registered as a private training establishment with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority in 1991 and offers courses in English as a foreign language to international students.

The school is small, with no more than 55 students at any one time. It operates from residential premises adapted to meet the school's requirements, with gardens and outdoor areas for the students to relax in. The school offers an intensive General English course and prepares students for three levels of Cambridge International Examinations: proficiency, advanced, and upper intermediate. Students attending the school come from Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Germany, Switzerland, and the Middle East, Thailand, Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic and Russia.

Aspiring Language Institute was previously quality assured by NZQA under the quality audit system. The most recent quality audit was in 2007 and all relevant requirements were met.

# Executive Summary

## Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **Aspiring Language Institute**.

Key reasons for this include the following.

- ALI has above-average performance when compared with institutes of a similar size and profile, as measured by Education New Zealand.
- ALI's Cambridge International Examination results are benchmarked and achievement levels are 96 per cent.
- Student expectations about study and travel in a foreign country are always met and often exceeded.
- Students are highly motivated and set individual goals with academic staff, which they consistently meet or exceed.
- Students can be moved up or down class levels to best meet their English language needs.
- Students are provided with one-to-one English language tuition until their English is at a level where they are ready to join a class.
- All staff are highly motivated to provide an excellent experience for the learners, academically and socially.

## Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Aspiring Language Institute**.

Key reasons for this include the following.

- Student needs are formally assessed at the time of enrolment and informally assessed on an ongoing basis throughout their course.
- The school has well-managed and consistent processes for monitoring and collecting data on student progress.
- This data is analysed and used to address individual needs and to inform course content and delivery.
- The directors understand the reasons why the school is highly successful and are committed to maintaining their niche in the international student market by ongoing self-review and analysis.

# Basis for External Evaluation and Review

*Self-assessment and external evaluation and review are requirements of course approval and accreditation (under sections 258 and 259 of the Education Act 1989) for all TEOs that are entitled to apply. The requirements are set through the course approval and accreditation criteria and policies established by NZQA under section 253(1)(d) and (e) of the Act.*

*In addition, for registered private training establishments, the criteria and policies for their registration require self-assessment and external evaluation and review at an organisational level in addition to the individual courses they own or provide. These criteria and policies are set by NZQA under section 253(1)(ca) of the Act.*

*NZQA is responsible for ensuring TEOs continue to comply with the policies and criteria after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of courses and/or registration. The Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality (ITPQuality) is responsible, under delegated authority from NZQA, for compliance by the polytechnic sector, and the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) has statutory responsibility for compliance by universities.*

*This report reflects the findings and conclusions of the external evaluation and review process, conducted according to the policies and criteria approved by the NZQA Board.*

*The report identifies strengths and areas for improvement in terms of the organisation's educational performance and capability in self-assessment.*

*External evaluation and review reports are one contributing piece of information in determining future funding decisions where the organisation is a funded TEO subject to an investment plan agreed with the Tertiary Education Commission.*

*External evaluation and review reports are public information and are available from the NZQA website ([www.nzqa.govt.nz](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz)).*

# Findings

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

*Information relevant to the external evaluation and review process, including the publication Policy and Guidelines for the Conduct of External Evaluation and Review, is available at: <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/for-providers/keydocs/index.html>*

## Outline of scope

The agreed scope of the external evaluation and review included the following mandatory focus areas:

- Governance, management, and strategy
- International students – pastoral support.

This evaluation also included the following programmes:

- General English
- Cambridge International Examination courses.

These programmes cover all the courses offered at Aspiring Language Institute.

## Part 1: Answers to Key Evaluation Questions across the organisation

*This section provides a picture of the TEO's performance in terms of the outcomes achieved and the key contributing processes. Performance judgements are based on the answers to key evaluation questions across the focus areas sampled. This section also provides a judgement about the extent to which the organisation uses self-assessment information to understand its own performance and bring about improvements, i.e. capability in self-assessment.*

### 1.1 How well do learners achieve?

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**.

#### **Explanation**

Students in the General English courses achieve well against their goals of balancing language acquisition and travel. Students who decide to study for the Cambridge International Examinations have achievement rates of 96 per cent.

There is a comprehensive induction programme for new students which includes familiarisation with local facilities such as banks, supermarkets, and the public transport

system. The director of studies administers the placement test which has a grammar and writing component. The students are also interviewed to assess their communication skills.

The length of the General English courses varies according to each student's needs, which makes completion rates an inappropriate measure of achievement. The school considers student satisfaction levels to be the most appropriate measure of learner achievement. This view was validated by the evaluation team. Student feedback and interviews confirmed that students have positive learning experiences and acquire English languages skills that improve their conversational and functional English language, including their understanding of grammar and spoken English.

Cambridge International Examination results are benchmarked, papers are marked and moderated in Cambridge, England, and students achieve at 96 per cent. Passes in Cambridge exams provide opportunities for further study in New Zealand and overseas. For example, Cambridge results can be used in Switzerland to gain entry to the university system.

Individual student achievement is recorded numerically. The school has many positive stories to tell and would benefit from capturing anecdotal information from students and other stakeholders such as homestay parents. This would more comprehensively reflect the breadth of the student experience at ALI.

The school performs above-average in terms of nationality and age mix when compared with institutions of a similar size and profile. However, one effect of open-entry is that individual student's rates of progress vary depending on their entry level skills.

All students spoken to at ALI said they enjoyed experiencing New Zealand culture, both academically and socially. The school benefits from recommendations from past students and some students return to study at ALI more than once.

## 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**.

### **Explanation**

Community involvement takes place through contact with homestay parents and activities arranged by ALI. Students have the opportunity to join community adult education night classes which are advertised on the ALI noticeboard periodically. All students are encouraged to stay with homestay families initially. Homestay families are local, usually located within walking distance of or a short bus ride from the school. This gives students opportunities to meet socially.

There is a careful matching process between students and the homestay families, with initial contact often occurring prior to the student arriving in New Zealand.

Most homestay families have been with the school for some time, some since its inception. They provide students with the opportunity to be involved in the local community and offer experiences such as travel to other places in New Zealand. Homestay also provides a range of naturally occurring opportunities for students to practise conversational English. Students commented that their tutors actively encourage them to discuss their day with their homestay families and the homestay parents contacted said they were mindful to include the students in conversation. They also emphasised that homestay was a great opportunity to introduce their families to cultures other than their own and that it was a privilege to host the students from ALI as they were always polite, appreciative, and motivated to succeed.

Students have a range of opportunities to experience English language and New Zealand culture while at ALI. The school has a policy of enrolling small numbers of students from different cultures to promote shared understanding. Combined with the English-only school policy, this ensures students mix well as spoken English becomes the shared way to communicate.

### 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 **Excellent**.

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

#### **Explanation**

Programmes for General English are well matched to the needs of individual learners. The classes are small, full-time, with a maximum of 12 students and a minimum enrolment period of four weeks. These classes are offered throughout the year.

The morning classes cover speaking and listening and focus on reading and writing as well as grammatical accuracy and vocabulary development. The afternoon classes concentrate more on fluency, listening, vocabulary extension, and everyday English usage. Students discuss individual learning goals with their teachers for the time that they have to study. Often these goals involve a short-term stay at the school in order to combine travel with a study focus of language acquisition and improved fluency.

Students who are not yet at beginner level at the time of enrolment can have one-to-one tuition in order to reach the beginner class level. Students can move class and course level at any time to reflect their progress. Students enrol in General English classes knowing that they will receive individual tuition if necessary and that their individual language acquisition and fluency goals can be met in the small class structure.

Programmes for University of Cambridge International Examinations are available three times a year for students who wish to enrol for a qualification. There is an entry test for the Cambridge courses. This is used to decide the level at which to place the student; entry is open. Students can use Cambridge qualifications to help with further study in New Zealand or overseas.

Students have a range of opportunities for language and cultural enrichment through a programme of activities. The school offers students an activities calendar with weekend visits to other parts of New Zealand and there are local activities coordinated during the week. These include a range of interactions with Māori culture through an after-hours social programme (bone carving) and a focus on Waitangi Day through classwork activities.

Saudi students are given time out to attend the Christchurch mosque, and are provided with a prayer area at the school. Their dietary needs are taken into account when the school organises functions where food is served.

These activities provide students with a range of opportunities to experience English language and be immersed in New Zealand culture, all the while accommodating individual student needs.

#### 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**.

##### **Explanation**

Teaching is highly effective and is matched to individual student need and each student's continuum of language learning. Three of the four teachers are qualified to teach Cambridge International Examination classes. They each have an opportunity to do this at three different times in the academic year, depending on student demand. General English teaching uses a mixture of course workbooks and the teacher's own resources.

Teachers have their own classrooms and resources. There is limited use of computer technology in the teaching, the emphasis being on an interactive, teacher-initiated and led, communicative approach. Class observations showed respectful and relaxed interactions between teachers and students. Students were engaged in different ways of using English language. There was a focus on fluency, repetition, working in pairs, and one-to-one discussion with the teacher.

Feedback forms from students indicate that teachers are meeting their learning needs and providing a friendly, fun learning environment. Students interviewed on site stated that teachers were helpful and that they had all improved their written and spoken English through class learning opportunities. They also reported that the small class sizes allowed teachers to work with them on an individual basis to help them achieve their goals. The use of a reflective student diary, shared with the teacher with the student's permission, was seen by students as a useful way of sharing progress and signalling where the student required help.

Highly effective teaching enabled the General English students to reach their goals and objectives in language acquisition and use. It also enabled students to attain Cambridge qualifications.

## 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**.

### **Explanation**

Students are well supported and guided appropriately. They work in small groups where there is a teacher focus on individual student strengths, weaknesses, and goals. There is an integrated model of academic and pastoral care. Students have access to graded readers and course books, supplementary reading, and a class computer with wireless broadband internet access. The latter encourages students to use their own laptops while at school.

Students also have access to websites with sound files. They are also introduced to the Christchurch City Libraries facilities and encouraged to use these. Students reported having different avenues for reporting or discussing academic and pastoral concerns, such as teachers, same-language counsellors, and the homestay coordinator staff member.

Students have a range of social opportunities to benefit from the small, family, “home-away-from-home” atmosphere at the school. The school prides itself on its high level of pastoral care. Good academic and pastoral guidance and support result in high levels of student satisfaction with their time spent at ALI.

## 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**.

### **Explanation**

Governance and management at ALI are highly effective. The integrity of vision is clearly stated and followed through at all levels of operation. The school targets a niche market of learners over 18 years who seek a homely, friendly, flexible experience where they can meet and work with other learners from different cultures, and adapt their learning to fit in with other needs such as travel.

The main markets for the school are Switzerland, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan (approximately 80 per cent of students); and Thailand, Saudi Arabia, and Eastern Europe (approximately 20 per cent of students). ALI has a clear, sustained vision and delivers learning programmes and activities according to its professed values and market needs.

The two directors are responsible for governance and setting the direction of the school. Since 2004 they have adapted the school’s scope and size as a planned response to socioeconomic pressures, downsizing the operation. This has resulted in closure of one property and reduced staffing and enrolments. The self-assessment material in this respect was ratified in discussion with the directors, showing downsizing from a maximum roll of 70 students prior to 2004 to a maximum roll of 55 post-2004.

The decision was made to reallocate the remaining work as full-time, permanent staffing positions. One of the drivers for this was student feedback showing that students felt more comfortable with core permanent teachers. The result is that although there are fewer staff members overall, most of the remaining staff are in full-time, permanent positions; any part-time staff are in roles such as language counsellors or relief teachers. Usually, English teachers in this field would need to work at different organisations to have full-time work.

This reallocation of roles has created a stable, highly motivated, committed staff group who enjoy working at the school and participating in all the activities. This is a strength of the organisation. All of the academic staff have extensive experience in teaching English to international students in a variety of contexts. Professional development opportunities are available to staff within budgetary considerations.

A director, a director of studies, and the office manager/homestay coordinator are responsible for the day-to-day management of the school. The managers are readily available to staff and students and are fully involved in the operation of the school. A comprehensive system of student feedback is collected and used to monitor the effectiveness of class programmes and homestay placements. Records are kept of actions taken in response to individual student concerns. Student attendance is high at the school, reflecting the individual attention provided and the inclusive atmosphere.

ALI's business plan showed good marketing based on sound research and analysis of trends. Ninety-five per cent of the school's business still comes from offshore travel agencies. A good relationship with these agencies, built up over many years, is the key factor in maintaining the school's competitive edge. All these factors combined mean that ALI has financial stability and resulting reliability as a service provider.

## Part 2: Performance in 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: International students – pastoral care

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: Cambridge – Upper Intermediate (First Certificate in English)

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

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

### 2.4 Focus area: Cambridge – Advanced (Cambridge Advanced English)

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

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

### 2.5 Focus area: Cambridge – Proficiency (Cambridge Proficiency in English)

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

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

# Actions Required and Recommendations

## Further actions

The next external evaluation and review will take place in accordance with NZQA's regular scheduling policy and is likely to occur within four years of the date of this report.

## Recommendations

There are no recommendations arising from the external evaluation and review.

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