

Report of External Evaluation and Review

Rotorua English Language Academy
Ltd

Highly Confident in educational performance

Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 13 December 2013

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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:	Rotorua English Language Academy Ltd
Type:	Private training establishment
Location:	1428-1460 Pukuatua Street, Rotorua
First registered:	1 March 1994
Courses currently delivered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Certificate in General English for Speakers of Other Languages (Level 3)• Language and Methodology for Overseas English Teachers (Level 4)• Tour Group Programme
Code of Practice signatory:	Yes, for students aged 10 years and under, students aged 11-13 who are not living with a parent, students aged 14-17 and students aged 18 years and upwards
Number of students:	Domestic: nil International: 50
Number of staff:	11 full-time equivalents
Scope of active accreditation:	As above
Distinctive characteristics:	Rotorua English Language Academy (RELA) is a Communicative Language Teaching learning environment that encourages students to use the language, not just analyse it. Classrooms are seen as international learning environments where students can exchange ideas and share interests and opinions.

RELA practises holistic language learning that balances speaking/listening/reading/writing and stresses the different contexts and purposes for language: day-to-day functional language, social interaction, academic and business language. RELA is also learner-centred, which means the organisation puts learners first and tries to understand who they are and what they need. Student numbers vary from 40-150 depending on the season. RELA is a member of English New Zealand and Quality English.

Recent significant changes:	A share sale of 47.5 per cent to a new director was signed off by NZQA in September 2013.
Previous quality assurance history:	At the most recent English New Zealand audit RELA met all the standards and there were no suggestions for improvement. At the most recent external evaluation and review (EER) by NZQA in 2009, RELA was found to be Highly Confident in educational performance and Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment.
Other:	RELA offers some accommodation on site to long-term adult students and has 120 homestay families who host RELA students regularly in their homes.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The focus areas selected were the mandatory focus areas of governance, management and strategy, and international student support. The programme focus area selected was the Certificate in General English for Speakers of Other Languages (Level 3), in which the majority of students are enrolled. The Tour Group Programme was not included as a focus area because there were no tour groups at RELA at the time of the EER.

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.

The evaluation was undertaken over two days by a team of two evaluators at the RELA Rotorua premises. The team met with the directors, the principal, the manager, the director of studies, the two office staff, the homestay manager, two experienced homestay parents, all the teachers and a range of students from different English class levels. They also spoke with the dean of international students at a local high school. The evaluators undertook a comprehensive document review that included the English New Zealand audit report, business and strategic plans, policies and procedures, management structure and accountabilities, the accident and incident register, records of meetings and decisions made, pastoral care documents, student evaluations of teachers and programmes, staff evaluations of the management, records of student progress including the electronic student management system, curriculum and teaching documents, and RELA's self-assessment document. The team also reviewed the changes made since the last EER. These changes were summarised in a document called 'Self Review Undertaken since the last EER'.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **Rotorua English Language Academy**.

- RELA students achieve high levels of course completion, and the small number of non-completions is generally due to external factors such as family obligations.
- RELA English class levels are linked to the Common European Framework (CEFR), allowing achievements to be compared with CEFR descriptors, providing international benchmarks of student progress over time. RELA students' English language progress consistently meets or exceeds these benchmarks.
- RELA provides individual attention to the students. Students who are not progressing well are offered additional self-study classes. This assistance has been shown to positively influence learners' language progress.
- Most students come to RELA to improve their English, experience study in a foreign country and make friends and experience New Zealand culture. RELA assists with these goals through offering homestays that meet student needs and help to integrate them into the Rotorua community.
- RELA has a core of well-qualified and experienced long-term staff who are expected to teach across all English language levels. Student evaluations over many years consistently rank teachers and teaching materials very highly.
- Staff are supported by a well-qualified director of studies and business manager, who provide effective leadership at the governance level.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Rotorua English Language Academy**.

- Self-assessment at RELA is formal and informal, comprehensive and responsive. It is part of the RELA culture and provides regular information on the organisation's performance. Self-assessment leads to changes and improvements that are reviewed on an ongoing cycle, and includes input from all stakeholders.
- The guidance and support offered at RELA is proactive and supported by detailed policies and procedures that are updated regularly. The understanding, by all RELA staff, of the relationship between regular

attendance, pastoral care and academic success ensures that students are well supported and that they progress in a caring environment.

- Student evaluations over time show that students enjoy the mix of language learning and activities in the General English programme.
- The RELA experience offers students high-quality English study combined with personal growth and development. The solution-focused approach, where issues are identified and dealt with proactively, has created a supportive learning environment.

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**.

RELA's attention to individual student needs has led to high retention and course completion rates. The small minority of students who do not complete are individually tracked. Non-completions are for personal reasons outside the control of RELA, such as family illness. On arrival at the academy, all students are interviewed by the director of studies or the manager as to their reasons for wanting to study English at RELA. They are also currently given the Nelson placement test and put into the appropriate class. During the first week, the director of studies checks to ensure the students are settling in well.

RELA English class levels are linked to the Common European Framework (CEFR), allowing achievements to be compared with the CEFR descriptors, providing an international benchmark. The Nelson placement test is repeated when the students leave, in order to gauge the progress made over time. The results indicate that RELA makes a significant contribution to the students' English language progress. RELA is currently trialling the Cambridge online diagnostic placement test as a possible alternative to the Nelson placement test. The Cambridge test would also be given at the entry and exit points. However, it is too early to draw any conclusions as to the merits of this test over the Nelson placement test.

Academic progress is checked formally by a test every six weeks. The test results form part of a comprehensive six-weekly individual report. The director of studies comments on every student in the six-weekly reports and any issues identified are followed up promptly. RELA has improved the six-weekly testing by providing more targeted assessments aligned with the content taught in place of the generic skills tests used previously.

RELA assists students who are not progressing well by offering self-study classes. These occur three times a week outside class hours. They run over two hours and are overseen by an academic staff member. To measure its achievement in examination English, RELA benchmarked itself against the international scores in the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) for 2011/2012. The academy was above international benchmarks in all aspects – reading, writing, listening and speaking. Exam students are integrated into the afternoon classes

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

with other General English students. They benefit from this mixing, both academically and socially, which helps to improve their exam results. While the number of students undertaking examination courses is small, this benchmarking provides additional indications that RELA is meeting the needs of this group of students well.

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 **Excellent**.

RELA concentrates on providing individual attention for each student, irrespective of the course or length of time they are enrolled. Even when student numbers are low, RELA keeps students at the appropriate class level rather than folding classes together. This practice also ensures staff are kept in employment, which fosters staff loyalty and is part of the culture of valuing the RELA 'family'. This family includes internal and external stakeholders, such as homestay parents and the Rotorua business and wider communities.

Both students and teachers agree that 'the value is in the experience'. This value can be measured by travel experiences, friendships made, other relationships that are developed and the levels of cultural understanding acquired. The evaluation team noted that the students were highly satisfied with their time at RELA, including the progress they made in English, the quality of the teaching experienced, the level of support and the relationships formed at RELA with other students and staff. Student evaluations sighted by the evaluation team consistently rated the quality of the programmes and the teaching highly.

Student satisfaction is also evident in other ways: students reporting their growing confidence in English, extending their stay beyond the time initially planned, returning to study at RELA again, and receiving word-of-mouth recommendations from friends, families and agents. The RELA experience offers students high-quality English study combined with personal development. These outcomes are the result of an established business, finely tuned management skills and the genuine positive regard for others that has fostered a nurturing environment for both students and staff. The result is a stimulating working environment where staff are encouraged and guided to develop their skills and talents for their own development and the greater good of the school. This environment fosters positive energy where all stakeholders, including the students, willingly contribute to and share ownership of the organisation and its valued outcomes.

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**.

Programmes and activities are closely matched to learners' needs and interests, from their first contact with RELA onwards. Active daily engagement with students by RELA staff allows for flexibility in activities and staff follow-up on student preferences. The extensive daily activities programme is tailored to the wants of the students and is mostly free or significantly subsidised. RELA is uniquely situated to provide an exceptional New Zealand experience. Rotorua and the surrounding areas showcase many of New Zealand's key attractions, such as skiing, tramping, jet boating and geothermal activity. Rotorua also has a strong Māori cultural heritage.

There is a diversity of student nationalities on campus. This diversity is a result of RELA policy to ensure that no one group significantly outnumbers any other. Students support this policy as they enjoy learning from each other about different cultures and ways of life. The ethnic mix also encourages the students to speak English and makes it easier to comply with the RELA English-only rule. This rule is supported by a trophy for English Speaker of the Month, and some students are nominated as ambassadors of English, to act as role models for others.

RELA has a charming garden environment, including a memorial seat and garden in honour of the principal's former business partner. Staff have recently further developed the garden in 2013 by developing a potager (kitchen) garden where students can relax, and by the addition of a vegetable garden. The produce from the vegetable garden is used for the popular cooking lessons held after school hours. RELA facilities are also used by a Korean language school, indicating responsiveness to community needs.

Significant changes since the last EER include new course books, the provision of a computer room (for self-study and other uses) and the increased use of multi-media in lessons. The introduction of new course materials resulted from a need identified by RELA to move away from predominantly Eurocentric content and introduce more New Zealand content into lessons. Other improvements include responding to a specific request from a Saudi Arabian group for more grammar in their class content. This need was met by establishing a dedicated grammar class at no extra cost to the group, and making changes to the afternoon classes to make them more varied and stimulating by including some online content in addition to the usual conversational focus.

RELA has clear formal and informal processes and procedures for gauging student needs and wants. It is this combination of the formal and informal approaches that allows RELA to respond quickly to student needs and track any actions taken in real time. For example, staff and management meet every day to discuss emerging

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issues as they arise. Any resulting actions are tracked, and follow-up occurs in subsequent daily meetings. If an issue is sufficiently significant to require changes to policies or procedures, this will be noted and incorporated into the annual policy review. An example of a formal process was rewriting the Tour Group Programme and this becoming part of the tour group curriculum document. Student evaluations over time show that students enjoy the mix of language learning and activities in the General English programme. Many students voluntarily stay in touch with staff via email or Facebook, and some staff and students become lifelong friends.

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**.

RELA has a core of permanent, committed, long-term staff, with other staff recruited at busy times. Student evaluations over many years consistently rank teachers and teaching materials at the highest possible ratings. Any variations to these ratings are followed up immediately with the staff member concerned. Student evaluations also show that students appreciate the teachers' support and teacher competencies, with all full-time staff having appropriate qualifications and experience. The recent English New Zealand audit showed that RELA meets the English New Zealand standard for teaching qualifications. Students interviewed by the evaluation team agreed that the teachers enjoy great respect: 'the teachers help us and push us – like good parents'; 'they are friendly, experienced experts'. RELA also encourages students to self-review, which helps them to note their own progress and become more autonomous and reflective of their learning. Students compare their self-review with the teacher's assessment of their progress.

There is very low staff turnover; nonetheless, RELA has developed good systems so that new teachers can integrate easily into the RELA way of doing things. All teachers are able and expected to teach all levels of General English, which maintains teacher interest, aids collegiality and keeps the teaching challenging. The academic plan includes information on teacher development and the resources required for the year. The director of studies refers to this plan regularly. All academic staff are observed by the director of studies annually, and a comprehensive report is written and feedback is given. The director of studies then develops an individual professional development programme with the staff member, and the staff member follows up possible ways to meet these professional development requirements, such as the Cambridge English Teacher website for online professional development courses. In addition, each year staff reflect on their professional development and discuss requirements for the coming year. Other professional development also occurs, such as peer observations to share skills and knowledge across staff, and internal teacher development meetings around topics such as the CEFR and new texts.

Staff are respectful, appreciative and highly skilled teachers and communicators, both with the students and among themselves. They are ably supported by a well-qualified and highly motivated director of studies and a manager who are helpful, very generous with information and respected and appreciated at all levels of the organisation.

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**.

All RELA staff are involved in pastoral support, including the principal who meets and greets the students each morning. Orientation is comprehensive and well documented, and includes useful checklists to ensure all the necessary information is covered. The principal and other staff visit the student common room each day to provide guidance and support as required, to encourage the English-only policy and to ensure timely responses to any issues that may arise. Issues are dealt with directly by RELA staff or referred to an external professional. Most issues are dealt with internally, but if there is an external referral RELA works closely with the student to assist them to follow any suggested actions. RELA has a well-earned reputation for being successful with students who have not succeeded at school in their own home countries. Most guidance and support occurs successfully within the RELA family culture.

RELA understands its commitments under the Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students and regularly reviews them. When there was an issue with a young person travelling as an unaccompanied minor not having all the necessary paperwork, RELA reviewed its procedures to ensure it was meeting all relevant requirements. RELA's homestay system is thorough, with a provision for tracking and grading homestays, including regular evaluations by students of the homestay and vice versa. The two long-term homestay parents interviewed by the evaluation team were well supported by the RELA team, usually choosing to drop in to the organisation for a chat if an issue arises. The few issues that have arisen have been dealt with promptly and appropriately. The support offered includes a regular newsletter updating any changes to procedures or legislation. However, in a relatively small community such as Rotorua, people often meet in the course of their daily business and share and resolve minor concerns informally. The current homestay organiser is leaving and these responsibilities will be spread across the existing staff team.

The guidance and support offered at RELA is proactive and supported by detailed policies and procedures that are updated regularly. The understanding, by all RELA staff, of the relationship between regular attendance, highly responsive pastoral care and academic success ensures that students are well supported and progress to the best of their ability in a warm, caring environment.

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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**.

Governance and management structures and processes support educational outcomes for RELA students. This was evidenced by the English New Zealand audit where RELA met all of the standards. Governance has been shared between the principal and the two directors, each of whom has complementary skill sets. A new director was invited to share ownership in 2013 as this person brings with them a different background and market knowledge. Governance and management functions are supported by a constitution and strategic and business plans, and clear structures, responsibilities and accountabilities. There are regular performance reviews of management by staff, an indication of the openness and drive to improve the experience RELA offers for staff and students.

Most staff work in open-plan offices, and the RELA culture encourages active and open participation and contribution, irrespective of the staff member's role. The principal is accessible and very supportive of all staff, providing career opportunities to staff within RELA and encouraging them to consider career opportunities elsewhere to extend their skills. Staff described the principal as a strong leader who listened well and was very supportive, particularly in times of personal need. To ensure the RELA culture is maintained and strengthened, new staff are appointed who fit in well with this culture.

The principal's leadership skills have been recognised recently by a prestigious leadership award. The principal has also been on the English New Zealand executive. This leadership is evident at RELA where the principal has ensured that staff are able to step into each other's roles. For example, the principal, manager, director of studies and a senior academic staff member can all do each other's jobs if required. This day-to-day management capability means that, although RELA is not a large organisation, staff are able to take holidays and time out for personal or family issues. It also means succession planning is well underway. This capability-building extends to the office staff who can also do most jobs. The day-to-day management is now delegated to the manager and the director of studies, who are a highly effective team.

Community engagement is strong. At the individual level, for example, a student was sent to the local SPCA to do volunteer work, and an intellectually disabled girl does odd jobs around the school. At the community level, RELA has relationships with around 40 businesses through the activities it offers to students. Links with the wider New Zealand and overseas communities also occur, for example through earthquake assistance to Christchurch and Japan.

Self-assessment at RELA is formal and informal, comprehensive and highly responsive. It is part of the RELA culture and encourages people professionally and personally. It leads to changes and improvements that are reviewed on an ongoing cycle, and in combination with a highly proactive approach has created an exemplary student learning environment.

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 student support

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: Certificate in General English for Speakers of Other Languages (Level 3)

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

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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