



Report of External Evaluation and Review

Laidlaw College Incorporated

Date of report: 1 June 2010

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MoE Number: 8563
NZQA Reference: C01224
Date of EER visit: 15 March 2010

Purpose of this Report

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

Brief description of TEO

Location: Auckland

Type: Private training establishment

Size: 500 equivalent full-time students. Over 1,000 students enrolled at the time of the visit

Sites: Auckland and Christchurch

Laidlaw College Incorporated (Laidlaw College), first established in 1922, began as the New Zealand Biblical Training Institute before becoming the Bible College of New Zealand and, since 2009, Laidlaw College.

Laidlaw College's vision is "a world shaped by love compelled and informed by the gospel". The mission is "to renew our communities with a faith as intelligent as it is courageous" and the commitment is "to ground the imagination of their students in the gospel and to graduate men and women of character, wisdom, grace, and love".

Laidlaw College currently offers NZQA-accredited diploma and degree qualifications in:

- Primary Teaching and Worldview Studies
- Mission and Ministry
- Counselling
- Theology
- Biblical Studies
- Internship, including a Tongan Language Stream.

These qualifications are delivered at the Auckland and Christchurch campuses. Most students attend face to face but around 20 per cent of the students enrolled at Laidlaw College choose to access their training through distance learning.

Laidlaw College is a signatory to the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students and currently has 16 international students enrolled.

Executive Summary

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Confident** in the educational performance of **Laidlaw College Incorporated**.

There was an abundance of informal evidence to show success in the students being shaped and positively transformed in their thinking by the college's approach to developing the "whole person". This came through strongly from all parties spoken to at the external evaluation and review on behalf of the associated departments and schools.

The completion rates for courses across the college have increased from 79 per cent in 2007 to 82 per cent in 2008, and this compares favourably with the national average course completion rate of all courses delivered in the private provider sector of 75 per cent. This good achievement rate reflects the effective interactive and relational teaching style adopted by the highly qualified faculty staff. All staff bring passion and energy to their role within the college and offer a range of valuable and relevant support to assist the students in their learning.

Historically, qualification completion has not been a primary focus for Laidlaw College, as demonstrated by a low 55 per cent qualification achievement rate for one popular programme of study started by students in 2004. In addition, only 22 per cent of the distance learners taking the same qualification starting in the same year achieved it successfully.

However, there was an overriding perception from management, faculty, and the Centre for Distance Learning (CDL) that qualification completion rates were on the rise due to several recent changes to the qualification structure. These changes have streamlined the delivery of courses at Laidlaw College and focused on the quality and value of qualifications and improved achievement. They include the closing of all but two of the campuses of Laidlaw College over the past two to three years, a rationalisation of many qualifications to a core nine, increasing the credit value of each course, and aligning the starting date of courses to the beginning of each semester. The effects of these changes are not yet fully known.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Not Yet Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Laidlaw College Incorporated**.

Effective self-assessment is not yet the primary means of improving educational performance at Laidlaw College.

The college has been through stringent rationalisation over the past three years and is now entering a period of consolidation. Management recognises that a more comprehensive and systematic self-assessment process is required to know how well the organisation is performing as a result of the rationalisation and to identify the actions and purposeful changes needed to ensure continuous improvement.

Laidlaw College relies heavily on the close relationships built and maintained with key stakeholders which informally assure them of the quality and relevance of the qualifications. While this is a useful self-assessment model, it is inconsistently implemented across the college. Also, due to the size and nature of delivery at Laidlaw College, used in isolation this informal assessment is not able to effectively gather accurate data for analysis to identify strengths, weaknesses, and trends over time.

Whilst the evaluation team acknowledged there were more formal processes in place to capture student feedback, Laidlaw College would benefit strongly from using a whole-of-organisation approach to self-assessment underpinned by a robust, structured process which gathers valuable data from all stakeholders and students that can be utilised to inform changes for improvement.

There are areas within the college that have robust self-assessment processes to capture valuable information which has informed purposeful changes leading to improvements. However, this is not a model that is reflected throughout the college. Other areas of the college's self-assessment processes need further development to ensure that valuable and useful information is gathered and is a reliable systematic representation of feedback.

TEO response

Laidlaw College confirms the factual accuracy of this report.

Basis for External Evaluation and Review

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

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

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

Outline of scope

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

1. First-year core courses (level 5) including distance learners

These courses are a good cross-section and representation of training at Laidlaw College as they incorporate learners enrolled on:

- Diploma of Biblical Studies (Level 5)
- Bachelor of Theology (Level 7)
- Bachelor of Ministries (Level 7)
- Graduate Diploma in Theology (Level 7)
- Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) and Worldview Studies (Level 7).
- Bachelor of Counselling (Level 7)

These courses are delivered both on campus and by distance learning.

2. Third-year shared courses (levels 6 and 7) including distance learners

These courses are a good cross-section and representation of training at Laidlaw College as they incorporate learners enrolled on:

- Bachelor of Theology (Level 7)
- Bachelor of Ministries (Level 7)
- Graduate Diploma in Theology (Level 7).

These courses are delivered both on campus and by distance learning.

3. The mandatory focus areas are:

- Governance, management, and strategy.
- Support of Students (including international students).

Part 1: Answers to Key Evaluation Questions across the organisation

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

1.1 How well do learners achieve?

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

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

Context

Laidlaw College records all students' course and qualification completion results through the Single Data Return which is completed and submitted to the Ministry of Education (MoE) three times a year. Each qualification is made up of a number of courses. One of the significant changes over the past three years to improve qualification completion was to increase the content and number of credits in each course and therefore reducing the number of courses in a qualification. This increase in credits would see students completing larger sections of the qualification each semester and therefore making the goal of qualification completion more achievable.

Explanation

It was clear from discussions with a number of students, faculty, and support staff that Laidlaw College is successful in its primary focus of shaping individuals. It was evident that at both the Auckland and Christchurch campuses there was positive personal development of the "whole person" while studying to complete qualifications. The CDL academic support staff said they also see evidence of this personal "shaping" with the distance learners through their interaction with them and their input into online discussions.

The 2009 course completion rate of 82 per cent across all courses compares favourably with the sector average of 75 per cent. This rate has also increased from the 2008 course completion rate of 79 per cent. The current self-assessment process collates data at the level of course completion across the college so does not inform the college of how well each qualification or school is achieving. The college sees this as an area of weakness and recognises that knowledge of achievement is not yet comprehensive and thorough enough to inform purposeful actions for continuous improvement. Markers for gauging achievement in both qualifications and personal development are yet to be determined.

The preparatory programme at level 4, designed for students who need extra support, has been successful in easing students into higher levels of study and helping them achieve qualifications at level 6 and 7. The college's comprehensive review of a group of 2007 preparatory programme students in one course found that 100 per cent of them achieved compared with 90 per cent of the direct-entry students. A consistent and systematic

approach using this effective self-assessment process across all areas of the college would provide valuable data to inform actions for continuous improvement in achievements.

There was an overriding sense of positive graduate outcomes for students reported to be moving into employment both in ministry and other careers for which the learning at Laidlaw College had prepared them. All students and staff offered informal and anecdotal evidence supporting these impressions. The value of the tools used in the formal self-assessment of graduate outcomes is still to be determined, and the information gathered has not yet been collated or analysed. There was, however, an analysis of graduate outcomes in 2006 which showed that 50 per cent of graduates went into a ministry-related role.

The self-assessment of graduates completing the Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) and Worldview Studies shows that positive destinations have historically been very high, with around 70 per cent of graduates gaining jobs as primary school teachers and a number of the remaining students moving into further education.

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

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

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

Context

Laidlaw College identifies the value of the outcome to learners as completing the course or qualification to secure sustainable employment, and more importantly, the shaping of the individual to reflect the college's vision, mission statement, and commitment.

It is recognised that, increasingly, graduates will work in the secular world and not solely gain roles in the church or mission field.

Explanation

Regardless of the desired employment outcome goal, the experience of arriving at Laidlaw College with set beliefs and going through the process of "deconstructing and reconstructing" is high on the list of valuable outcomes for the students.

The students said the appeal of a Laidlaw College qualification was based on the sound reputation the college has in the sector, the respect and admiration for the highly qualified and knowledgeable academic staff, and the interdenominational Christian philosophy that underpins the whole organisation.

Alongside the personal development experienced and valued by the students, successful completion of the Bachelor of Teaching and Worldview Studies and the Bachelor of Counselling enables the students to be registered in their chosen field and embark on a recognised and sustainable career.

There was evidence of effective engagement with primary school stakeholders which showed positive feedback on the value of the Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) and

Worldview Studies graduates' performance and knowledge during the practicum placements.

Each school is regularly and closely engaged with many groups, ministries, employers, and alumni that anecdotally inform the college of the value of its graduates, particularly in their positive contribution to local communities. This information is then shared and discussed at the many structured weekly and fortnightly meetings throughout the college. Although this process is a clear strength for the college, due to the complexity in number and variety of stakeholders, the information gathered would have more utility with a more formal and systematic approach to self-assessment.

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 **Adequate**.

Context

Laidlaw College's Academic Advisory Board is an external body with representatives from tertiary institutions, churches, and Christian organisations who advise on academic programmes and outcomes. This board meets twice a year, one week after the National Academic Committee, which is the internal academic board that feeds into the Academic Advisory Board.

Explanation

All faculty at Laidlaw College are actively engaged in church ministry, with around 50 per cent holding positions within the church as pastors, preachers, and youth leaders. This close relationship that all faculty and staff have with their church communities and stakeholders is effective in ensuring that the content and delivery of the qualifications is meeting the needs of these stakeholders.

Paramount to the experience of studying at Laidlaw College are the ministry activities that support the students' spiritual growth. These activities include community life, worship, cell groups, and pastoral care. The students and staff spoke of the value of the cell groups which are integral to supporting the students in their spiritual growth outside of their academic study. Cell groups have changed over the years in response to self-assessment and are now not compulsory, and have developed to match a greater variety of needs by having two focuses: one of "intentional groups" for specific study, and the other for general support. These cell groups are still attended by around 50 per cent of students.

The modes of delivery at Laidlaw College are well designed to attract and match the needs of a diverse group of learners. Students spoken to said the option of full or part-time study, and whether it is in the classroom or by distance learning, enabled them to access the training and complete qualifications to suit their situation.

The quality of information technology used by Laidlaw College is a great advantage to the students as it is highly advanced but is still compatible with most home computer packages.

All staff and students regarded the Moodle IT system as efficient and it is used consistently by all distance learning and classroom-based students. The system facilitates many functions such as academic support, resources, and online discussions.

Although Laidlaw College maintain close relationships with a number of key stakeholders the self-assessment of needs analysis is sporadic overall. The evaluation team recognised and acknowledged there were more formal processes in place to capture student feedback, however the validity of data from students through an end of each course evaluation form was diluted due to the low student response rate. Laidlaw College is currently reviewing this student evaluation process to ensure the data gathered is strengthened by a greater response rate of the evaluation forms that have been newly implemented through their electronic system. The information gathered and collated from the evaluations has in itself been valuable and there was evidence that it has informed purposeful changes for improvement. The college is also currently reviewing new and previous successful initiatives to gather valuable information from the alumni.

Effective self-evaluation of the programme within the Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) and Worldview Studies practicum has led to a change in student practice. Where previously the first practicum involved only observation, students now teach school pupils starting from the first practicum.

1.4 How effective is the teaching?

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

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

Context

The Laidlaw College faculty at the Auckland and Christchurch campuses are made up of highly qualified academics who have expertise in their field across theology, ministry and mission, counselling, and primary school education.

Each faculty member allocates 20 per cent of their time to research and after every seven semesters they are able to take one semester study leave. The staff turnover at Laidlaw College is very low, with many long-serving faculty staff who have remained in their roles through the major changes that have taken place over the past three years.

Explanation

There was strong confirmation from all staff and students that the college provides a safe and inclusive learning environment which engages all learners through an effective interactive and relational teaching style.

The faculty and students relate well to one another as the individual lecturers make themselves available to students at all times to offer academic and spiritual support.

The recent initiative of developing hybrid courses has had a positive response across the college from both faculty and students as the students are able to spend time with students from other schools and with different levels of qualification. However, the effects of this recent change have not yet been measured or fully realised.

There was evidence of a robust internal moderation process across all schools which enables consistency of assessment that supports learning. Self-assessment of the assessment and moderation process is discussed at various appropriate levels throughout the college. Examples of changes being made in response to this feedback are the extended assessment time, stronger identification between level 6 and 7 qualifications, and ensuring the turnaround time of assessments is consistent.

Self-assessment of teaching effectiveness is measured through many avenues at the college. The means of capturing feedback include the student evaluation reports, destination surveys, and minuted discussions at the many college forums and, continual informal feedback through the support staff, student leaders, and student representatives. However, the college recognises that the valuable process of peer observation, where a member of the faculty observes and assesses another while they deliver a lecture, is not currently implemented consistently and regularly across the college. Laidlaw College is in the process of reviving the previous peer observation model of self-reviewing for the consistency, quality, relevance, and currency of the content and delivery of each course.

Although completed student evaluation forms do not represent a significant proportion of the student body, the collated information is received by the faculty, and there was some evidence of where the process of identifying opportunities for change has been effective. An example of this is the feedback from students requesting more visual resources in their learning which has resulted in the inclusion of relevant clips from YouTube.

The faculty staff are appraised annually. An example of change resulting from the appraisal process is the redirected teaching hours of a staff member to enable that person to concentrate on research, which is where their expertise lies and would be of greater benefit to the college.

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

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

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

Context

All potential students are interviewed by dedicated staff at Laidlaw College prior to enrolment and matched to qualifications and programmes of study that meet their identified needs and aspirations.

There are many levels of support available for Laidlaw College students including the Student Services Centre, the Centre for Academic Preparation and Support, CDL academic support staff, Community Life worship, cell groups, student leaders (Auckland campus), student representatives (Christchurch campus), and faculty and general staff. Both campuses have connections in the community to provide professional counselling to students at no cost and prayer support to students who wish it.

Laidlaw College is a signatory to the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students. There are currently 16 international students enrolled and one main contact person dedicated to the role of international student support within the college.

Explanation

The support of all students in both their academic studies and their general well-being is clearly a high priority for Laidlaw College as demonstrated by the variety of opportunities available and the number of support staff. The college demonstrates the same high level of commitment and focus to supporting international students. The students are closely monitored throughout their qualification by a dedicated staff member who informally reports that the course completion rate for international students is comparable to all other students, although they have a lower score average. However, there was no formal evidence of self-assessment to support this claim.

Both campus-based and distance-learning students spoken to at the external evaluation and review were unanimous in their positive feedback about the guidance they received. Students said the courses met their levels of expectations.

Laidlaw College has been proactive in introducing initiatives to remove barriers to learning for the students prior to, and during, the first week of the course. These services designed specifically for the new student were identified through informal self-assessment which showed that some students felt overwhelmed in their first semester. All students enrolled at the Auckland campus are invited to attend a summer school which runs the week before the commencement of courses. This is currently a free and optional service for the students and had an uptake of around 50 students for the 2010 cohort.

The equivalent support for Christchurch students is an intensive orientation week the first week of the semester while the Centre for Distance Learning students also take part in a compulsory orientation week. These sessions give the students an insight into learning at Laidlaw, the college's expectations, and the study skills needed to be successful in achievement. The staff delivering this support are experienced in facilitating community relational exercises and working with the deconstructing and constructing paradigm, and are well-versed in the nature of academic work and study.

Due to the timing of the summer school, the Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) and Worldview Studies students are unable to attend but are exposed to equivalent support at the beginning of their first year at a camp induction week.

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

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

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

Context

The National Governing Council (NGC) is the governing body of Laidlaw College and meets at least four times a year. Its members are appointed for their stature as professionals

and leading persons in the fields for which Laidlaw College is equipping its students. In light of the recent resignation of the chief executive and national principal, the interim period sees the senior management taking over these responsibilities. The executive team is made up of senior management and heads of school who report directly to the board.

Explanation

It is clear that the changes Laidlaw College has been through over the past three years have been the initiative of the principal with a mandate from the NGC. There was an obvious consensus from all staff that these changes were necessary and have given Laidlaw College students a clearer route to higher level qualifications achievement. Such changes include the closing of campuses, rationalisation of a multitude of qualifications to a core nine, increased credit numbers to courses, delivery of common courses in each qualification to students across the schools, and enrolments only at the beginning of each semester.

Faculty staff expressed a positive attitude towards having the heads of school in the executive team, which has created clearer channels for decision-making, communication, and feedback.

The governance focus has changed for the Christchurch campus as the recent changes have developed a more inclusive and whole-business approach under the NGC and executive team.

The college is now entering a period of consolidation, and its multifaceted policies and practices form a solid structure for the college in the future. However, in order to reap the benefit of the changes in measuring the improvements, a structured, comprehensive, and systematic self-assessment process will need to be embedded across the organisation at all levels.

Laidlaw College has adopted a generous professional development package for its faculty which commits 20 per cent of work time to research and also after every seventh semester academic staff are able to take a semester for study leave. Academic staff are also recipients of a grant dedicated to professional development of their choice.

Although there have been many changes in the school over the past few years, governance and management have been successful in reducing the negative impact on the quality of delivery by managing the staff well and mitigating the effects of management and staff turnover.

Part 2: Performance in focus areas

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 **Adequate**.

2.2 Focus area: International students

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

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

2.3 Focus area: First-year core courses (level 5) including distance learners

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

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

2.4 Focus area: Third-year shared courses (levels 6 and 7) including distance learners

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

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

Statements of Confidence

The statements of confidence are derived from the findings within and across the focus areas. A four-step scale is used: highly confident, confident, not yet confident, not confident.

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Confident** in the educational performance of **Laidlaw College Incorporated**.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Not Yet Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Laidlaw College Incorporated**.

Actions Required and Recommendations

Further actions

Because NZQA is Not Yet Confident in Laidlaw College's capability in self-assessment, NZQA will contact the organisation within 20 working days of this report to agree upon an appropriate quality improvement plan.

The plan is intended to enable Laidlaw College to work towards achieving a judgement of at least Confident in relation to capability in self-assessment. Implementation of this plan will be monitored by NZQA. When the plan has been completed, or at any time deemed necessary by NZQA, another external evaluation and review will be scheduled.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Laidlaw College:

- Develop formal self-assessment into a systematic and comprehensive process, so that all significant aspects of the college's operation are prioritised for consideration over a manageable time frame.
- Integrate valuable data collection, its analysis and interpretation, and the intended use of self-assessment results as a means of identifying the college's strengths and acting on significant areas for improvement.

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