

Report of External Evaluation and Review

Laidlaw College Incorporated

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 23 May 2012

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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:	Laidlaw College Incorporated (Laidlaw)
Location:	80 Central Park Road, Henderson, Auckland
Type:	Private training organisation
First registered:	1990
Number of students:	Domestic: 807 equivalent full-time students International: seven equivalent full-time students
Number of staff:	90 full-time equivalents (including 60 administration staff)
Scope of active accreditation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Master of Theology (Level 9)• Bachelor of Counselling (Level 7)• Bachelor of Ministries (Level 7)• Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) and Worldview Studies (Level 7)• Bachelor of Theology (Level 7)• Graduate Diploma in Theology (Level 7)• Diploma of Biblical Studies (Level 5)• Diploma of Ministry Internship (Level 6)• Certificate of Preparatory Studies (Level 4)
Sites:	Head office in Auckland as above, and one other site at 70 Condell Avenue, Papanui, Christchurch. Laidlaw also delivers distance learning

programmes.

Booth Mission College, 20 William Booth Grove ,
Upper Hutt (approved as a site for the Diploma in
Biblical Studies)

Distinctive characteristics: Laidlaw is a Christian theology-based tertiary education provider, originally known as the Bible Training Institute and previously as the Bible College of New Zealand. Programmes are offered in two locations, Auckland and Christchurch, through face-to-face classrooms as well as via distance learning.

Laidlaw's graduate profile states:

'Laidlaw's mission is to equip students and scholars to renew their communities with a faith as intelligent as it is courageous, in service to our vision of a world shaped by love compelled and informed by the gospel. We strive towards this as imperfect people in need of grace, but convinced that through faith and hope our graduates can influence the church and world through love. The graduate profile comprises the distinctive characteristics by which we intend our graduates to become known, in the context of their churches, communities, workplaces and relationships.'

Recent significant changes: The organisation has recently reviewed and re-documented its approach to quality management.

Previous quality assurance history: Laidlaw was previously evaluated in June 2010. At that time, NZQA was Confident in Laidlaw's educational performance and Not Yet Confident in Laidlaw's capability in self-assessment.

Laidlaw's degree programmes are reviewed periodically by NZQA-appointed monitors. NZQA notes the positive tone of the reports and that the monitor has made a number of recommendations in each report.

Laidlaw is not required to engage with any standard-setting bodies (industry training organisations or NZQA's Tertiary Assessment and Moderation unit) for the moderation of New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) unit standard assessment practice or materials. Laidlaw has not reported any results of

assessments against NZQF unit standards for 2010 and 2011. The most recent NZQA moderation of assessments was in 2007.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

This evaluation included two mandatory focus areas: governance, management, and strategy, and international student support, and the following programme areas:

- The Certificate in Preparatory Studies (Level 4) was chosen as this is an entry-level programme designed to support students towards later academic success.
- Distance learning programmes were chosen as this focus area includes four separate qualifications and a significant number of student enrolments (269 in 2012).
- The Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) and Worldview Studies (Level 7) was chosen as this is a relatively new area for Laidlaw and the third year it has been offered.

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.

A team of three evaluators visited Laidlaw's main site in Auckland over three days. The team met with, or had phone contact with, members of the organisation's national governing council, the national academic committee, academic advisory board, the management team, and groups of teaching and administration staff as well as groups of students, and had phone contact with a number of external stakeholders. A range of Laidlaw's documentation and records was also reviewed as part this evaluation.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

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

Laidlaw College is providing a well-resourced learning environment and students are completing courses at slightly above the national median for all private training establishments. Course completion rates rose over 2009 and 2010, from 79 per cent to 83 per cent. The national median during this time rose from 71 per cent to 74 per cent. Qualification completion rates were below the national median for 2009 and 2010. However, this is in part explained by a number of student enrolments in new programmes, where there has not yet been sufficient time for these students to graduate. The evaluation team considered that these results reflected a reasonably strong performance, with some improvements from past years.

Laidlaw has extensive and very active relationships with its stakeholders, including learners receiving ongoing positive support. There was extensive informal evidence of high levels of satisfaction among Laidlaw's stakeholders. This was evidenced through all personnel interviews and confirmed by the evaluators' direct contact with stakeholders as well as through student intentions and graduate survey results.

The organisation employs staff who are very well qualified in their fields, and has responded to degree monitors' comments to increase the focus on research by lifting research activity and outputs.

Students enjoy a high level of one-to-one attention and access to all staff across all courses. It was clearly evident at this evaluation that this is resulting in students and staff developing a high level of respect for each other and is contributing to a constructive learning environment.

The organisation has recently 'reconceived' its mission, vision, and values, as well as its overall approach to managing the quality of its educational performance. This project has been developed with all staff, and the organisation anticipates that it will result in significant improvements to its focus on educational performance.

The evaluation team considers that Laidlaw has maintained its educational performance, and there are ongoing improvements in its performance resulting from its self-assessment since the last external evaluation and review in 2010.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Laidlaw College Incorporated**.

Laidlaw has developed a comprehensive self-assessment framework since the last external evaluation and review, and has made reasonable progress in implementing this.

One of the strengths of Laidlaw's long-term approach to monitoring its own performance is its extensive networking with stakeholders. This has focused on ongoing informal feedback from a range of sources such as graduates, schools, churches, agencies, and other theological colleges. However, more recently, with the development of a more structured approach to self-assessment, the organisation has begun to examine and review its performance data, looking more specifically at comparative performance, for example across programmes, courses, schools, and sites. The organisation places a high importance on tracking and supporting individual students. Furthermore, the organisation has an open-door policy, and a free flow of communication was clearly evident across and among staff, management, and governance. This was noted by staff across a number of programmes as a factor that is contributing to improved self-assessment across all staff.

Laidlaw has developed a graduate profile outlining the distinct knowledge and understanding, skills, and characteristics expected of all graduates. These are used by Laidlaw as a basis for reflection on the extent to which the graduates are meeting this profile. This is an effective form of qualitative assessment and is an effective tool for reflection on how well graduate outcomes are being met.

The evaluation team considers that the organisation's self-assessment processes are purposeful, have been well designed, and are being implemented and tested. There are some gaps in the depth or breadth of self-assessment, such as reviewing students' needs assessment processes in lower-level courses.

Findings¹

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**.

Students are achieving steady educational success. The course achievement rates across all programmes have been slightly above the national median for the last two years, indicating that the students intending to complete qualifications are highly likely to succeed. The Certificate in Preparatory Studies programme course completion rates range from 60 to 82 per cent, and across all diploma and degree programmes the range is from 75 to 94 per cent over the last five years.

Qualification completion rates for 2009 and 2010 have been below the national median by between 10 and 18 per cent. Laidlaw considers (and the evaluation team accepts) that this is in part explained by the large number of part-time students enrolled at the college and enrolments to new programmes where students have not yet graduated.

Students are achieving meaningful skills. A recent pilot survey to review how well Laidlaw is achieving its graduate profile identified that the 'qualities encapsulated in the graduate profile had been significantly influenced during the period of study', as evidenced in graduate responses. This study identified areas that scored less well and Laidlaw has, for example, developed a response specifically in relation to bicultural dialogue.

Distance learning students' achievement rates increased significantly from 2009 to 2010, with three of the four programmes in 2010 showing higher completion rates than students studying in face-to-face courses. Data presented at this evaluation showed distance students' course completion rates consistently tracking up from 2007 to 2011, from 73 per cent to 79 per cent. This is a significant result as these are not the usual trends across distance learning programmes in the tertiary sector.

Laidlaw's academic database does not yet provide easy access to performance data for the institution to analyse learner achievement. However, management is reviewing learner achievement across a range of aspects, such as comparing courses, programmes, sites, and mode of delivery. While this shows a significant improvement in the organisation's self-assessment capability on the previous evaluation in 2010, this type of review is relatively recent and more analysis and reflection still needs to take place.

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 **Good**.

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

Laidlaw is held in high regard by its stakeholders, including students. This was evidenced through formal student surveys and extensive informal feedback to the organisation from stakeholders. The external stakeholder feedback is reviewed and Laidlaw acknowledges the benefits in applying a more structured approach to seeking and reviewing stakeholder feedback in order to more clearly identify areas of high performance and areas to further develop. The evaluation team's contact with external stakeholders confirmed that Laidlaw is respected and its graduates highly valued. This was particularly apparent with the school of education. Student surveys have indicated to Laidlaw that students place a high value on studying within the 'non-denominational environment'.

Laidlaw's graduate profile has been developed in consultation with the wider stakeholder community, and the organisation is currently exploring how best to determine how well it is achieving the aspirations contained in the profile (see also the pilot study results noted under section 1.1.)

The management and governance groups within Laidlaw are aware that graduate destinations are not yet tracked as well as they could be. While informal and ad hoc processes are currently relied on to track graduate destinations, staff noted that they had a reasonable level of understanding of graduate outcomes via their personal, professional, church, and academic networks. In some cases, staff knew where every one of their graduates was and how they are using the knowledge and skills gained at Laidlaw. For example, one staff member stated, 'most Bachelor of Teaching graduates have gained teaching positions and those that have not are on relief rosters', and 'principals love our graduates, and want more of them'. A more systematic analysis by Laidlaw could confirm this anecdotal evidence.

Many students enrol at Laidlaw through word-of-mouth referrals from family and church communities, indicating a high degree of endorsement of the programmes offered.

Laidlaw has responded to ongoing degree monitoring concerns over the level of research outputs by providing funds and time for academic staff to engage, resulting over the past year in an increase in research activity and outputs (see table in section 1.4).

The evaluation team considers that Laidlaw's self-assessment of how well its programmes are providing value is working reasonably well. However, Laidlaw is a large institution, and management acknowledges the need to develop more extensive or formalised processes without losing the strength of the extensive

informal networking that currently occurs across all staff in their ongoing involvement in local churches and agencies. One example of progress in this area is that the organisation is currently exploring options to reconnect with graduates through an alumni network.

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**.

Laidlaw has placed an increased emphasis on assessing student capabilities and intentions at the time of enrolment, and is successfully directing students to appropriate courses. For example, a number of students enrol specifically to gain a wider awareness and understanding of a particular area of study, but do not intend to complete a qualification. The students are now directed to either a Certificate of Proficiency, where they can complete one or more courses, including submitting assessments, or are directed to enrol for 'interest only', where they can attend classes to widen their knowledge or understanding in general. This is resulting in more accurate data being collected for course completion and qualification completion statistics, as well as contributing to student satisfaction.

The Certificate in Preparatory Studies is another initiative offered at Laidlaw. This option is offered to students who do not meet the academic prerequisites or minimum IELTS (International English Language Testing System) scores for direct entry to diploma or degree programmes. Staff working in the college's Centre for Academic Preparation and Support indicated that there is a general understanding that graduates of this programme go on to enjoy a reasonable level of academic success at diploma or degree level within Laidlaw. However, while there was some independent data to confirm the extent of further academic success from this programme, the tracking could be more systematic to understand key factors that impact on student success at higher levels. The evaluation team considers the depth and breadth of needs assessment carried out with students enrolling with CAPS could be limiting how well the programme is able to match learners' needs. However, there was evidence to show that students at risk of not succeeding were provided with extra targeted support.

Laidlaw operates 'intentional communities', in that there is on-site accommodation for approximately 400 students, with five communities based around the Centre for Academic Preparation and Support, the School of Theology, Mission and Ministry, the School of Education, School of Counselling, and the Laidlaw-Carey Graduate School. Appreciation of the community and family-based culture at Laidlaw features in student satisfaction survey comments and ratings, and was referred to positively in discussions at this evaluation.

The Centre for Distance Learning staff demonstrated a high level of attention to students' needs. For example, at enrolment students undertake an assessment

called 'readiness for distance learning', and staff noted positively that this occasionally leads to students choosing not to study by distance. At enrolment, students are given an orientation to distance learning and its associated technologies and processes, which appears to be contributing well to subsequent student achievements.

As in other areas of Laidlaw's self-assessment, the extent to which the organisation is matching the needs of learners and other stakeholders is to some extent an informal process. Staff and management demonstrated a reasonable level of knowledge and understanding of how well they meet student needs. However, a more structured, purposeful process may provide improved evidence to more closely match needs in some cases. For example, anecdotal evidence indicates that Pasifika students do not achieve as well as others, but systematic data to understand the extent of this issue is lacking.

Programmes are well designed and include consultation with relevant organisations such as the New Zealand Association of Counsellors and the New Zealand Teachers Council. Laidlaw also has both an internal and an external reference group: the national academic committee (internal members) and the academic advisory board (external theological and academic members). Laidlaw has also established a Rūnanga (Māori council) to provide advice on meeting Māori students' training needs. Interviews with members of these groups and meeting minutes sighted indicate that these groups are making a significant contribution to Laidlaw's performance as well as its self-assessment processes.

1.4 How effective is the 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**.

There was a good level of evidence presented at this evaluation to show that teaching is relevant, current, providing challenging inquiry, and providing students with an engaging and deep learning experience. One indication of the quality of teaching is that students are completing courses at a rate higher than the national median. Student feedback, peer observations, and regular moderation meetings provide regular opportunities to reflect on teaching practice.

Staff are well qualified within their specialist areas. Many hold primary or secondary teaching qualifications and some have adult teaching qualifications.

In recent years Laidlaw staff have been engaged in and focused on research activity and outputs, as detailed in the table below.

Research summary 2008-2011				
	2008	2009	2010	2011
Scholarly monographs	1	0	0	2
Edited books	1	0	0	3
Chapters in books	7	6	6	17
Refereed articles	8	7	4	7
Reviews	9	13	6	5
Conference papers	17	15	13	18
Theses	0	0	0	4

The quality of assessment materials and processes is appropriately moderated and checked for fitness for purpose, both internally and externally, and staff frequently meet to review awarded grades and to identify individual students requiring specific help. The evaluation team saw sufficient evidence to show that the organisation monitors the quality of assessment well across all programmes from level 5 above. The level 4 certificate programme needs to put in place formal internal and external moderation of assessment as well as programme review processes to provide an independent judgement as to the quality and consistency of its assessment processes. However, certificate programme staff work closely with other programme colleagues evaluating their processes and outcomes, which provides a level of informal review.

The organisation has well-developed processes and appropriate software to ensure plagiarism is identified and appropriately addressed, and advice in this regard is provided to students.

Performance appraisals for all staff occur annually, using a range of processes such as peer observations, self-review, and discussions, which identify strengths and weaknesses and lead to professional development. This is providing a reasonable level of assurance as to the effectiveness of teaching. The organisation has a well-established process for funding and allowing time for study and research leave. The evaluation team heard of several instances where staff members are taking advantage of this.

An area for further development, acknowledged by management, is for staff to take up opportunities for professional development in adult teaching theory and practice. Currently, few staff members at Laidlaw have adult teaching qualifications. While there was evidence of a range of teaching strategies and learning modes and technologies utilised by staff, it was less clear how well these are used and applied by all staff.

Laidlaw conducts regular online student satisfaction surveys, which show consistently high ratings and positive comments. The low rate of return in some courses is of concern compared to previous paper-based surveys because it reduces the validity of the results. The organisation is exploring how to increase the number of students completing surveys.

The evaluation team considers that Laidlaw is using the information it collects and receives to make genuine efforts to monitor and improve the effectiveness of learning and teaching.

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**.

Students studying at Laidlaw receive very well-considered and planned personal and academic support and guidance. This was evidenced from Laidlaw's analysis of student survey responses and comments, and discussed in interviews with staff, students, and other stakeholders.

Laidlaw is a signatory to the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students and currently has seven international students enrolled. The organisation has well-planned and regular reviews of its compliance with the code and no issues or concerns came to the attention of the evaluation team. Information provided to international students is clear, complete, and appropriate for their level of study and for their safety and comfort in New Zealand.

Support and guidance is an area of particular strength at Laidlaw. The organisation provides a focus on individual students as well as the 'organisation as a community', and operates within an ethos of values, relationships, open communication, and fostering informed engagement with the church community. These aspects are clearly stated in the organisation's strategic priorities and were mentioned frequently in interviews with students, staff, and other stakeholders. Laidlaw also operate 'cell groups' and 'nexus groups' (small peer support groups), and students noted that these are an effective additional means of support.

In some areas the organisation's self-assessment processes are not yet as effective or complete as they could be to identify whether the additional support provided is specifically addressing all students' needs. For example, Laidlaw staff know that Māori and Pasifika students are succeeding at a lower rate than the overall student population. However, the effectiveness of support processes is not yet well analysed. Similarly, while students enrolling in the Certificate in Preparatory Studies undertake a needs assessment process, the question remains open as to whether this is sufficient to identify the full extent of their study needs.

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 **Good**.

Laidlaw's governance and management groups are providing appropriate support to enable the organisation and its students to achieve their educational goals. This was evidenced through interviews with members of the national governing council, the academic advisory board, the chair of the Rūnanga, the executive, the national academic committee, staff, students, external stakeholders, as well as the organisation's documents and records. Through the governance and management structure, Laidlaw has established effective processes that provide input from within its academic staff, and externally from members of other tertiary organisations, including theological seminaries, universities, and polytechnics.

The organisation is particularly well appointed and resourced for the range and levels of academic programmes offered. Staff interviewed commented that all reasonable requests for additional resources are promptly considered and provided. The library provides appropriate access to academic journals and databases for research purposes.

Management has recently 'reconceived' its approach to quality management, developing a comprehensive self-assessment framework, and is currently in the process of implementing and testing the effectiveness of this across the organisation. This has resulted in a more complete self-assessment process, closing many of the gaps identified at the previous evaluation. For example, Laidlaw is now more systematically evaluating the effectiveness of learning and teaching, reviewing its courses and programmes and interactions with external approval and funding agencies (NZQA and the TEC), and has more clearly defined its internal communications across the organisation.

Laidlaw is reviewing and analysing its performance data, but is currently constrained to some extent by the limited functionality of its academic database from producing some desired reports to support management's self-assessment processes. While the database provides all required data for the Ministry of Education and the TEC, its functionality does not yet allow internal reporting processes to compare academic performance across a range of measures. This is currently being carried out manually and, while this provides some time series benchmarking data, it is relatively new and not ideal. For example, Laidlaw is not yet able to compare course or programme achievements by gender or ethnicity.

The organisation is benchmarking its performance against achievement data publicly available through the TEC and is benchmarking with other theological colleges informally through staff networks. However, this activity is limited to theological and educational matters rather than the sharing of specific achievement statistics.

Since the last external evaluation and review, the organisation has made considerable advances towards developing and embedding a culture of structured and purposeful evaluative quality assurance. The evaluation team saw sufficient evidence to be confident that the organisation has the capability to reflect on its strengths and weaknesses, to develop appropriate responses to identified areas of need, and to monitor these to determine the extent to which they are leading to meaningful improvements. A standout example of this was within the Centre for Distance Learning. The evaluation team noted that across the four programmes offered within centre, staff were able to discuss a number of changes that have already resulted in significant improvements to learner achievement. Examples of these changes are students' preparation for distance study at the time of enrolment, the adaptation of learning materials, and closer follow-up with students at risk.

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: Certificate in Preparatory Studies (Level 4)

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: Distance learning programmes

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

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

2.5 Focus area: Bachelor of Teaching (Primary) and Worldview Studies (Level 7)

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

There are no recommendations arising from the external evaluation and review, other than those expressed or implied within the report.

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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