

Report of External Evaluation and Review

Language Studies International (NZ)
Limited

Highly Confident in educational performance

Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 27 September 2011

Contents

Purpose of this Report.....	3
Introduction	3
1. TEO in context.....	3
2. Scope of external evaluation and review	4
3. Conduct of external evaluation and review.....	4
Summary of Results	5
Findings	7
Recommendations	12
Appendix	13

MoE Number: 8963
NZQA Reference: C04992
Date of EER visit: 29 June 2011

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

Location:	10-12 Scotia Place, Auckland
Type:	Private training establishment
First registered:	1993
Number of students:	International: 160
Number of staff:	17 full-time equivalents
Scope of active accreditation:	General English including: International Language Testing System (IELTS); Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL); Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC); First Certificate in English (FCE) and Certificate of Advanced English (CAE) preparation; Business English; and intensive options.
Sites:	As above
Distinctive characteristics:	Language Studies International (NZ) (LSI) has one director/owner who is based in the United Kingdom. The New Zealand school is one among a number of Language Studies International schools around the world in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, Switzerland and France.
Recent significant changes:	The LSI site in Christchurch closed in February 2011 as a direct result of the region's earthquake. The building is damaged and still being assessed.
Previous quality assurance history:	At the previous quality assurance visit by NZQA, an audit in 2007, LSI met all requirements of the quality assurance standard then in place as well as the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students.

Other:

LSI is a Signatory to the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students approved for:

- Students aged 14-17
- Students aged 18 upwards.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The external evaluation and review examined the following mandatory focus areas:

- Governance, management, and strategy
- Student support for international students.

The other focus areas were chosen as they represented two distinct English language programmes offered:

- General English
- TOEFL and IELTS preparation classes.

3. Conduct of external evaluation and review

All external evaluation and reviews are conducted in accordance with NZQA's published policies and procedures. The methodology used is described fully in the web document Policy and Guidelines for the Conduct of External Evaluation and Review available at: <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/registration-and-accreditation/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eeer/introduction/>

LSI supplied the evaluation team with a number of documents outlining processes for self-assessment and any improvements made. One lead evaluator and one external evaluator visited LSI over two days. While on site, the evaluation team interviewed the owner/director, the principal, the director of studies, the assistant director of studies, tutors, students, the homestay coordinator, and the administration manager. The evaluation team also observed a general English class in progress and viewed a range of documents including surveys of students, staff, and agents, as well as curriculum review documents, student files, and achievement data and analysis.

Language Studies International (NZ) Limited has had an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report, and submissions received have been fully considered by NZQA before finalising the report.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **Language Studies International (NZ) Limited**.

An excellent understanding of students' needs and effective processes for meeting them are distinctive features of LSI. Quality processes for recruiting and developing staff ensure that students are taught by well-trained tutors who are guided by a recently updated curriculum which has been benchmarked against the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). A placement test and interview are used to ensure students' needs and goals are established at the beginning of their time with LSI, and weekly tests closely monitor English language achievement. This regular assessment is analysed at the school level to ensure that, on average, students are progressing up a level every ten to 12 weeks. Results for the University of Cambridge English language examinations (the Certificate in Advanced English and the First Certificate in English) also indicate strong achievement.

Students feel comfortable approaching staff if they have any concerns, and problems are dealt with promptly. LSI New Zealand uses its international networks to share expertise, new ideas, and teaching and learning resources. Working with a select group of agents who recruit for LSI around the world ensures that these key stakeholders can give fast, direct feedback about what students want.

Learners' achievements in English language improve their career and study options. LSI students represent a cross-section of cultural groups, including Turkish, Saudi, South American, Russian, Korean, and Japanese. The multicultural experience is a valued aspect of the LSI Auckland study experience.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Language Studies International (NZ) Limited**.

Achievement is closely monitored and analysed at LSI. The analysis gives confidence to the claim that, on average, students progress one level every ten to 12 weeks. LSI uses a variety of approaches to understand the needs of learners and other stakeholders. These include regular formal and informal contact with agents, entry and exit interviews, placement tests, formal and informal student feedback on both their classes and their homestay or hostel, and staff meetings and surveys. There is good evidence that this information is brought together and analysed to ensure that any issues that arise are dealt with promptly. Longer-term improvements include investments in technology and computers and a review of the curriculum, both of which have enhanced the quality of teaching.

From the evidence supplied to the evaluation team before the EER, and that viewed while on site, it is clear that self-assessment is systematic and embedded in the policies and processes of the organisation. Ongoing quality improvement is business as usual.

TEO response

Language Studies International confirms the factual accuracy of this report.

Findings¹

1.1 How well do learners achieve?

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**.

Achievement is closely monitored and analysed at LSI, and therefore there is good evidence of students achieving excellent gains in English language skills. All students who begin their English language instruction with LSI have an initial placement test which gives tutors a clear understanding of their competencies in the language. Weekly tests are conducted every Friday and the information is shared with each student about their progress. Six-weekly reports are given to students describing how far they have progressed during their time with LSI. The different skills are benchmarked against the CEFR and assessments are internally moderated to ensure consistency between tutors. Attendance and retention are an important part of achieving new skills in English, so this is encouraged and closely monitored.

This regular assessment is analysed at the school level to ensure that, on average, students are progressing up a level every ten to 12 weeks. Results from external exams such as IELTS and TOEFL are more difficult to collect as students have usually left LSI by the time the results are available. However, LSI receives the results for the University of Cambridge English language examinations: the Certificate in Advanced English and the First Certificate in English. These results indicate strong achievement. At the end of the course of study, students are given certificates in achievement which clearly describe the students' achievements or gains in English language skills.

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 **Excellent**.

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

Improved English language is the most immediate outcome that students are aiming for when they enrol at LSI. As noted above, there is abundant evidence that LSI guides learners to this outcome. Longer-term valued outcomes include improved study and career options in the students' country of origin. Students were confident that their LSI experience would improve their future employment options.

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

Many of the students who study with LSI are also looking for an overseas experience. From the testimonials and exit surveys, it is clear that students value the multicultural experience facilitated by LSI.

LSI systematically gathers feedback on outcomes in the form of student exit surveys and agent feedback surveys. There is the opportunity at the exit interview to collect richer information on the range of valued outcomes for students. This could be useful information for LSI to understand how it adds value to the student experience. With both formal and informal methods of surveying these key stakeholders, LSI continuously ensures that it is delivering programmes that students value. Any issues that arise at the exit interview are immediately explored with the students and every effort is made to ensure that students leave satisfied with their experience.

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 **Excellent**.

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

LSI has a variety of mechanisms that it uses to understand the needs of learners and other stakeholders. These include regular formal and informal contact with agents, entry interviews and placement tests, formal and informal student feedback on both their classes and their homestay or hostel, staff meetings and surveys, and other previously mentioned approaches. There is good evidence that this information is brought together and analysed to ensure that any issues that arise are promptly dealt with.

A current issue is the use of technology and the internet on campus and in the classroom. In response to feedback, LSI provided two classrooms with a number of computers and wireless access across the different floors. However, LSI is aware that it is still not completely matching all student or staff needs at the moment and so is exploring possibilities to either manage expectations or better meet those needs.

A review of the syllabus in 2010 considered information gathered from tutors, students, and agents. This review resulted in updated material being better aligned with the CEFR. All language levels have clear outcome statements and are linked to a range of teaching resources. Staff reported that this transparency and clarity across the curriculum supported them in their teaching and assessment decisions.

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 **Excellent**.

Tutors at LSI are supported by the principal, director of studies (DOS), and assistant director of studies (ADOS). To support professional development there are regular development workshops and formal and peer observations. Tutors spoke positively about

these events as “giving them new ideas” and “keeping them fresh”. Moderation is ongoing and systematic and ensures consistency between different tutors’ assessment of learner achievement.

Weekly meetings are a useful forum for staff to give feedback on their teaching and what is going well and what is not. Staff reported that issues raised at the meetings were followed through by the DOS and principal and that there was a willingness to support teachers with new resources to enhance their delivery.

With achievement and student satisfaction being monitored closely, any issues that arise in the classroom are quickly identified. Teachers reported that negative student feedback was always handled discreetly and professionally and that senior staff supported them to improve their teaching.

Teaching is well planned and guided by the syllabus. Teachers use a range of approaches to support engagement and maintain interest, including group work, pair work, guided reading, and games. Regular formative assessment is used to understand learner needs. Teachers showed a good understanding of the different needs of learners from different cultures and at different levels.

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 **Excellent**.

LSI has good systems to ensure that students are supported during their stay in New Zealand. All students are interviewed when they arrive and there is an orientation session which outlines conditions of enrolment, LSI systems and expectations, and important information about staying safe in New Zealand. An innovative approach to identifying issues is the use of student journals. Students write about their time studying and living in New Zealand, and these reflections are shared with teachers. Teachers watch for signs that may indicate that a student is unhappy and needing extra support. If a problem is identified, there are clear processes for ensuring the student gets the required support.

With a variety of feedback being collected, including surveys on homestays, LSI ensures that students are supported and the effects of culture shock and adapting to a new country are lessened. There is a policy of acting swiftly to respond to problems. A recent example was a homestay accommodation being changed within two days when a student was unhappy. Support staff showed a good awareness of the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students and regular reviews are documented.

The management of students who were victims of the February 2011 earthquake in Christchurch highlighted LSI’s support for its students. After the earthquake, the principal ensured that she made contact with every Christchurch-based student and gave them a number of options for their future. Some students chose full refunds and returned home, some transferred to other schools, and some moved to LSI in Auckland. LSI provided counselling for the students for two weeks following the earthquake. The director reported

that the feedback from agents was overwhelmingly positive about the way LSI had looked after its Christchurch-based students following the quake.

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

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**.

LSI is clear about what it is trying to achieve, and the goals are shared across the organisation. There are clear policies and guidelines which are all directed towards achieving these goals and ensuring that quality is maintained. The management style is open and democratic and informed by considerable expertise and knowledge of the sector. The director has regular contact with the principal, although the school is largely left to manage itself. Where examples of good practice can be shared across the schools internationally, this is encouraged. A recent example includes homework resources being placed on the website and made available to all LSI students across the world. LSI New Zealand has regular contact with LSI Brisbane, Australia, and relieving staff travel from Brisbane when necessary.

A notable feature of LSI is the collegial nature of the staff, many of whom have been with LSI for a considerable time. Annual performance reviews are seen as useful, and performance is assessed using a range of useful feedback mechanisms. Staff reported that the annual appraisals are a good opportunity to give honest feedback. Staff are also invited to give feedback informally and formally at meetings and via surveys. This valuing of staff, as a key input into quality education, ensures teaching and administration staff support the goals of the organisation.

The recent events in Christchurch put LSI management policies and processes to the test. What emerged was that a risk plan and appropriate back-up systems were in place and, as a consequence, staff and students did not suffer unduly.

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 **Excellent**.

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

2.2 Focus area: International students

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

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

2.3 Focus area: TOEFL and IELTS preparation classes

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

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

2.4 Focus area: LSI General English

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

There are no recommendations arising from the external evaluation and review.

Appendix

Regulatory 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 non-university TEOs continue to comply with the policies and criteria after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of courses 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 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).

*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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