



Report of External Evaluation and Review

Academy Business Training NZ Ltd

Confident in educational performance

Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 18 January 2011

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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

Location:	Academy Business Training NZ Ltd (the Academy) is located at Level 1, 317-319 New North Road, Eden Terrace, Auckland. This is the sole delivery site.
Type:	Private Training Establishment
First registered:	1994
Number of students:	Domestic: 153 students International: One student Of the 154 students, 19 are full-time, 117 are part-time, and 18 are distance learners
Number of staff:	The Academy is owner-operated by its two full-time directors and currently does not employ any staff.
Scope of active accreditation:	The Academy is currently accredited to deliver: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• National Certificate in Computing (Level 2)• National Certificate in Computing (Level 3)• National Certificate in Business Administration (Level 4)• National Certificate in Contact Centre Operations (Level 3)• National Certificate in Contact Centre Management (Team Leader) (Level 4) <p>The Academy is currently seeking accreditation for Academy Business Training Certificate in English Language and related unit standards.</p>

Distinctive characteristics: Academy Business Training NZ Ltd is one of over 200 international franchised colleges. The Academy is a licensee of Academy of Learning (Australia) Ltd which holds the Australasian licensing rights from Canada. All programmes and course resources originate from Canada and are adapted for use in New Zealand.

The Academy offers a number of courses and career and office skills training programmes aimed at learners seeking to enter the workforce, wanting to upskill for employment, or to develop new career pathways. Courses can be studied separately or in packages, leading to local or national qualifications.

A distinctive mode of training across all programmes and courses is via the Academy's Integrated Learning System. This constitutes practical, step-by-step and competency-based training using comprehensive workbooks supported by audio instruction. Learners commence study at any time, set their own schedule, and train individually and at their own pace, either off site or on site at the Academy. A classroom-based facilitator is on hand to provide one-to-one support either on a face-to-face basis or via telephone or email during office hours and late night Thursdays and Saturday mornings.

Previous quality assurance history: The Academy was previously quality assured by NZQA under the audit system. At its most recent audit in October 2008, the Academy met all but one requirement of Quality Assurance Standard One, the standard then in force.

In 2009, the Academy met national external moderation requirements as assessed against standards managed by NZQA.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

For the external evaluation and review, the following mandatory focus area was chosen:

- Governance, management, and strategy

The two focus areas selected to represent vertical dimensions of the organisation were:

- Medical Reception
- MYOB Accounting.

These focus areas were identified as meeting specific workplace needs and as being of importance to the Academy and its stakeholders. They represent a longer-term programme popular with learners (Medical Reception) and a shorter-term programme/series of courses (MYOB Accounting) also popular with learners. Both focus areas represent horizontal dimensions of the organisation as their mode of learning embodies the Academy's integrated learning system, that is, practical, step-by-step and competency-based training using comprehensive workbooks, supported by audio instruction and facilitator support.

The Academy is accredited to deliver the National Certificate in Contact Centre Operations and the National Certificate in Contact Centre Management (Team Leader). Contact centre operations were not selected as a focus area as the current main delivery focus is training facilitated on site for two specific businesses. This training is currently facilitated by a tutor from Academy Australia.

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 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/>

The external evaluation and review was conducted on site over 7-8 October 2010 by an NZQA lead evaluator and an external lead evaluator. This involved engagement with:

- The directors of the Academy (one of whom is also the sole facilitator of all Academy programmes and courses)
- The chief operating officer of the Australian organisation and an Australian facilitator who provides training in New Zealand
- Learners currently enrolled in MYOB Accounting and the Medical Reception programme
- Graduates of MYOB Accounting courses and the Medical Reception programme
- A stakeholder from the medical sector (medical receptionist).

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Confident** in the educational performance of **Academy Business Training NZ Ltd.**

The Academy has good overall course completion rates. These have been consistently maintained in recent years. The Academy's course completion rate for 2009 was 64 per cent, the same rate as for all national course completions for those commencing certificates with PTEs in 2008¹.

Improving achievement rates is an ongoing focus for the Academy. Although course withdrawal rates are low and signify the relevance of courses and programmes for learners, a number of learners are leaving the Academy after completing courses but without sitting final exams. The Academy has responded to this by seeking to encourage learner certificate completion and allowing learners a 12-month period to complete qualifications.

Learners choose the Academy specifically for the courses and programmes on offer and are confident that they are attaining transferable, workplace-relevant skills and undertaking courses and programmes of importance to industry. The Academy identifies that learners obtain employment in their chosen field, assisted by the connections the Academy has with employers and personnel agents.

Learners choose to study at the Academy because of the self-paced, self-directed mode of learning on offer. This enables learners the flexibility and opportunity to fit study around work and other personal commitments. All learners spoken to said that the one-to-one support received from the organisation's facilitator (whether face to face or via telephone or internet) is immediate and responsive. Course workbooks are identified by learners as comprehensive and easy to use and learners indicate that they are well prepared for course assessment.

Because of the learning style at the Academy, peer engagement is not facilitated, nor does it appear to be a priority for learners. However, this is an area that would be important for the Academy to consider further. Peer engagement would offer learners additional support, motivation, and other benefits that may derive from interaction with each other.

¹ Ministry of Education (2009) *Education Counts: Retention and Achievement: Passing Courses*. http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/statistics/tertiary_education/retention_and_achievement

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **Academy Business Training NZ Ltd.**

The Academy has a solid understanding of its organisation, programmes, and courses, and of its learners. This understanding is facilitated by established processes to attain and review information to inform the organisation, its courses and programmes, and learner outcomes.

The Academy has good processes in place to understand learner achievement rates over time and across learner types. Learner feedback is collected systematically and reported twice yearly. It is used regularly to review programmes and resources and facilitator effectiveness. Examples were provided where actual or proposed enhancements to course materials and resources have arisen directly from learner feedback. Analysis and use of this data has also led Academy to identify improvements to data collection tools to ensure a more robust picture of learner needs.

The Academy has also established connections with a small group of key stakeholders (reflecting the size of the organisation) and has processes in place to facilitate the regular collection of stakeholder feedback and input into programmes and resourcing.

The Academy has responded well to a changing fiscal climate without erosion of its own commitment to self-assessment and quality improvement. It has responded to learner needs by offering time-payment plans and a 12-month period to complete qualifications.

However, there are two important areas where the organisation has not yet acted and where it could make improvements to ensure that it is meeting the needs of key stakeholders. The first relates to the development of a contingency plan for an unexpected long-term absence of one or both of the Academy's two directors and who constitute the only staff of the Academy. Secondly, the organisation could also strengthen its processes to understand the value of its courses and programmes for graduates and employers. The implementation of a systematic process for collecting feedback from graduates and employers, even on a small scale, would provide added confidence in the relevance and value of Academy courses.

Findings²

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 **Good**.

Learners at the Academy have good rates of achievement which have remained consistent over the last few years. In 2009, approximately 64 per cent of learners successfully completed courses and completed exams for Academy certification (completion rates for full-time students were particularly strong at 86 per cent). In previous years, learner achievement rates sat at around the 60 per cent mark. This compares with all national course completion rates of 64 per cent for those commencing certificates with PTEs in 2008, and qualification completion rates of 62 per cent for learners enrolled in a certificate course with PTEs after one year³.

Similarly, achievement rates are consistent in the focus areas considered for the EER. Of eight learners enrolled in the Medical Reception programme in 2009, four have successfully completed the programme and two are still to complete. For learners enrolled in each of the shorter MYOB courses, 73 per cent successfully completed these courses in 2009.

Through processes of self-assessment, the Academy has identified a potential concern that achievement rates for distance learners are lower than those for other learner types. In 2009, 5 per cent of students were distance learners, with achievement rates identified as 38 per cent, with 31 per cent still to complete/still busy completing qualifications.

The academy director/facilitator seeks to monitor distance learners' progress and enhance motivation by telephoning each learner at least once a week. However, identifying additional strategies to encourage distance learners to complete their assessments may need to remain an ongoing focus – 2010 figures indicate an increasing move by learners opting to study this way (almost 12 per cent are studying via distance learning in 2010).

A notable challenge in recent years has been learners completing all modules of their particular course of study, but not completing the final exam to enable certification. The Academy identifies that a number of these learners leave to take up employment opportunities, and therefore the motivation to complete final exams may not always be strong. In 2009, 27 per cent of learners were in this category, with rates higher and around the 40 per cent mark in 2007 and 2008, possibly reflecting the stronger employment market at that time. The Academy's response to this has been to attempt to encourage learners back to complete exams, and the re-emphasis of its policy offering a 12-month window within which learners can return to complete exams.

² The findings in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation's activities.

³ See note 1.

Of note, learner withdrawal rates are very low (around 3 per cent in 2009 and less than 1 per cent in recent years) and potentially attests to the relevance to learners of Academy courses and programmes. Combined figures for learner completions, irrespective of whether this involves completion of final exams, is around 91 per cent and presumably means that a significant number of learners are completing courses and attaining new skills and knowledge.

All learners spoken with demonstrated a confidence that they were acquiring practical-based knowledge and skills considered essential to attaining employment or to operating within their desired field. MYOB Accounting learners described the necessity of this training in the accounting area.

Looking to the future, the Academy has identified a long-term goal of increasing learner achievement rates to 70-80 per cent. This seems readily achievable should Academy continue to focus on the concerns of exam completion and distance-learning achievement rates. In addition, should the Academy decide to analyse learner achievement across demographic categories, such as ethnicity and age, resulting information may prove valuable in terms of identifying where to focus strategies to enhance achievement rates and to meet the different needs of learners (for example, identifying and responding to the needs of learners under 20 years of age given the recent slight increase of learners in this age group).

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**.

Of utmost value for learners at the Academy is the ability to obtain skills and knowledge that will immediately be recognised in employment and the fact that Academy courses and programmes are relevant and employment-specific.

As identified at section 1.1 above, learners are confident that they are obtaining practical, work-relevant skills which can be transferred immediately to the workplace. They are confident that the Academy is offering courses of study that specifically respond to industry requirements and which will be recognised and of importance in future employment.

All learners engaged with also referred to the value of being able to keep the Academy workbooks and were confident that their comprehensiveness would enable continuous reference, support, and knowledge in future employment.

The Academy's directors indicate that graduates tend to obtain employment in their chosen area, although employment has been affected by the economic climate in the last couple of years. The Academy is aware of graduate destinations, but long-term learner destination tracking or ongoing input from graduates about the relevance of Academy training does not systematically occur. Similarly, while the Academy has established ongoing links with a

small, defined number of key industry stakeholders, there does not seem to be systematic processes for engaging with employers who hire Academy graduates.

Ongoing follow-up with graduates in employment, and employees, even if undertaken on a small but ongoing basis, is an area that the Academy should give future consideration to. This would provide the Academy with an overt understanding of the employment relevance of Academy courses studied and is particularly pertinent when considering the ongoing relevance of niche programmes such as the Medical Reception programme.

The nature and quality of Academy training is nevertheless valued by stakeholders connected to the Academy. Established connections with personnel agents and stakeholders in industry have resulted in Academy learners being recommended to potential employers directly seeking Academy graduates, with the EER team hearing of two recent examples where Medical Reception learners were offered employment opportunities with GP practices.

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**.

For learners wanting and suited to an individualised, self-directed style of learning, Academy programmes and activities go a long way towards meeting such learners' needs. All learners engaged with for the EER chose to study at the Academy because of the particular courses and programmes on offer and the flexibility of being able to study at their own pace, while also being able to continue to work and to meet other personal commitments. The one-to-one learning environment is also able to meet the needs of learners who may feel intimidated asking questions and not confident competing against other learners in a standard classroom environment.

The Academy offers a distance-learning option which enables learners to study at the Academy even if physical distance or personal commitments prevents this. For on-site learners, the Academy is also open till 8pm on Thursday and on Saturday mornings, thereby catering to learners who require facilitator input outside of standard work hours.

The Academy's time payment plan is an important facilitator to study. In addition, the Academy's policy of allowing learners a 12-month period to complete their study has meant that learners do not have to give away their study to take up immediate short-term work opportunities or to address personal matters that may arise.

Individual learner needs are initially assessed at a one-to-one meeting between the learner and the director of the Academy, where there is a specific focus on how programmes and courses can meet learners' training needs and take into account past education and experience. All learners spoken to by the evaluation team were satisfied that they had enrolled in the right course of study.

It is evident that the Academy is delivering programmes and courses of study of importance to employers and industry and therefore is undoubtedly meeting key stakeholders' needs. Learners are developing core skills crucial to the roles they are training for. However, as identified in section 1.2 above, there appears to be an absence of structured engagement with graduates and employers to better understand and strengthen the picture of how well the Academy's programmes and activities are meeting key stakeholder needs.

Discussion with learners identified very little engagement between learners themselves, whether on or off site. However, for those learners who are very much focused on their individual plan of study, this was not considered to be an issue. Future opportunities for the Academy to facilitate peer engagement may, however, be worth investigating as a means to provide learners with additional motivation and support and other benefits associated with peer interaction.

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**.

For learners electing to undertake training via individualised, self-paced study, with facilitator support, good processes are in place to ensure the effectiveness of teaching. Programmes are informed by sound pedagogical practice with each course taught through the cycle of listening, reading, and doing.

It is evident that effective relationships exist between learners and the course facilitator. The evaluation team consistently heard that the facilitator is highly responsive and readily available to provide one-to-one support to learners where this support is sought. Learners indicated that they felt comfortable asking for assistance and would not hesitate to raise any issues or to provide feedback. The facilitator also maintains weekly contact with all learners to discuss progress and learning needs.

The facilitator and individual learners are able to monitor learner progress via student record cards which are paper-based records providing information about the courses completed by learners and are monitored on a weekly basis.

Learner feedback is formally sought at the end of each course and programme and is utilised by the Academy to understand the effectiveness of teaching and to make improvements (e.g. increasing practical-based exercises). Learner feedback identifies that learners are well satisfied with the quality of audio tapes and availability of computer resources. Conversely, learner feedback identified less satisfaction with the quality of audio tapes and computer resources. However, the Academy has responded by taking action to address these issues.

Learner feedback has identified satisfaction with the quality of assessments and assessment feedback. Learners have the opportunity to complete pre-exams before final assessment and indicated that they feel well prepared for final assessment at the conclusion of each course. One-to-one feedback is provided to learners on assessment outcomes. Information

about assessment requirements and procedures are contained in course booklets and the student handbook. To ensure that assessment is valid, fair, and consistent, the Academy has also established pre- and post-moderation processes and met national external moderation requirements in 2009.

The facilitators' own training knowledge is enhanced by completion and understanding of all course workbooks. The facilitator seeks input and advice from relevant industry contacts and peers (i.e. other MYOB trainers) where her own knowledge and understanding requires it.

1.5 How well are learners guided and supported?

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**.

The Academy's directors provide responsive and timely support and guidance to learners engaged in facilitator-supported, individualised study. Learner feedback and regular engagement with learners seeks to ensure that this is maintained.

Comprehensive information is available to learners in the Academy student handbook, the orientation booklet, and the course catalogue in relation to Academy courses and fees, the mode of learning at the Academy, prerequisites and course requirements, and relevant Academy policies and procedures. The Academy website also provides comprehensive information. In the main, these resources appear to be current, although the EER team did note that some information may need updating.

Before commencing study at the Academy, a one-to-one meeting is held between an Academy director and the learner to determine individual learning needs and how Academy programmes may be suited to those needs. Educational pathways and staircasing opportunities are available via Academy training, and where applicable the opportunity to complete unit standards is discussed. However, in the absence of financial study support and with a focus on attaining specific work-based skills, the Academy also has to respond to learners' strong focus on their immediate and shorter-term study and career plans.

The one-to-one meeting provides the opportunity for the Academy to apply prerequisites and to understand the appropriate level of study for learners, as well as individual support needs that may be required. For MYOB study, the Academy will seek to understand learners' past accounting experience, and for the Medical Reception course a touch-typing test is undertaken.

Assessment of numeracy and literacy needs includes a maths and comprehension test and the unobtrusive facilitation of discussions by an Academy director to discern specific needs that may require particular attention. Where specific numeracy and literacy needs are identified, the Academy will offer recommendations to learners, for example additional training, and so far as resourcing and time allows, will offer extra support and assistance.

The evaluation team also heard examples of the Academy supporting and minimising barriers for learners. In one case a student was able to regularly bring an assistance dog on site; in another, an Academy director drove outside of Auckland to deliver course materials to ensure that a distance learner received them before a holiday period.

Ongoing support needs are identified by close monitoring of learner attendance and progress. The directors will contact learners immediately if there appears to be any concerns. They will also seek to work with learners and, if relevant, their families, to seek to address issues that may arise.

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**.

Governance and management is the responsibility of the two directors of the organisation. They have a clear and well-defined vision for the organisation and a clearly articulated business plan for the achievement of organisational goals and objectives.

Planning and decision-making are very much shaped by the realities of a small, two-person, owner-operated organisation. The directors are passionate about their organisation and learning model and know their organisation and learners well. They also have a solid understanding of the wider environment within which they operate. This is enhanced through established connections with a small number of key stakeholders whose input is regularly sought to inform proposed developments in relation to programmes and activities. This is obtained via a stakeholder satisfaction survey, annual stakeholder engagement, and two-yearly engagement with the organisation's local advisory committee (LAC).

Self-assessment and reflection is well embedded into organisational practice and informs governance and management. An annual Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis, budget planning, and learner and stakeholder input are utilised to identify areas of focus and to plan and to make realistic decisions, including the prioritisation of resources to support learning and teaching. Enhancements are made to the extent that resources allow and with a view to future and ongoing improvement.

The Academy has responded well to a changing fiscal climate, without erosion of its own commitment to self-assessment and quality improvement. It has responded to learner needs by offering time-payment plans and a 12-month period to complete qualifications.

A significant emerging focus for the Academy is a proposed shift to providing business-focused English language training for international students. The Academy's directors demonstrated a solid awareness of the potential implications of this proposal for both domestic and international learners and have considered various strategies to address such implications. The Academy has also sought input from its LAC on the proposal and advice from a small number of external consultants.

There are two key areas that the EER team consider an important focus for the Academy and which potentially could have an important impact on learner outcomes. One is that the organisation does not have a solid contingency plan to deal with an unexpected long-term absence of one or both of the Academy's directors, including the absence of one of the directors who is also the sole facilitator and key contact with learners and external stakeholders.

The other area has been identified earlier in this report, and relates to ensuring structured information-gathering from graduates and their employers, even if on a small scale. This would provide the Academy with an additional measure of confidence that Academy programmes and courses are meeting key stakeholders' needs.

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: Medical Reception

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

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

2.3 Focus area: MYOB Accounting

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 implied or expressed within the report.

Further actions

The next external evaluation and review will take place in accordance with NZQA's policy and is likely to occur within four years of the date of this report.

Progress toward improvement will be monitored by NZQA and a further EER scheduled at an appropriate time.

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

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

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

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

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

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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