

Report of External Evaluation and Review

Aspiring Language Institute

Not Yet Confident in educational performance

Not Yet Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 22 May 2013

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Purpose of this Report

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

Introduction

1. TEO in context

Name of TEO:	Aspiring Language Institute
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	Level 1, 87-89 Albert St, Auckland CBD, Auckland
Delivery sites:	As above
First registered:	1 May 1991
Courses currently delivered	Intensive English
Code of Practice signatory?	Yes, students aged 18 upwards
Number of students:	Domestic: nil International: approximately 35 students
Number of staff:	Nine full-time equivalents
Scope of active accreditation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cambridge - Upper Intermediate - First Certificate in English (FCE)• Cambridge - Advanced - Certificate in Advanced English (CAE)• Cambridge - Proficiency - Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE)• IELTS (International English Language Testing System) preparation programme
Distinctive characteristics:	Aspiring Language Institute has changed its format in the last two years. Significantly there has been a change of ownership and governance and a

change of location from Christchurch to Auckland. Effectively, Aspiring Language Institute now needs to be appraised as a provider that is newly established as there is little left of the previous regime.

Recent significant changes: In August 2011, Aspiring Language Institute was sold to its current owner, and continued to operate from its Christchurch site while an Auckland site was established. In March 2012, the Christchurch site was discontinued and the current site is at the Auckland address. Although the name and accreditation remain the same, the changes in governance, management, location and staff mean that Aspiring Language Institute has changed its basic nature.

Previous quality assurance history: Results of the 2010 external evaluation and review:
1. Educational performance: Highly Confident
2. Capability in self-assessment: Highly Confident

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

Governance, management and strategy are a mandatory focus area, as is international student support. The other focus area selected was:

- Intensive English

This selected programme is the only programme currently offered by Aspiring Language Institute.

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.

An NZQA lead evaluator conducted the evaluation visit with an external evaluator over a single day at the provider's sole site in Albert St, Auckland. The evaluators met with the owner and director, office manager, international student support

counsellors, teaching staff and students. Particular attention was paid to a report by a consultant who was commissioned to study the assessment functions of the school. Other documents sighted by the evaluators during the visit included moderation documents, the quality management system, staff files, student evaluations, monthly tests, the business plan, achievement reports, accommodation documents and student activities documents.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Not Yet Confident** in the educational performance of **Aspiring Language Institute**.

Aspiring Language Institute is focussed on educational achievement, but this is achieved mainly through the commitment of the teaching staff members, who guide the learning process at present. Currently, there is a lack of supervisory, overarching academic management, which may have contributed to instances where inappropriate behaviour by one or two of the teachers was highlighted in student feedback. Although these instances were dealt with effectively, they could have been avoided altogether.

Student achievement figures are not readily compiled or analysed by Aspiring Language Institute, but the data for achievement is gathered and the figures show that students achieve well and that only a few students have dropped out. It is estimated that of 207 students that have enrolled since the change of ownership, about 13 have dropped out of their enrolment so far. This makes an estimated 94 per cent retention rate. About 106 students have graduated so far. The remainder have all completed their enrolled period of study, but there is no real indication of how well the students achieved their desired outcomes. Achievement is generally measured by tracking those students who complete their period of enrolled study and improve their English language as a result. Student surveys show that approximately 90 per cent of students are generally happy with their learning experience. Attendance is very good at around 92 per cent, which indicates a good level of commitment from the students.

The organisation has established processes for understanding student needs and ensuring the students are placed correctly into courses. Enrolment is for varied lengths of time depending on the needs of the student, and this also influences whether the student has a student visa or a tourist visa. The courses are mainly centred on the General English programme; there is also an IELTS preparation class. Aspiring Language Institute was not able to show how well its students perform in comparison to other English language schools. These programmes are international in nature and it would be useful to engage in benchmarking locally and internationally.

Aspiring Language Institute uses appropriate methods to determine the students' levels of learning at the outset of the programme. There is an enrolment interview and a placement test to determine the entry level of the student. These tests are used to place the students at the appropriate level of study. There is also a trial period of one week to identify whether a student needs to be moved to another level.

Aspiring Language Institute makes considerable efforts to ensure that the students, who are all international, are supported during their stay in New Zealand so that learning is facilitated in the best way. Students are recruited from diverse countries such as Japan, South Africa, China, Korea, Saudi Arabia and parts of Europe. The agents that are used to recruit students continue to give support to the students during their stay in New Zealand. This mixture of student nationalities is in keeping with Aspiring Language Institute's ethos of providing a culturally diverse environment. The student support counsellors assist the students in various ways to help them find their way and acclimatise to Auckland. Most students choose to find their own accommodation or are assisted by a contractor, and currently none are housed in homestay accommodation. Aspiring Language Institute goes to some effort to provide extramural activities for the students. Trips to museums, sporting events and karaoke are examples of these events, which are voluntary and popular with the students. The institute also organises guest speakers to explain some of New Zealand's customs and culture.

Currently, Aspiring Language Institute is looking for a part-time principal and/or a director of studies, which will fill an obvious gap in academic planning and supervision. The teaching staff members are operating in a partly self-directed environment currently, and there is a lack of mechanisms to give assurance of the quality of teaching. Staff members observe each other's lessons on a regular basis, and this serves as a constructive check on teaching practice. Feedback is given during this process, but this is not part of a formal performance review of the teachers.

Teachers at Aspiring Language Institute are well qualified and experienced and have shown that they are capable of being self-directed, but there is a gap in management supervision and oversight of teaching practice. It is hard to see how management at Aspiring Language Institute can show assurance that quality educational processes are taking place. Management mainly gains awareness of staff performance through student feedback. Some of this feedback has shown that a few staff members were behaving inappropriately in the classroom. The evaluation team heard examples of how these poorly performing staff members are managed. The staff members concerned were observed, mentored and instructed, and one did not have his contract renewed with Aspiring Language Institute. This enabled resolution of the problem with minimal disruption to teaching and the least upheaval for the students. While these problems are being resolved once they occur, there is little in place to prevent them from occurring in the first place.

The teaching staff and counsellors meet weekly to discuss student progress and welfare. Each staff member has a monthly one-to-one meeting with the office manager to discuss performance issues.

Aspiring Language Institute is currently attempting to update some of its resources in response to formal and informal feedback. The PTE inherited many of its resources from the original owner in Christchurch. Some of these resources are out of date and need renewal. Management is aware of this, and the evaluators

heard that there is a consignment of new textbooks on its way for use in 2013, although they had not arrived at the time of the EER. The students have remarked, through the feedback facility, that they are not happy with the internet speed and those that were interviewed by the evaluation team said they preferred to use their own laptops.

The philosophies outlined in the Aspiring Language Institute mission statement are evident in the running of the school and echo the reasons that students give for selecting the institute as their preferred provider of English language tuition. The organisation offers small classes, good value, a good cultural balance and personal attention from good teachers. These philosophies were referred to by the governance and management teams in the interviews and appear to be embedded in the awareness for the planning and development processes. There is a culture of celebrating the achievements of the students, with successful students being publicly congratulated at the regular Friday assemblies.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Not Yet Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Aspiring Language Institute**.

Generally, Aspiring Language Institute gathers data which is used to make informed decisions about programme planning and development and teaching improvements. These measures are still in a formative stage as the provider still uses the material from the original programmes as taught in Christchurch. Data is collected in the student entry interview and placement test, which allows the student to be placed at the appropriate level of competence. A further trial period of a week allows any students who have been incorrectly placed to be assigned to the appropriate level. Feedback is gained from the students after each month and collated to inform programme development. Self-assessment processes are still in the formative stages at Aspiring Language Institute, and although data collection is occurring, it is too early for this to influence the future developments that are envisaged. The provider is hampered in that it can only engage in improvements as its finances will allow, and so some planned developments have to wait.

Importance is placed on the provider's relationship with the recruitment agents, and regular feedback is also acquired from the agents. This assists the provider to ensure it is matching student needs as much as possible. Aspiring Language Institute also gains graduate destination information as much as it can, and so knows where some graduates are using their English language skills after they leave. Collecting graduate data under these circumstances is not easy in view of the itinerant nature of the graduates. Information about extramural activities is entered on a Facebook page, and this gives students and graduates the opportunity to communicate online.

Teachers engage in peer teaching observations and give each other feedback on their performance from this process. A management-instigated performance review system for the teaching staff has been established, but it is still in the formative

stages and has not been fully implemented. There is currently a lack of academic management control due to the lack of a director of studies to give overarching direction and to administer quality control. Management is aware of this issue and is taking steps to fill this position.

Moderation occurs after the students sit a test to gauge consistency of marking, but there is no evidence of pre-assessment moderation. This is quite an important concern as it leaves uncertainty in the validity and consistency of the tests. There is also no evidence of a procedure to implement a structured scheduled review of programmes to maintain currency and relevance. A professional education consultant was recently hired to carry out a structured review of the programme, and some important recommendations were made, most of which have still to be implemented.

Findings¹

1.1 How well do learners achieve?

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

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

Aspiring Language Institute monitors learner achievement through monthly tests, and the students are given feedback on their development. Given the short duration of the courses, it is seen as a positive indicator that 14 per cent of the students choose to extend their studies. Student evaluations show that students generally feel that they are getting value from their learning and enjoy their time at the school. Aspiring Language Institute recognises student achievements and they are celebrated at the Friday assemblies. In this way, recognition is shown to students who succeed in their studies. The average student attendance rate is 92 per cent, which indicates that the students are generally committed to their studies, and attendance is closely monitored by the teaching staff. Although it is not clear that Aspiring Language Institute knows consistently the number of completions (due to the rolling entry, variation in enrolment length and other factors), management was able to demonstrate that, apart from a small number of dropouts, most students completed their period of enrolment.

Aspiring Language Institute could do more to gain IELTS achievement data, as this will help the provider to understand how well it prepares its students to meet international standards. The lack of external moderation of the monthly tests could cast doubt on confidence in student achievement. The evaluators saw a lack of consistency in some of the assessment reporting practices and consider that a reliable approach is required. Documentation showed that assessment marking was being done using different methodologies by the various teachers, which is another indication of lack of effective moderation to ensure consistency.

In 2012, management engaged an educational consultant to review educational processes. This consultant recommended a number of changes to systems. Some of these recommendations are being carried out currently and others will begin when funds become available. It is not yet possible to gauge the effectiveness of these actions.

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

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

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

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

There is a range of evidence to suggest that students value their time studying with Aspiring Language Institute. For example, the evaluators learned of anecdotal evidence that students gain in confidence and independence as a result of their time at Aspiring Language Institute. Student success is valued by the institution and is openly celebrated at the weekly assemblies. In addition, Aspiring Language Institute makes a concerted effort to track students after they graduate and, while not managing to track all, the organisation does gain valuable information on the destinations of a significant number of the students. The evaluators saw documentation to verify this. It is not clear at this stage how the feedback will be used to inform programme development. The provider also makes worthwhile attempts to get documented feedback from the recruitment agents. Of those agents who have responded to requests for feedback, most were very satisfied with their overall experience with Aspiring Language Institute. Student feedback showed that they mostly feel they are getting value for money. While these measures show that good efforts are being made to collect worthwhile data, it is not yet clear that the data is being used to inform programme development decisions. Course delivery remains largely unsupervised and the teachers are largely self-directed at present. The resources currently being used are the same as those that were previously used in Christchurch, and they are not currently subject to a process of systematic review. These factors raise doubt as to the quality of the resources and whether the learning outcomes are being achieved.

Aspiring Language Institute is achieving the goals stated in the mission statement, one of which is the desire to have a balanced and varied cultural student mix. The organisation uses a variety of ways to gather data to ascertain the quality of its educational performance. These include monthly student evaluations, questionnaires for those students leaving or graduating and the tracking of graduates where possible. A concerted effort to understand the IELTS results is still required.

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**.

Aspiring Language Institute is working hard to match the various needs of the students who enrol. Students interviewed by the evaluation team have a variety of

reasons for selecting Aspiring Language Institute over other Auckland English language schools. Commonly stated reasons for selecting Aspiring Language Institute are: the reasonable fees, the good teachers, the small class sizes allowing for more individual attention and the varied cultural mix in the school.

Aspiring Language Institute conducts enrolment interviews and placement tests to determine the levels at which students should enter the programme. These interviews and tests are generally effective, with most students being placed appropriately. There are plans for the procurement of a new placement test system which should streamline placement procedures and enhance educational benefits further. A recent beneficial innovation is the facility for placing students in classes at different levels in the morning and afternoon to allow for the students' different levels of capability in the various aspects of language development (reading, writing, speaking etc).

Student satisfaction is monitored through the monthly evaluation questionnaires, the results of which are collated and analysed and discussed at the weekly staff meetings. The results of this process are used to inform some developments such as the establishment of a conversation class and the planning of some of the optional activities for the students. Aspiring Language Institute management has an appropriate course of action for handling students' complaints, and records any such events to ensure a transparent process. In addition, the organisation uses a suggestion box to collect anonymous spontaneous feedback and suggestions from the students. These processes ensure that the organisation has mechanisms for gauging how well it is matching the needs of the students, but the facilities to engage in meaningful educational controls are lacking. This is shown by the lack of supervision and the lack of review and moderation, all of which will serve to ensure the quality of the learning outcomes when implemented.

1.4 How effective is the teaching?

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

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

Aspiring Language Institute has well-qualified and experienced teaching staff, who for the most part are self-motivated and able to facilitate the teaching of the programme without direct academic oversight. The lack of professional supervision of the teaching staff is a concern and the effects of this have been discussed in previous sections of this report. There is a lack of a written curriculum, and the programme outline seems to rely on following the textbooks. This situation shows a lack of adherence to recognised programme planning structures, which is a concern.

The evaluators heard about one staff member's inappropriate actions highlighted in student feedback and which resulted in complaints, which were dealt with in a

timely and effective manner by management, with a minimum of disruption to the students.

The students use textbooks and photocopied paper resources for the lessons. To a large extent, the students' resources are provided by the teachers. The textbooks were acquired with the purchase of the original PTE and the evaluators were told that they need updating. The students stated that some of them prefer to use their own laptops on campus as the computers provided by Aspiring Language Institute have very slow internet speed. Management informed the evaluators that they were seeking technical assistance to remedy the problem of poor internet speed.

Feedback on teaching effectiveness is gathered using student feedback and is collated and used to fine-tune the learning experience for the students. There is little direct evaluation of teaching effectiveness by management, due to the absence of an academic manager. While the absence of academic supervision is currently being managed by the office manager, this will result in a lack of credibility and it is doubtful that this type of control would be sustainable if student numbers were to grow. It is questionable whether the current managers have the degree of expertise to sustain the academic standard of the organisation in the long term, and supervision by a suitably experienced director of studies would help to maintain and enhance the systems in place.

Staff members engage in peer observation and provide feedback to each other, and they told of the value of this exercise to enhance their lesson delivery. Individual meetings between teachers and the office manager are currently held every month, and it is planned to hold performance appraisals for each teacher at the end of the first year of tenure and once a year after that. As most of the teachers have been engaged for less than a year, many of these meetings have yet to occur. Although the teachers moderate each other's assessment marking, the evaluators found that there was little pre-assessment moderation to ensure that tests are fit for purpose. The regime for the moderation of assessment would benefit from a systematic approach that includes external moderation. A structured approach to curriculum development and programme review needs to be implemented to ensure continuing improvement in academic self-assessment.

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

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

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

Guidance and support systems at Aspiring Language Institute are inextricably linked to the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students (Code of Practice) as all the students are from abroad and covered by student visas or

tourist visas. The processes for reporting compliance with the Code of Practice are still being developed and the monitoring systems for this are not fully in place yet.

Aspiring Language Institute has a policy of enrolling from a variety of countries to ensure an ethnically diverse group of students. The composition of the current student body reflects this philosophy, and to cater for this the organisation employs counsellors from diverse cultural backgrounds to assist the students. Currently, the counsellors are from Mexico, Japan, China and France and speak a number of relevant languages between them; this is a good match for the students currently enrolled.

The organisation has appropriate processes for ensuring students have access to guidance and support. The director/owner has taken responsibility for being the 24-hour contact for the students and is available to contact appropriate support agencies. Aspiring Language Institute provides orientation and support facilities and contacts for medical, dental and counselling requirements. There is a student handbook for reference to the academic rules and procedures. The students are aware of the avenues available for making complaints or suggestions, and if there are any they are discussed at regular staff meetings. The counsellors are instrumental in providing support for the students in many different ways, such as organising airport pick-ups and accommodation, if necessary, and assisting the students to open bank accounts or use public transport. As the students are all over the age of 18, most of them are happy to find their own accommodation, but help is provided if required.

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

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

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

Aspiring Language Institute has a clear vision which is reflected in its mission statement. This document is posted in various places around the school to emphasise the message. Management has effective data storage systems and information is readily available, but evaluation of data is at a formative stage and the implementation of development is hindered by financial limitations at the present time. There is a good system of data collection from the feedback surveys of students and recruitment agents, but there is less evidence that the data is collated and used to inform future directions. Much of the intended developments are promissory in nature and the benefits are still to be seen. Aspiring Language Institute keeps its quality management system documentation up to date, reviews this document periodically, and bases its procedures on it. As a result of analysing the data from feedback, the organisation plans a number of changes for 2013. These prospective changes include improved moderation practice, the introduction of standardised 12-week courses and the engagement of a part-time principal

and/or a director of studies. Staff members are consulted in these academic decision-making processes, but there is currently a lack of professional educational supervision of staff, which is a concern.

Aspiring Language Institute is operating under new ownership and in a new location, so the management takes the view that it is starting as a new business and is facing the challenges inherent in such a situation. The first year has been one of learning from experience and management is looking forward to making further progress in 2013. The evaluators gained a sense of the direction Aspiring Language Institute wants to take from studying the business plan for 2013, which focuses on expanding the provider's profile in the Auckland area, but does not focus on educational improvement. Management has shown the foresight recently to commission a consultant to conduct a study and supply a report on the academic state of the business. The study highlighted a number of areas that can be improved, and Aspiring Language Institute is moving to make these improvements. One of the deficiencies identified in the study is the lack of a director of studies. To date, this deficiency has been adequately managed, but the need for overarching academic direction in the future is a priority, if an appropriate level of educational quality is to be achieved. This will be a positive move, and one that is being planned for by management. While the provider shows that it has a good system for the collection of data, as evident in the collection of student destination information, the evaluators note that much of the improvement that is indicated is yet to happen, so it is difficult at this point to gain assurance of long-term, sustainable 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 **Adequate**.

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

2.2 Focus area: International student support

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

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

2.3 Focus area: Intensive English

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

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

Recommendations

To assist this provider to add further value to its programmes, the evaluators recommend that Aspiring Language Institute:

- Address the gaps in academic management.
- Reconsider moderation processes, particularly pre-assessment moderation.
- Facilitate the development of a curriculum map or programme outline for the programme.
- Develop a systematic programme review system to update the programme and keep it current.
- Make a concerted effort to collect completion data and IELTS results to assist with understanding how well students are prepared, and the value of the learning.
- Ensure that on-campus internet access is appropriate and effective for student use.
- Implement a structured system of staff performance appraisal to gain assurance of ongoing quality teaching.

Appendix

Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

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

In addition, for registered private training establishments, the criteria and policies for their registration require self-assessment and external evaluation and review at an organisational level in addition to the individual programmes they own or provide. These criteria and policies are also deemed, by section 44 of the Education Amendment Act 2011, to be rules made under section 253. Section 233B(1) of the Act requires registered PTEs to comply with these rules.

NZQA is responsible for ensuring non-university TEOs continue to comply with the rules after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of programmes and/or registration. The New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) has statutory responsibility for compliance by universities.

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

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

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

External evaluation and review reports are public information and are available from the NZQA website (www.nzqa.govt.nz).

Information relevant to the external evaluation and review process, including the publication Policy and Guidelines for the Conduct of External Evaluation and Review, is available at: <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/registration-and-accreditation/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction/>

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