

# Report of External Evaluation and Review

Aspiring language Institute

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 18 September 2014

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*Final Report*

# 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 I, 87-89, Albert Street, Auckland CBD
Delivery sites:	As above
First registered:	1991
Courses currently delivered:	Intensive English – General English and preparation for International English Language Testing System (IELTS)
Code of Practice signatory:	Yes – 18 years and over
Number of students:	Domestic: NA International: 92
Number of staff:	Seven tutors and seven administration staff
Scope of active accreditation:	NZQA-approved course – Intensive English
Distinctive characteristics:	Aspiring Language Institute delivers English language courses in the Auckland CBD designed to meet individual students' needs. Typically, students enrol on Mondays for the number of weeks they require. Most students enrol for less than 12 weeks, but some enrol for longer periods.
Recent significant changes:	In the past 12 months, Aspiring Language Institute has introduced a new set of English language course texts, appointed a new director of studies,

and has recently applied to NZQA for approval to move to larger premises within the Auckland CBD.

Previous quality assurance history: Aspiring Language Institute was most recently evaluated by NZQA in December 2012, resulting in NZQA being:

- Not Yet Confident in educational performance
- Not Yet Confident in capability in self-assessment.

Aspiring Language Institute has no consent to assess for unit standards on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework, and is not required to engage in external moderation of its assessments by any standard-setting bodies.

## 2. Scope of external evaluation and review

This evaluation reviewed the only course currently offered at Aspiring Language Institute. The focus areas included General English (including IELTS preparation), and the mandatory focus areas of governance, management and strategy, and international student support.

## 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-eeer/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.*

A team of two evaluators visited the Albert Street site in Auckland for one and a half days. The evaluators interviewed the sole owner and director, the academic manager, head teacher, teaching staff, and administration staff involved in enrolment and pastoral care of international students. Three Auckland-based recruitment agents were also interviewed. A randomly selected group of students present on the day were interviewed, and two recent graduates were interviewed by phone. This evaluation included a review of a range of the organisation's documents and records.

# Summary of Results

## Statement of confidence on educational performance

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

- Students enrol for 11 weeks on average, with the goal to gain an improvement in their English language. All students achieve in line with international benchmarks such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, and in proportion to their varying lengths of enrolment.
- Some students enrol to improve their English in preparation to sit IELTS examinations, and while their results are slightly above internationally published average scores, the starting point is not known for all students. Ten, or approximately 32.5 per cent, of students have previously attempted IELTS examinations. On average, these students improve their IELTS scores between one-half and 1 point on the 9-point IELTS scale.<sup>1</sup>
- All but one teacher has appropriate qualifications and all have extensive experience in teaching English language.
- Assessment decisions are well moderated, ensuring their validity and consistency.
- Staff are well monitored through annual performance appraisals and are supported with ongoing in-house professional development.
- The school has up-to-date, internationally recognised teaching and learning resources, including Wi-Fi internet access for teachers and students.
- The organisation has well-planned and implemented processes that result in meeting both the intent and spirit of the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students (Code of Practice).
- The evaluators consider that evidence presented at this evaluation indicates that changes to self-assessment processes at Aspiring Language Institute since the 2012 evaluation have resulted in sustainable improvements to educational performance.
- Areas for further improvement in educational performance may include:
  - Continuing to collect and analyse data on recent improvement initiatives to more fully review their effectiveness over time
  - Considering external input to strengthen governance.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ielts.org/institutions/test\\_format\\_and\\_results/ielts\\_band\\_scores.aspx](http://www.ielts.org/institutions/test_format_and_results/ielts_band_scores.aspx)

## Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

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

- The organisation has effective processes which establish students' purposes for enrolment and achievement of their goals. The most common goal for students is to improve their confidence and ability in English for travel or holiday work matching their visa status, but some also wish to prepare for IELTS exams.
- Aspiring Language Institute closely monitors student achievements through weekly, six-weekly and 12-weekly tests. Students receive appropriate oral feedback soon after these tests, and the organisation has further developed its written feedback to strengthen this communication with students.
- Students' initial class placement is closely reviewed and monitored, and shows that very few students move to another class level in the initial few weeks, indicating that the placement test is effective.
- The organisation has surveyed 85 per cent of its 2013 graduates, finding 58 per cent of those achieved their goal of gaining employment, and those who sit IELTS exams are achieving good results, as already noted.
- Improvements have been made as a result of student surveys, for example to offer evening classes, one-to-one academic support, or workshops such as for developing CVs.
- Aspiring Language Institute has a well-structured and detailed process to review (and confirm) how well it is meeting the requirements and spirit of the Code of Practice.
- The evaluators consider that changes to self-assessment processes at Aspiring Language Institute since the 2012 evaluation have resulted in improvements to the organisation's understanding of students' learning and achievements.
- Areas for improvement in organisational self-assessment may include:
  - Continued monitoring of recent initiatives to determine their effectiveness over a longer time period.
  - Exploring wider self-assessment factors, for example to monitor students' increasing confidence with English.

# 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**.

General English students improve their English language capability in line with international benchmarks, such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Students are tested at enrolment to establish the appropriate class entry level. Very few students move from this placement, and student surveys show a high level of satisfaction, indicating this is an effective needs assessment process. Most students progress up class levels, at individual rates in proportion to their length of enrolment. Tests to determine students' readiness to progress are conducted at six and 12-weekly intervals. These tests have clear criteria and are benchmarked against the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, and provide a good level of credibility to students' progress.

IELTS students gain average examination scores, slightly higher than internationally published rates. This was evidenced at this evaluation through the organisation's research on published international IELTS examination centre results. This data shows international average scores for 2012 were 5.9, while Aspiring students' average scores were 6.2. Ten, or approximately 32.5 per cent, of IELTS students have taken an IELTS examination prior to enrolling, and on average these students improve their IELTS score between one-half and 1 point on the 9-point IELTS scale. While this shows improvement, the numbers are small and therefore insufficient to draw any overall or longer-term conclusions about achievement patterns.

Aspiring Language Institute's analysis of student surveys indicates that students are consistently very satisfied with their level of achievement. Strategies are being employed to 'capture' information on those students who report being less satisfied. An example of this is the weekly test and informal feedback recently introduced. These strategies appear to be effective, although they are recent innovations.

Most students are in New Zealand on short-term visas, and generally enrol for around 11 weeks to improve their English-language ability for travel and work in New Zealand. A small group of students with student visas come to Aspiring Language Institute specifically to study for a longer period, and often have goals of achieving specific IELTS scores to gain entry to higher-level study. The

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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.

organisation establishes the students' goals at enrolment and monitors their achievement, and the data shows that the majority of students achieve their goals.

Aspiring Language Institute has implemented a number of changes to its approach to self-assessment since the previous external evaluation and review, for example establishing students' goals more clearly, and tracking and recording students' progress more completely and accurately. The organisation tracks learner achievement closely through its six-weekly and 12-weekly tests, with test results shared with students through discussions, providing timely feedback which supports the students' learning. In recognition that a number of students are enrolling for less than six weeks, weekly tests have been introduced to provide an indicator to staff and students of their progress, including gains in confidence using English. This has been a worthwhile improvement for staff and students.

## 1.2 What is the value of 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**.

As noted, students are enrolling to gain some improvement in English to support their short stay while in New Zealand on a working holiday or in tourism activities. The organisation has surveyed approximately 85 per cent of 2013 graduates and established that 58 per cent are in employment, as was their goal, and some have moved on to other tertiary education providers, with some indication being gained of their success in this further study. While the ability of graduates to gain employment is not specifically linked to their short time of study at Aspiring Language Institute, there is some indication that improvements in confidence in using English have been a contributing factor. Student surveys do, however, clearly indicate that students are very satisfied, with 98 per cent stating that they would recommend Aspiring Language Institute to others.

The vast majority of students stay for the time they pay for, with attendance and retention rates sitting at around 90 per cent and above, indicating that students are satisfied and gain value from their study. Further support for the value added by the study is provided by a number of students returning to study at Aspiring Language Institute.

The collation and analysis of student surveys has significantly improved from the previous external evaluation and review, and Aspiring Language Institute has introduced new methods to collect feedback to determine the value added for students. An example of this is the Facebook page collecting unsolicited positive comments and 'likes'. Some further time is required to allow these processes to bed-in and show their full potential.



### 1.3 How well do the 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**.

Students' needs are established at enrolment through the English language placement test and the initial interview. Clear guidelines and marking grids are used effectively, ensuring consistency of the placement test. A range of questions are asked during the placement interview, and these collect useful information on students' needs. Information from these questions is used effectively to place students in their initial class level, from which very few students move in the first few weeks, indicating the accuracy of the placement.

Aspiring Language Institute has appropriate written agreements and contracts with, for example, a homestay company and student recruitment agents. These documents meet the requirements of the Code of Practice and provide a sound basis for both maintaining student safety and ensuring students have appropriate visas and study intentions. The organisation's agent surveys show a high level of satisfaction, with 93 per cent of agents being satisfied with their engagement with Aspiring Language Institute and with the progress of the students they refer. While very few students require the services of the homestay company, the few that are placed are happy with their placement and few request a shift or raise any concerns.

The organisation has a programme of visiting speakers who match student needs, for example speakers on water safety, representatives from other tertiary education organisations offering further study options, and the New Zealand Police running workshops for student 'ambassadors'. There are currently two student ambassadors at Aspiring Language Institute who have undertaken workshops with the New Zealand Police, supporting the sharing of safety information with other students.

The organisation has introduced a range of extra events or services that match identified student needs, for example Friday workshops on topics such as writing CVs, Tuesday and Thursday academic support classes where students are given one-to-one extra support, and some one-to-one private lessons for beginner or advanced students where there are insufficient numbers to run separate classes at these levels.

There are minor gaps in performance and self-assessment, primarily related to the fact that some of the changes are recent. While there is evidence of value gained, and analysis of this value, further data collection and analysis over time is required to determine the value of longer-term outcomes. The majority of students are studying for less than 12 weeks, so a more systematic investigation into gains in confidence might provide valuable evidence on value and assist with organisational

self-assessment. The evaluation team acknowledges that Aspiring Language Institute collects some testimonials from students, providing some anecdotes regarding gains in confidence.

#### 1.4 How effective is 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 **Good**.

Students are making good progress; they engage well with, and have high respect for their teachers. Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced in teaching English to speakers of other languages. Teaching staff have New Zealand and overseas teaching experience in a range of situations and all but one of the seven hold an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teaching qualification. There are plans in place for this person to complete the qualification. The academic manager has sound international leadership experience in English language teaching.

The organisation uses up-to-date, internationally recognised commercial English language texts and appropriate supplementary learning materials to maintain student interest and provide a New Zealand context to the learning environment. All supplementary material has appropriate checks for level and alignment with the curriculum.

Teachers undergo one or two performance appraisals per year, depending on their length of service. This includes teaching observations and subsequent discussions. The academic manager and staff said they felt this process was providing a good level of reflection, sharing of information, and opportunities for developing teaching strategies. Professional development is built into the weekly staff meetings and is perceived by staff as adding value through these professional conversations and presentations. The validity of the presentations is supported by the fact that they follow the teacher training programme developed by Languages International as commissioned by Ako Aotearoa.

Sound processes are in place to moderate assessment decisions. These are well documented and indicate that assessments are consistent and reliable. Assessment material is essentially taken from commercial texts, providing a good level of assurance of their validity and fitness for purpose. Clear rubrics and marking grids ensure consistency across the productive skills. Teachers and the academic manager undergo 'blind marking', which is used well to confirm that assessments are consistent. Gaps or differences are noted and discussed among the staff as a process of building staff skills.

These initiatives have been introduced by the new academic manager as part of an overall review of the organisation, resulting in several changes that have improved overall educational integrity. Improvements have included: a programme syllabus based on the commercial text, ensuring a range of supplementary resources are

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available, and, as noted, staff performance appraisal processes and professional development (for example, areas for improvement are noted in teacher observations, discussed openly in professional development sessions, and are linked to future sessions). While some of these improvements are relatively new, there are clear indications that they are adding value and providing quality assurance to the organisation. Programme outcomes for each class level are clear and consistent. The outcomes and the text used are cross-referenced to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, IELTS bands and to the proposed New Zealand Certificate in English Language.

The organisation's self-assessment practices include monitoring student achievement rates and conducting regular student surveys to determine their level of satisfaction. Results of surveys are fed back to the teachers in a timely manner. Performance appraisals also provide data for the academic manager to monitor teaching effectiveness. Evidence presented at this evaluation indicates that these processes are used consistently and there was clear evidence that while some are relatively new, they are already adding value.

## 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 **Good**.

Students are well guided through information provided prior to enrolment, at enrolment and during their time of study. The information is available via the organisation's website, recruitment agents, a student handbook, noticeboards, and through interviews at enrolment and ongoing discussions with staff. No significant gaps in information provided to students were identified at this evaluation, and students expressed satisfaction with how well they were informed, supported and guided.

As noted, Aspiring Language Institute has a range of speakers to provide information on living, studying and maintaining safety while in New Zealand. These processes are effective and no significant complaints have been received by the organisation or reported directly to NZQA.

The organisation has a detailed and well-structured process to monitor its compliance with the requirements and spirit of the Code of Practice. This was well evidenced at this evaluation, and indicated that the organisation was not only compliant, but also provides a caring and friendly place of study. Students interviewed at this evaluation said there was a family atmosphere and they felt well cared for, with some stating that they had studied at several language schools and, 'this was the best [they] had experienced'. While staff interviewed at this evaluation had a reasonable knowledge of the Code of Practice, the Guidelines to the Code of Practice were less well-known. While there is no apparent negative impact, an

improved knowledge and understanding of the Guidelines may support staff to build a fuller understanding of the subtleties within the Code of Practice.

Aspiring Language Institute provides first-language counsellors for all but one of the nationalities represented at the school, with a counsellor from the community being available if needed.

While international students are well supported and guided, the evaluators consider that staff knowledge of the Code of Practice could be stronger, and achieving this could provide additional assurance for both students and staff.

## 1.6 How well does governance and management support learner 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**.

Aspiring Language Institute has a clear focus on learner achievement, and staff interviewed during this evaluation showed a clear understanding of sound educational processes, and a good level of understanding of how well their students are achieving in the context of their relatively short enrolment periods.

This is a small organisation with a sole owner and director, who is supported by an office manager and an academic manager. These are in turn supported by administration and teaching staff. The organisation has appointed staff with appropriate skills, qualifications and experience for the roles they hold.

The owner has, with the help of her staff, made significant changes in response to the previous external evaluation and review, addressing each of the areas of concern in that report. Changes have included:

- The appointment last year of a director of studies, more recently replaced with an academic manager
- Improving entry and exit evaluations to assist with destination data
- Implementation of a structured and detailed moderation process which, as noted, is confirming the validity and consistency of assessment practice
- Purchasing an up-to-date set of English language course texts, developing a range of supplementary materials, and developing a programme outline and syllabus
- Collecting and analysing data regularly on student progress and achievements, and specifically analysing Aspiring Language Institute students' IELTS examination average scores against internationally published scores

- Establishing a reliable dual Wi-Fi system for staff and students, improving internet access
- Re-establishing staff performance appraisals and professional development.

Some of these changes were implemented prior to receiving the finalised evaluation report in 2013, and some changes, as noted, have been implemented more recently. However, data collected and analysed by the organisation to date provides reasonable assurance that these changes are resulting in real improvements to the learning environment and student achievement. The more recent changes, for example a recent programme review conducted in February 2014, are being monitored by the organisation to gather further data in order to track any emerging issues and monitor the effectiveness of the changes.

The evaluators consider the changes that have been made are genuine and permanent and are resulting in improvements to organisational effectiveness and to student learning. With further time and further data analysis, the organisation is likely to have stronger evidence to support ongoing improvements.

## 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 **Good**.

### 2.3 Focus area: General English including IELTS

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 Aspiring Language Institute:

- Continue to collect and analyse data on recent improvement initiatives to more fully review their effectiveness over time
- Consider gaining external input to strengthen governance for the sole owner and director
- Continue to monitor recent initiatives to determine their effectiveness over a longer time period
- Explore wider self-assessment factors, such as to monitor students' increasing confidence with English.

# 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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