

Report of External Evaluation and Review

Unique New Zealand

Highly Confident in educational performance

Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 11 February 2014

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Final Report

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:	Unique New Zealand
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	1 Clyde Road, Browns Bay, Auckland
Delivery sites:	As above and 24-26 Clyde Road, Browns Bay
First registered:	27 October 1995
Courses currently delivered:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• English for Academic Purposes (Level 4)• General English course for Speakers of Other Languages• English for Further Studies (Level 4)• English for Young Learners (Level 3)• Unique New Zealand English adventures (English Plus Activities) (Level 2)
Code of Practice signatory:	Yes
Number of students:	Domestic: nil International: approximately 1,000 annually for short and long-term English programmes. The students are a mix of young learners – local or overseas secondary school students – and adults. During 2013, most students came from Saudi Arabia, Japan, Korea, Thailand, China and Russia. However, students also came from another 36 countries.

Two hundred students were enrolled at the time of the external evaluation and review (EER) visit.

Unique is also accredited to deliver the English for Migrants programme, and the number of students on this course varies, with three students at the time of the EER visit.

Number of staff:	32 full-time equivalents
Scope of active accreditation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• English Language (to level 3)• Interpersonal Communications (to level 4)• Introductory Communication Skills (to level 3)• Legal Studies (to level 3)• Personal Financial Management (to level 3)• Reading (to level 3)• Self-Management (to level 3)• Work and Study Skills (to level 3)• Writing (to level 3)
Recent significant changes:	Unique changed ownership in 2012. The management team structure was revised prior to the change in ownership and the new owner-director has maintained the same focus and structure.
Previous quality assurance history:	NZQA's previous EER conducted in 2009 judged Unique to be Highly Confident in educational performance and Confident in self-assessment.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The following focus areas were included in the scope of the EER based on the TEO's suggestions, the previous EER scope and the most active courses:

- Governance, management and strategy (mandatory)
- International students (mandatory)
- English for Academic Purposes (Level 4)

The English for Academic Purposes programme was selected because it has a steady number of students enrolled throughout the academic year.

- Unique New Zealand English Adventures (English Plus Activities) (Level 2)

This programme is usually taught over two to three weeks to international students who come to Unique in their school holidays to learn English and to experience the activities New Zealand has to offer. The number of student enrolments peaks for the organisation during the northern hemisphere summer (June-August).

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 two evaluators conducted the EER over two days at the main campus on Auckland's North Shore. The team spoke to the senior management team, comprising the previous owner, current director, general manager, academic director, and the operations officer. Interviews were held with current English for Academic Purposes students, graduates, a homestay family, international department representative, tour guide operator, education agent, and tutors from the English for Academic Purposes and English Plus Activities programmes, as well as the international support staff.

The team sighted satisfaction surveys from homestay families, and students' course and activity surveys, tutor resources and international benchmarking analysis. Further documentation was reviewed using the organisation's online self-assessment and reporting tool.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **Unique New Zealand**.

Unique has collected data on individual student test results for a number of years. The results show strong improvement in students' levels of English during their time at Unique. All students sit weekly and six-weekly tests and results are kept in student portfolios and used to show and support progress. IELTS (International English Language Testing System) students also sit a weekly IELTS skills tests and a weekly writing test, the results of which are a good indicator of actual IELTS test results, and confirm that marking is reliable.

The organisation has collected graduate destination data in its student database to determine whether the English for Academic Purposes course is meeting the needs of students. Analysis of this data shows that of the Unique students who wished to improve their English Language scores to be eligible to enrol in tertiary study in New Zealand or their own home countries, almost all achieved their goal. This strong matching of needs is one of the reasons why this school is recommended by former students and agents to international students.

English Plus Activities courses are successfully meeting the needs of overseas students who come to Unique during the northern hemisphere holidays to improve their English while participating in activities within New Zealand. Supporting evidence includes the high levels of satisfaction reported by students and the repeat business from overseas high schools in sending groups of students to Unique.

High School Preparation students are well prepared for entering New Zealand high schools, and often return to Unique to study during the holidays.

Unique offers comprehensive pastoral care and support for all students. It has recruited a diverse team of student counsellors/advisors who speak the languages of nearly all students. This assists the students to adjust to a new environment. The location of the school is a drawcard due to its proximity to the beach and the small community atmosphere, leading to a unique New Zealand experience. The organisation takes all care to ensure that students aged under 18 years are safe, with separate socialising spaces, police vetting of homestay parents and staff, and weekly contact with parents/caregivers.

The English New Zealand audit report (2013) commends the school on its integration of technology into the classrooms as well as the range of support available for both students and staff, and the EER team concurs with these judgements. The owner is supportive of staff, and management has the resources to respond to student feedback about facilities and resources and to provide staff

with the professional development they require to keep abreast of new technology. The organisation is seeing the new technology and the new skills of staff result in improvements to students' engagement and motivation.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Unique New Zealand**.

The organisation has further strengthened its self-assessment processes and understanding of all areas in order to identify where it can improve. The management team has purposefully sought ways in which it can gather better information about student success and how it can improve the classroom experience.

Unique monitors student performance using an electronic dashboard reporting system with links to strategic areas of the business plan. Information is fed into the database for reporting purposes. Already the information gathered about graduate destinations is providing useful information about the success the organisation has in meeting the needs of students wanting to enrol in further study via IELTS as well as seek employment and undertake travel.

Unique has identified areas for further improvement in students' overall learning experience using its own self-assessment and the 2012 English Language Barometer global student satisfaction survey. Unique responded to the areas that the survey results identified could be further improved, using its self-assessment process to gather additional information and to analyse and monitor improvements. This has included a review of its student orientation process and the introduction of iPads and smart boards into the classrooms, which is already fostering better student engagement and motivation.

Other ways in which Unique's senior management team gathers information about its performance include using feedback from homestay families as well as from activity providers. This feedback is being used to identify how Unique can better support international students.

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**.

The IELTS results achieved by the students at the end of their English for Academic Purposes courses show a significant improvement in English language abilities from when they started at Unique, when analysed against entry-level English and final assessments of English language skills. This success is demonstrated by graduates achieving the required IELTS scores to enable enrolment in further study or to find employment, as seen in the positive destinal outcomes for graduates. The organisation has a long history of assisting students to achieve these outcomes.

In addition, there is strong evidence to show students improving their English language skills while enrolled in Unique's short English Plus Activities courses. Students enrolled in these courses typically arrive from overseas secondary schools during the northern hemisphere summer holidays to learn English and take part in adventure activities within New Zealand. The evidence of improved English language abilities comes from feedback from students and their secondary school teachers, or from the tutors' weekly assessments and classroom observations.

The organisation uses a system of tutor reports on weekly test outcomes and individual progress to help ensure students are able to achieve. Further confirmation that students are achieving their language goals comes from the student evaluations conducted during and at the end of each course. The results show that over 90 per cent of students are highly satisfied with their learning at Unique. The graduate testimonials and end-of-course evaluations provide examples of course satisfaction, with some students reporting that they took less time than expected to meet their goals.

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 **Excellent**.

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

A review of student outcomes for 2013 shows that almost all of the students who enrolled in the course to improve their language so they could study at tertiary level in New Zealand, have achieved this goal. The collection of this data has only been formalised in the organisation's student management system in the past six months, but previous anecdotal and outcomes data shows that this is a consistent outcome. Final student outcomes show that 32 per cent continued study in their home country, 20 per cent undertook secondary school study and 12 per cent tertiary study in New Zealand, 18 per cent achieved employment in their home country, 5 per cent achieved employment in New Zealand, and 5 per cent went on to travel in New Zealand.

The English Plus Activities course provides an alternative learning environment for international students in their school holidays to improve their English skills for study and an opportunity to learn about New Zealand culture. The value in this is seen in the return of groups from the same schools each year – one Taiwanese school has sent its students to Unique for the past 12 years.

Although not selected as a focus for this EER, Unique's English language preparation course for high school students is the preferred choice of local high schools because the course produces students equipped with the English language skills and confidence to help them fit into school life. One secondary school chooses Unique as its sole provider of English language teaching because of the consistent results achieved. The ongoing contact that Unique has with local high schools enables it to continue to meet their needs.

The organisation's data shows a high number of referrals and repeat enrolments from former students. Former students recommend Unique because they see the value in their improved language skills. In addition, feedback from the parents of students confirms the perceived value of Unique's courses. Parents comment favourably on the supportive environment and the care that staff have for their children. The long-term relationships Unique has with many of its former students and staff also provide supporting evidence that the English language preparation course is of value.

Another indicator that the training is achieving valued outcomes is the feedback from agents who recommend that their clients enrol in Unique for the family-like environment and beachside location, although still within the greater Auckland area. In particular, Saudi Arabian students wishing to gain the 4.0 IELTS score in order to be eligible for a Saudi government scholarship to undertake further studies are very satisfied with their achievement. Many are not fully motivated initially, but through the support offered by the school they are achieving their academic goals.

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The organisation has begun formally reviewing feedback from homestay families – in addition to student feedback about homestays – to identify the value for them in accommodating the students. Initial feedback shows that the families see the value in learning about other cultures, and the students staying with them gain value from the location and the small community.

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**.

Unique courses meet a diverse range of students' English language learning needs. This is achieved through a process of identifying individual abilities and tailoring the programmes to help the students achieve their goals. A high level of communication is used to maintain effective relationships with stakeholders, including schools, agents, parents and activity providers to inform programme development through ongoing feedback on what works and any possible improvements. The organisation also adjusts programme content and resources using student feedback, test results and tutor input. An action plan is used to introduce amendments to programmes or other changes, and the outcomes of changes are recorded against the action plan. Examples of changes arising from such processes include the development of a study centre for students, for homework and the use of library resources and computers.

The English for Academic Purposes programme prepares the students with a series of test activities for the various language skills areas. The curriculum has met the standard set by the English language sector body, English New Zealand. The organisation is currently aligning all the course teaching materials to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) descriptors, which is an internationally recognised framework. This exercise will improve the transparency and utility of the results and the English competencies profiles for students wishing to enrol in further studies or to achieve employment overseas.

An initial placement test determines the level in which the students should enrol, and the sharing of information across tutor and support staff is used to assess the appropriate class level throughout the programme. An analysis of weekly test results as well as tutor reports provides input to the academic manager about any adjustments required to programme content to ensure it continues to meet the desired outcomes for students preparing for IELTS exams, and the requirements of other stakeholders such as high schools in New Zealand and overseas. Student feedback shows that they believe the programme prepares them well for the IELTS exam.

A key feature of the English for Academic Purposes programme, also commended in the English New Zealand audit report (2013), is the upgrade of technology in the classrooms since the previous EER. This is enabling tutors to use a variety of teaching activities assisted by technology, such as smart boards and iPads, to enhance engagement and to motivate students. The organisation has employed a staff member to help with the integration of technology to add value to the classroom activities, through resources such as online homework and a self-study tool so that students can study from home. Currently the tutors upload class notes directly from the smart board, with relevant references for reading and links to video resources. Already the organisation has found this increases teenagers' motivation to study, as evidenced in the face-to-face feedback from the students.

The English Plus Activities programme is not specifically academically focused. Students attend English language classes in the morning according to their level and then partake in organised activities in the afternoon. Classroom activities relate to the activity in the afternoon to help strengthen comprehension and confidence in using the language. Student evaluations inform Unique about the activities that are popular, to help develop the activity schedule for future courses.

Overall, the programmes provide students with many opportunities to practise and improve their language through organised activities in a range of contexts, as well as classroom-based learning activities.

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**.

The consistent achievement of students' learning goals is supported by the effectiveness of the teaching. The use of formative assessment helps identify students' individual progress, which is also a useful motivational tool as students get feedback on where they are improving and where they need to develop further.

The English for Academic Purposes course has voluntary mock tests held twice a week, which are used as practice for the end-of-week tests. The results of the formative end-of-week tests match well with the actual IELTS scores that students achieve when they sit the externally administered test, indicating that the preparation by teachers is effective.

A range of methods is used to monitor students' achievements and to identify any gaps in their learning. This process is informed by regular reporting about skills development from the weekly test results, a mid-term progress report (around six weeks) and the end-of-course progress report (a week before students complete the course), as well as feedback from tutors. The students are also asked in their evaluations whether they have improved, to compare against desired progress. The organisation's analysis of database records shows that over 90 per cent of

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students are achieving their goals, whether for a desired IELTS level for further study or employment, or to gain a Saudi scholarship.

Unique has good assessment practices. The assessments for the English academic courses are marked by a tutor who is also an approved IELTS examiner. The practice test results and classwork are indicative of the actual IELTS test results, which is a strong indicator that the assessments are being assessed reliably. English Plus Activities marking is carried out by the tutor using moderated guidelines for marking four areas for competency, which helps to ensure the consistency of assessment decisions. Results are discussed with other tutors to inform recommendations about whether students need to move a level or require further teaching at the current level, before approval by the academic manager. This helps to maintain consistency of decisions about student achievement.

The success of the teaching can be attributed to the highly competent and experienced staff who relate well to both adult students and high school students, including the academic manager who is a trained secondary school teacher. Professional development activities for staff focus on improvements to teaching practices, such as teaching teenagers, how to integrate the use of smart boards effectively, and learning about different cultures' learning styles. New tutors are given a high level of support to help them engage with students, including detailed lesson plans and support from other teachers. Observations of teaching practice, included in the annual performance appraisals, also contribute to the tutors' effectiveness. Feedback from students is highly positive about the tutors' ability to adapt to students' learning needs, and about the quality of the teaching and support.

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**.

Unique has a highly comprehensive student support system. A key element of the support is the appointment of counsellors/advisers who cover the range of languages spoken by the student body, including French, German, Slovakian, Russian, Mandarin, Arabic, Portuguese, Spanish, Japanese, Thai and Korean. The students appreciated having someone they could talk to in their own language and who explained and helped them complete enrolment requirements, as it made it easier to adjust to a new environment. The advisers act as a cultural liaison for the students throughout their course. This includes the initial assessment of students' learning needs and a follow-up within two weeks of starting to see how the student is coping with the course and whether accommodation arrangements are suitable. The adviser communicates weekly with parents of student under the age of 18 years, providing a level of assurance that the students are being cared for while enrolled at Unique.

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Agents recommend students to Unique based on the student's previous academic achievements and both the student's and their family's intentions. The organisation communicates regularly with agents, which helps to ensure that the agents' information about courses is up to date. If students arrive with unidentified or undisclosed learning or social issues, they are allocated to a class taught by a specialised special learning needs tutor.

Homestay families are an important part of the support provided. Unique selects the families carefully, including through police vetting, and matches them with the student. A monthly newsletter is sent to homestay families, and the quarterly information meetings help staff at Unique to gain feedback from the families as well as to provide information to homestay families about other cultures; and also provide the opportunity to talk to other homestay families. Surveys of homestay families have identified some improvements already, such as providing families with information about their homestay students earlier.

The location and the community feel of the organisation lead to the creation of a safe environment for students. The organisation has a range of social activities scheduled throughout the year which enables students to meet other students and learn about life in New Zealand. Small class sizes also contribute to the personalised support for students and to making new friendships that often carry on to their New Zealand high school. Students under 18 years of age are separated from older students for their comfort and safety.

Students feel comfortable discussing issues about their course or accommodation with their adviser or the pastoral care person. Students also discuss other problems with their tutors. Unique has a course evaluation written in the students' language so that students can provide formal feedback in their first language. Unique listens to students' feedback and is responsive to their requests. Examples of this were the organisation providing a study centre with computers and additional learning resources, and providing extra tutorial time after class. The student evaluations rated the support by all staff at Unique very highly.

A recent student focus group arranged by Unique to evaluate the orientation process has identified some improvements which the organisation is addressing. This was identified as a result of the global English Language Barometer, an international survey of English language schools in 2012. Unique performed strongly in the areas of accommodation, support and facilities, including the provision of a separate worship space, but some areas for improvements were identified around orientation, activities and facilities based on slightly less positive feedback. This surprised the organisation, which had its own internal feedback systems in place and had acted on any need for changes it had identified. However, Unique used the external English Language Barometer results as an additional and useful benchmark and made further improvements, even though the differences in the results for Unique compared with other New Zealand and global providers were small.

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**.

The organisation has strong governance and clear roles and responsibilities for all staff. The owner has maintained the strategic direction and vision of the school since the change of ownership in 2012. The previous owner has an ongoing role as a consultant and provides advice to the management team in a part-time capacity, providing continuity. The management structure was changed prior to the change of ownership and the staff report that the transition has been smooth and that it has led to better communication. There are clear goals and the supportive, open environment enables staff to have a strong sense of identity and direction. Staff interviewed reported that they are committed to the educational standards and family values of the organisation and feel supported to achieve the organisation's goals.

Unique's comprehensive pastoral care focus is carried over from the original purpose of the school, which was as a pastoral care provider for high school students. Unique has scaled down its guardianship services as the student demographic has changed over time.

The organisation has further improved its self-evaluation processes since the previous EER. The use of an electronic database has provided an overview of the organisation's activities, with key strategic areas linking to strategic goals. Within the database are links to supporting strategic documents and operational documents and processes, with information systems to hold relevant student information. Reports from this database provide a high-level overview of key activities and the achievement of outcomes to enable the management team to review trends and issues and to plan activities.

Unique has used the results of the English Language Barometer satisfaction survey to benchmark with other New Zealand English language schools, which shows Unique is performing well in comparison. The online global survey of English language schools carried out by English Language Barometer that Unique took part in during 2012, in which 70 of their students participated, showed that Unique did well in system support and facilities including worship and the internet. The organisation's feedback from the students on the learning resources led to the purchase of iPads and the addition of technical support, but Unique was unaware of the other issues. Unique acted on four areas which the external survey identified could be further improved. Management has analysed the results using its self-assessment model to check that actions taken to make further improvements – such as the orientation process – have been effective. The network that English New Zealand membership provides has also enabled Unique to share good

practices, for example the integration of technology into classrooms, with other English language schools.

The owner supports the operation team with a budget for new resources, specifically with the upgrading of classroom technology, new teaching resources and professional development activities. The ongoing review of evaluations from students, parents and other stakeholders helps inform the management team about how it can provide the appropriate level of support for course success. Annual reviews of all staff, including the principal, demonstrate the importance of continuous improvement, leading to strong educational performance.

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: English for Academic Purposes/IELTS Preparation

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: English Plus Activities

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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