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Report of External Evaluation and Review

Aspiring Language Institute

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 13 November 2017

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MoE Number: 8524
NZQA Reference: C24935
Date of EER visit: 22 and 23 August 2017

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 (Aspiring)
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
First registered:	1 May 1991
Location:	115 Queen St, Auckland
Delivery sites:	As above plus Level 1, Building D, Area 2, Botany Town Centre, East Auckland
Courses currently delivered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intensive English (Training Scheme)• New Zealand Certificate in English Language (Level 4)• New Zealand Diploma in Business (Level 5)
Code of Practice signatory:	Yes
Number of students:	Domestic: nil International: approximately 100 international students at any time
Number of staff:	13 full-time and three part-time
Scope of active accreditation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• General English (Levels 1-4)• IELTS¹ Preparation• New Zealand Certificate in English Language

¹ International English Language Testing System

(Level 4)

- New Zealand Diploma in Business (Level 5 and 6)

Recent significant changes: Aspiring changed its head office location to a new site at 115 Queen St, Auckland. The move from the previous site one block away was planned and was being approved by NZQA but was brought forward after the previous site was found to have an unacceptable earthquake risk rating.

Aspiring began delivering the New Zealand Diploma in Business from May 2017. At the time of the external evaluation and review (EER), the first cohort of four students had just completed their first term of study.

In 2016, 50 per cent of the shares of Aspiring were sold by Janet Wang to Chen Wang. The sale was approved by NZQA.

Previous quality assurance history:

This is Aspiring's third scheduled EER. The last EER was conducted in June 2014, at which time NZQA was Confident in Aspiring's educational performance and Confident in its capability in self-assessment. The 2014 EER report recommended that Aspiring:

- 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.

NZQA has not noted any risk issues since the last EER. Aspiring has met all NZQA moderation requirements.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

Focus areas and rationale for selection

Three focus areas were included in this evaluation. Together they cover the majority of current student enrolments and the mandatory focus area for international providers.

Focus Area 1. International students: support and wellbeing
NZQA is committed to the responsible development and delivery of education to international students. It is essential to New Zealand's 'brand' to ensure that all students are adequately supported in their programmes of study. To that end, from August 2016 NZQA introduced a standard focus area for all EERs of tertiary organisations that enrol international students. This focus area examines how effectively the organisation under review is discharging its pastoral care responsibilities towards its international students.
Focus Area 2. New Zealand Diploma in Business (Level 5)
Aspiring was approved by NZQA to deliver this programme in late 2016 and commenced delivery to the first cohort of four students in May 2017. Bearing in mind that there are small numbers of students at this stage – and at the time of the EER the first cohort had only recently completed the first two courses – it was nevertheless an ideal opportunity for Aspiring to demonstrate its processes around stakeholder engagement, programme development and recruitment/entry.
Focus Area 3. Intensive English (IELTS preparation) and New Zealand Certificate in English Language (Level 4)
This is Aspiring's largest programme area and the core of its business.

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.

Prior to the EER, the lead evaluator visited Aspiring and met with the owner/director and leadership team to agree the scope and process for the EER. The evaluation team of two evaluators then spent one and half days at the Aspiring headquarters in Auckland, where they reviewed an extensive range of documentation and met

with the owners, management team, administration staff and seven tutors. The evaluators also spoke to representatives of client and stakeholder organisations. A sample of students were randomly selected by the lead evaluator from class lists. The evaluation team met with these students and viewed their student files.

During the site visit, Aspiring provided the evaluation team with a range of operational documentation, including training and planning materials, quality management policies, enrolment information and policies, agent agreements, student achievement records, student evaluations, collated analysis of student satisfaction levels, and course delivery and assessment materials including student transcripts. This documentation complemented the self-assessment information that had been pre-submitted by the organisation. The evaluators reviewed all materials tabled and were able to review a sufficient range of evidence to reach evaluative judgements.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance and capability in self-assessment

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

The EER team's interviews with students, governance, management and staff, and a selection of key stakeholders helped confirm the success, extent and benefits of the educational performance of Aspiring. The reasons for NZQA's confidence can be summarised as follows:

- The students are achieving excellent results and acquiring useful and meaningful skills and knowledge, evidenced by feedback from students, graduates and education agents.
- The organisation has a clear philosophy and purpose that is well operationalised. The teaching is adequately resourced and Aspiring uses its resources effectively.
- The organisation is soundly and sustainably managed. It has systems for monitoring its obligations to ensure that important compliance accountabilities are understood and well managed.
- Aspiring has student support structures that are appropriate to the needs of its students, and these lower barriers to achieving their goals successfully.
- Staff at Aspiring demonstrate a good understanding of the factors that lead to student achievement and analyse and discuss ideas for maintaining achievement and making the courses more useful and enjoyable for the students. Processes for the continuous and ongoing review of student achievement are systematic and are expected to continue to produce good outcomes.
- Aspiring's processes are generally effective in ensuring that student and stakeholder needs are understood and met, and appropriate standards are maintained. However, many self-assessment processes are recent and need to be embedded into a planned, sustained and co-ordinated approach across the organisation to demonstrate excellence in self-assessment capability.

Findings²

1.1 How well do students 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**.

Students at Aspiring are achieving excellent results as a consequence of good teaching and high-quality student support. All English language students are tested on entry and their progress is measured regularly by way of formative testing at six and 12 weeks. These weekly progress and achievement tests are aligned with the course books and levels, which in turn are modelled on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Aspiring introduced a new textbook in July 2013. Since then the average results for the achievement tests have continued to improve, and even more so since a programme review in February-March 2017. In 2016, 93 per cent of students completed their course compared with 87 per cent in 2015. Testing is coherent, with clear marking guidelines, improved rubrics and learner engagement with what constitutes a strong performance. Entry criteria to higher-level courses, i.e. IELTS and NZCEL³, have been tightened and this has improved results further. Model answers help inform teachers to self-moderate, and external moderation has just started with another provider.

Aspiring has good student performance data which is readily accessible and regularly analysed. However, the organisation is not yet using this information continuously and systematically to inform improvements to teaching practice and course delivery. The PTE's analysis so far has identified correlations between achievement and factors such as age, gender, nationality, attendance, etc. Although this work is not systematic, it is informing some useful improvements. For instance, Aspiring identified that there is a significant correlation between achievement and the living circumstances of students. Students who live in an English-only environment (i.e. homestay where they are the only student) learn English more quickly. This finding is brought to the notice of agents and new students when making their accommodation choices.

The new cohort at Botany will potentially alter Aspiring's achievement statistics. For example, the city campus students generally move up a level after they have attended for 11-plus weeks and each term thereafter. Given the demographic of

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

³ New Zealand Certificate in English Language

the Botany cohort, despite the best efforts and good teaching, it is unlikely they will match this level of performance. Aspiring will need to develop an added measure of performance to capture and reflect the valuable service offered at Botany (see Findings 1.2).

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

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' goals and motivation are identified at the commencement of their course and regularly assessed by staff to see if those goals are being met. For instance, most students enrol to improve their speaking and listening skills. At six-weekly performance meetings, students are encouraged to reflect on their goals and staff help them to identify any barriers to achieving them.

Although Aspiring could not formally demonstrate the long-term benefits its courses provide to all of its graduates, the organisation has anecdotal information about some of the graduates and the positive way in which the programmes have contributed to their lives. Through exit interviews, staff know the immediate destination of every graduate and graduates are encouraged to keep in touch with the organisation via email and Facebook. Given that 85 per cent of Aspiring's students come through agent referrals, it would be useful to get more regular and comprehensive feedback from agents about how the students perceive the value of the courses.

Approximately 30 per cent of Aspiring's English language graduates move into further higher-level study with other PTEs, polytechnics or universities. Aspiring has formal pathway agreements with one polytechnic and one university. Although staff know that graduates move into higher-level study through the exit interview process, they have only anecdotal information about how well these students achieve at higher levels as a result of the preparation at Aspiring. A greater effort to collect and analyse achievement information would provide useful intelligence to inform improvements in teaching and course design at Aspiring.

The recent initiative to deliver level 2 General English at Botany is a commendable response to community need. The typical student at this Botany course is an older, non-English speaking parent or grandparent of new migrants. Although it is too early to judge the formal achievement rates in these courses, early indications are that students are gaining confidence and enhancing their ability to function independently in New Zealand society.

1.3 How well do programme design and delivery, including learning and assessment activities, match the needs of students and other relevant 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's efforts to meet the individual, personal and academic goals of every student is a strong feature of the organisation. Students are asked what they want at the beginning of the course and this information is made available to teachers who use it in their planning to ensure that course content is matched to the needs of students.

Aspiring aims for a diversity of nationalities on campus with a policy that ensures that no one group significantly outnumbers any other. This mix not only exposes the learners to other nationalities and cultures, but encourages them to speak English on campus, thereby complying with the Aspiring English-only rule.

Aspiring uses a variety of mechanisms to understand what students want. Teachers meet with individual students six-weekly to review their progress and provide them with a written progress report. Staff and students interviewed at this evaluation confirmed that this was valued and contributed well to their overall progress.

Aspiring seeks feedback from learners through a variety of mechanisms. As well as the formal student feedback process, staff have an open-door policy and it is clear that students approach them with problems and issues.

There was evidence of good teaching practice at Aspiring. For example, there are six-weekly self-reflections on the classes which are then attached to the progress tests. There is an opportunity for further development of this with more active mentoring to upskill and improve teacher performance. Staff are enthusiastic and passionate about their curriculum and teaching and they are well supported by management. Every staff member at Aspiring has a role in student learning and they take a collegial, whole-of-organisation approach to ensuring that all students achieve. Teachers and students relate well to each other and students spoke highly of Aspiring's teaching staff. The strong rapport between students and staff was evident from discussions and evaluation survey outcomes. The low staff-to-student ratio allows for personal attention when appropriate.

The organisation has six-weekly teacher development sessions which staff are paid to attend. These sessions are topical and are occasionally facilitated by an external expert. A few staff are also engaged in ongoing external professional development.

There was evidence of Aspiring purposely providing opportunities for staff to participate in meaningful discussion about teaching practice and student progress.

Teaching staff spoke about how they share ideas, experiences and knowledge through their daily interactions, staff meetings, peer observations and professional development activities.

Aspiring has a very thorough system for students to evaluate and provide feedback on teaching and other aspects of their programme. This feedback is then analysed and discussed (although not necessarily systematically acted on), and reported back to students in a timely manner. The formal feedback from students, as well as the wealth of informal comments, provides teaching and management staff with valuable information. This could be used more effectively to identify new and improved teaching and learning strategies.

1.4 How effectively are students supported and involved in their learning?

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**.

Aspiring has robust and client-friendly systems for the pastoral care of its students. The organisation is providing a safe and supportive learning environment for its students and is in close contact outside of the normal hours of tuition. The results and conclusions drawn from the regular student questionnaires provide information for Aspiring to use in its assessment and continuous improvement of support structures.

Staff with different languages and nationalities are available to support students. The religious needs of students are appropriately catered for.

The administration manager has overall responsibility for ensuring that the requirements of the Education (Pastoral Care of International Students) Code of Practice are met, and she and other staff regularly attend professional development offered by NZQA's Code Administrator. The organisation periodically (at least once per year) has thoroughly self-reviewed its compliance with the code. Aspiring has provided the required attestation to NZQA that it continues to meet these requirements.

There is a designated support staff member with 24-hour phone contact should the students require assistance when away from the site. Homestay accommodation for international students is managed by a contract homestay co-ordinator who is also a signatory to the code. The co-ordinator visits all homestay providers on a regular cycle to inspect and evaluate their suitability, including a visit in the week prior to any new student placements. Those providing accommodation for under 18-year-old students are visited every three months.

Aspiring occasionally accepts international students under the age of 18 years. Staff are fully aware of their Code of Practice obligations for these students and ensure that they are meeting them.

Aspiring has introduced a process for monitoring punctuality and attendance in the belief that students who attend classes have a greater chance of success. For several years the organisation has monitored the positive correlation between attendance and achievement. While the system is strictly enforced, it is supportive and seeks to identify and address the reasons why students may not be attending classes. As a consequence, attendance has steadily improved as has educational achievement.

Students receive sound pre-enrolment guidance, and a comprehensive orientation programme was available to them in their first week of study.

1.5 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**.

Aspiring has developed and embedded effective systems for monitoring student achievement and actively supporting staff to improve educational outcomes. Monitoring of performance at all levels of the organisation is regular, authentic, transparent and open. While often challenging, the monitoring of performance is always supportive, student-centric and focused on improvement.

Governance and management have created an organisation that enthusiastically encourages opportunities for reflection on its role and how to better meet student and other stakeholder needs. This has led to a reflective environment and culture throughout. Evidence indicates that management and staff actively seek feedback from many sources to use as a learning and improvement tool. As previously discussed, there were several incidents noted where feedback and improvement loops were not quite being completed. The organisation is collecting feedback and data and analysing it, but not using it systematically to make improvements.

The organisation has, over time, employed, developed and retained a very competent, well-qualified and dedicated group of staff. Staff clearly enjoy the environment and said they worked hard but were rewarded well and felt valued. The evaluation team observed coherence across all staff in their focus on giving students the best experience possible, to equip them to perform and achieve. Staff are supported by the organisation in their professional development. A greater level of external engagement in their professional development would be beneficial.

The campus is adequately supplied with physical and learning resources for the number of students that it currently has. Resourcing, in particular learning

resources, although effective and fit for purpose, could not be described as 'leading edge'. Many texts and resources are becoming dated, and there was little evidence of new technologies being used in educational delivery.

1.6 How effectively are important compliance accountabilities managed?

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**.

As a small business in New Zealand, Aspiring has compliance accountabilities to several agencies and regulatory bodies. The organisation has a bring-up system to identify compliance requirements and an organisational culture with a strong emphasis on compliance. Consequently, there was no indication that accountabilities are not being met. As previously discussed, moderation is up to date and meets required standards.

NZQA attestations and returns have been met within required timeframes. The courses are being delivered consistent with NZQA approvals.

The organisation has detailed risk management plans for all key operations. All staff are either employed or contracted and said they had current contracts or agreements. There is systematic and robust appraisal of individual staff performance.

The intended outcomes from the Code of Practice are being met. Retention on programmes is high. Student surveys are conducted early on, during study and at exit, and show a high level of satisfaction with the support provided and the students' overall experience. Most of the student support staff have been with Aspiring for some years and are familiar with the Code of Practice and their responsibilities – information sessions on the code are regularly delivered at staff meetings. The administration of entry and enrolment and the scrutiny of agents is sound, as required by Immigration New Zealand and NZQA. Attendance expectations as they pertain to programme success and visa rules are very actively managed. Warnings and sanctions are fairly applied when student attendance falters. Data from daily attendance registers is collected and monitored closely by relevant staff, with summaries provided to the director and leadership team.

Random samples of the eight student files selected and checked during this EER revealed that all necessary information on each student was accurate and readily accessible. This included pre-entry guidance and verification of entry criteria, including English test scores, formative assessments at enrolment, insurance and visas.

In essence, Aspiring has a clear understanding of its compliance accountabilities and manages effectively and proactively to ensure obligations are met.

Focus Areas

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

2.1 Focus area: Intensive English and New Zealand Certificate in English Language (Level 4)

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

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

2.2 Focus area: New Zealand Diploma in Business (Level 5 and 6)

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: International students: support and wellbeing

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

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

Recommendations

NZQA recommends that Aspiring Language Institute:

- Consider ways to more systematically use student performance data to inform improvements to teaching practice and course delivery.
- Consider how to collect and analyse the achievement information of students who go on to further study to inform improvements in teaching and course design.
- Consider how to use the considerable formal and informal feedback from students to identify new and improved teaching and learning strategies.
- Consider whether a staff member having a greater level of external engagement in their professional development, including greater affiliation with relevant professional bodies, would be beneficial to teaching and learning.
- Consider updating resources and delivery methods to better engage learners.

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).

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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