



NEW ZEALAND **QUALIFICATIONS** AUTHORITY  
MANA TOHU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA

---

**QUALIFY FOR THE FUTURE WORLD**  
KIA NOHO TAKATŪ KI TŌ ĀMUA AO!

# External Evaluation and Review Report

Thoughtplanters Limited

Date of report: 23 November 2018

# About Thoughtplanters Limited

---

*Thoughtplanters is a small private training establishment based in Auckland which is owned and operated by experienced arborists. The organisation offers a wide range of niche short courses in all aspects of horticulture, arboriculture and utility line-clearance industries.*

---

Type of organisation:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	6 Westfield Place, Mt Wellington, Auckland
Code of Practice signatory:	No
Number of students:	Approximately 250 students per annum
Number of staff:	Three full-time equivalents and eight part-time
TEO profile:	<a href="#">NZQA – Thoughtplanters Limited</a>
Last EER outcome:	Confident in educational performance Confident in capability in self-assessment
Scope of evaluation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Training scheme – Insulated tool zone vegetation control worker (Close Worker)</li><li>• Training provided under contract to the Primary Industry Training Organisation</li></ul>
MoE number:	7875
NZQA reference:	C30647
Dates of EER visit:	28 and 29 August 2018

*Final*

# Summary of Results

---

*Thoughtplanters is effectively meeting many of the most important needs of its key stakeholders. Key contributing factors include the skill and experience of the trainers; management attention to and oversight of educational quality and health and safety; and effective governance.*

---

## **Confident in educational performance**

- Thoughtplanters provides high quality training which produces graduates who can work safely and competently in a high-risk industry.
- Courses offered are niche and designed to meet the needs of key stakeholders including Primary ITO and employers.

## **Confident in capability in self-assessment**

- Educational processes are robust, with good evidence of support to trainers with planning, delivery, resourcing, assessment and moderation.
- Governance and management are effective in managing performance. After a period of change and instability following loss of revenue from its major funder, Telford Rural Polytechnic, the business has been rebuilt and future opportunities are being considered by governance.
- Compliance requirements are identified and managed appropriately.
- The collating and analysis of achievement and outcomes data could be improved.

# Key evaluation question findings<sup>1</sup>

<b>1.1 How well do students achieve?</b>	
Performance:	<b>Excellent</b>
Self-assessment:	<b>Good</b>
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>At least 98 per cent of Thoughtplanters' trainees achieve competency. This is common in short courses where trainees are usually employed and are motivated to extend their skills and knowledge and maintain competencies.</p> <p>The quality of assessment is validated through external moderation and contracted trainers who work in the industry.</p> <p>The Close Worker course involves graduates working around live power lines. The work is high risk and trainees need to be highly skilled and experienced. Thoughtplanters requires every trainee to have 140 hours of practical experience before attending the course.<sup>2</sup></p> <p>Thoughtplanters estimates that Māori and Pasifika trainees comprise around 5 per cent of the total. Ethnicity data is collected at enrolment but is not used to understand the student demographic or achievement by ethnic group.</p> <p>Thoughtplanters monitors achievement using result sheets, trainer reports and reports to funders. However, there is limited analysis of achievement data across courses, ethnicity, over years or benchmarking to self-assess areas that may require improvement. While this is a gap, given the size of the PTE and current achievement rates, the impact is low.</p>
Conclusion:	Thoughtplanters performs exceptionally in terms of trainee course completions, contributing to safe industry practices. Self-assessment of achievement data could be improved.

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

<sup>2</sup> Trainees must complete a prerequisite unit standard and/or demonstrate equivalent knowledge and skills before enrolling on the course.

*Final*

## 1.2 What is the value of the outcomes for key stakeholders, including students?

Performance:	<b>Good</b>
Self-assessment:	<b>Good</b>
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Since Thoughtplanters' trainees are already in work, the Close Worker course provides assurance to employers and power companies that the worker is competent to undertake arborist work near live power lines. For employees, the benefit of the course is a higher salary given the high risk involved in the job.</p> <p>For Primary ITO trainees, Thoughtplanters provides specific off-job courses highly valued by the ITO. Trainees are employed as apprentices, so overall achievement and outcomes are monitored by the ITO.</p> <p>Thoughtplanters contributes to national and international industry bodies. The short courses and refreshers contribute to a competent, skilled and safe workforce who meet the Approved Code of Practice and associated guidelines for arborists.</p> <p>Self-assessment in this context is continuous but informal given the size of the provider and the limited body of outcome evidence gathered. Management and the directors are active in the industry and therefore constantly assessing needs and the impact of the training to inform them of the quality, relevance and demand for training. Thoughtplanters has longstanding return customers including Primary ITO and employers, which provides them with a level of assurance of the quality and value of the courses. No formal data is gathered from these stakeholders.</p> <p>Information is gathered formally from trainees on completion of the course. The evaluation form could be enhanced by asking trainees whether their knowledge, skills and confidence to practise safely has improved as a result of training.</p>
Conclusion:	Thoughtplanters' contribution to valued outcomes is assessed through informal feedback and ongoing custom from Primary ITO and employers. Formally collating and self-assessing outcomes data is an area for improvement.

### 1.3 How well do programme design and delivery, including learning and assessment activities, match the needs of students and other relevant stakeholders?

Performance:	<b>Excellent</b>
Self-assessment:	<b>Good</b>
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>The training is based on an ongoing formal and informal assessment of need drawn from employers, trainers, graduates and Primary ITO. The courses are designed to teach both theory and practice. Trainers are active in the industry through their own commercial businesses and therefore bring up-to-date knowledge, experience and resources to the training that is relevant to and benefits the trainees.</p> <p>Thoughtplanters is involved in reviews relating to expected standards of practice, as well as tertiary training reviews. The PTE makes amendments to its training resources and teaching materials as needed. The directors and the sector are exploring the demand for a qualification in arboriculture.</p> <p>Moderation results reflect the quality of assessment. Opportunities for self-reflection, development and moderation are available (e.g. internal moderation) but are limited due to the size and capacity of the organisation.</p> <p>Trainees have ample opportunity to demonstrate their understanding and competence prior to being assessed. Where trainees are deemed not yet competent, Thoughtplanters will discuss a course of action with the ITO and/or employer.</p> <p>Thoughtplanters provides training nationally. It has a network of trainers contracted to deliver training against a schedule of training programmes months in advance. Trainings is well organised and resourced either through Thoughtplanters or the ITO, with trainers and trainees provided with training material in advance of the course. In some cases, resources are provided by the employer (e.g. chainsaws), which are safety checked by the tutor.</p>
Conclusion:	Thoughtplanters' programmes are high quality and fit-for-purpose. Programme content and delivery is monitored and amendments made based on stakeholder feedback. Self-assessment is informal and continuous.

*Final*

## 1.4 How effectively are students supported and involved in their learning?

Performance:	<b>Good</b>
Self-assessment:	<b>Good</b>
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Trainees are well supported given the context of the training: short courses to improve skills for industry. Given that the trainers are practitioners, there is a strong mix of theory and practice to involve trainees in their learning. Trainees formally provide feedback after each course which is sighted by trainers and analysed by management. Any matters of concern to management are discussed directly with the trainer.</p> <p>Trainees will often be given several opportunities, if needed, to demonstrate competence (in some cases trainers have offered to assess the trainee at a different date after the course). The ITO training manager is responsible for any support or learning issues identified by the trainers. Where trainers assess that a trainee either needs more time and practice before being formally assessed, or is deemed not yet competent, these matters are discussed with management and the ITO manager and/or employer.</p> <p>Trainers are required to report to the manager on the outcomes at each training session. The reports are trainer reflections on how well the training went, and which students have been assessed and deemed competent. Trainers feel supported, with one trainer recommending more background information about trainees and their experience be sent to trainers prior to the training to help tailor their delivery. Management has acted on this.</p> <p>Trainers are contracted based on their experience and reputation. All trainers have decades of experience working in the industry; most have a related qualification in their industry and some have adult education qualifications.</p>
Conclusion:	Support for trainees is limited given the short nature of the courses. However, effective processes are in place to ensure employers and the ITO support trainees who need more time and support to achieve competence.

## 1.5 How effective are governance and management in supporting educational achievement?

Performance:	<b>Good</b>
Self-assessment:	<b>Good</b>
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Thoughtplanters is owned and operated by experienced arborists who are invested in the industry through their commitment to training (operating a PTE); to quality through the development of codes of practice for their industry (as longstanding members of national and international arborist associations); and to industry practice (the directors operate their own commercial businesses). Thoughtplanters is the only PTE that provides arboriculture training through niche short courses to improve competence in certain skills.</p> <p>Since the last EER, Thoughtplanters has lost its major funder. As a result, it has had to rebuild its training business, extend its relationships and remodel its delivery. Through good management, leadership and strategy, Thoughtplanters has regained a level of stability and is now looking at future opportunities.</p> <p>Thoughtplanters has built a strong reputation in the industry as a quality provider validated by stakeholders. The directors bring a range of experience and depth as governors. They meet quarterly and engage in strategy setting and monitoring performance – health and safety, budget and strategy are key agenda items. Currently, educational performance is not a formal agenda item which is an area for improvement. The general manager has oversight of academic quality and compliance, with support from an operational manager and administrator.</p>
Conclusion:	Thoughtplanters' governance and management team is effective in leading the organisation. Quality of training is a priority, inclusive of health and safety. Investment in resources and quality staff and trainers enables high quality learning outcomes. Some areas of performance and self-assessment require further improvement.



## 1.6 How effectively are important compliance accountabilities managed?

Performance:	<b>Good</b>
Self-assessment:	<b>Good</b>
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Thoughtplanters' most important compliance accountabilities are health and safety (for trainers and trainees), contract management and compliance with NZQA regulations.</p> <p>Thoughtplanters has a clear policy and expected practices that trainers need to follow to ensure their own safety and the safety of others during the training sessions. Management keeps up to date with changes in their industry as it relates to health, safety and compliance.</p> <p>External moderation requirements have been met satisfactorily with no issues raised by standard-setting bodies. There were no NZQA compliance issues identified during the on-site visit. There is some monitoring of compliance with NZQA regulations; however, there is no proactive or regular internal audit and review.</p> <p>Contractual issues are managed effectively through ongoing discussions between Thoughtplanters' management and the ITO. There have been no recent contractual issues.</p>
Conclusion:	Thoughtplanters identifies and manages its important accountability requirements. There are few gaps and weaknesses.

# Focus Areas

*This section reports significant findings in each focus area, not already covered in Part 1.*

## 2.1 Focus area: Primary ITO Training

Performance:	<b>Good</b>
Self-assessment:	<b>Good</b>

## 2.2 Focus area: Insulated tool zone vegetation control worker (Close Worker) Training Scheme

Performance:	<b>Excellent</b>
Self-assessment:	<b>Good</b>

## Recommendations

*Recommendations are not compulsory but their implementation may improve the quality and effectiveness of the training and education provided by the tertiary education organisation (TEO). They may be referred to in subsequent external evaluation and reviews (EERs) to gauge the effectiveness of the TEO's quality improvements over time.*

NZQA recommends that Thoughtplanters Limited:

- Collate, analyse and report priority data to its board of directors
- Build its body of evidence around value to industry and meeting industry needs by formally documenting feedback from trainees, employers and other key industry stakeholders to inform quality self-assessment.

## Requirements

*Requirements relate to the TEO's statutory obligations under legislation that governs their operation. This include NZQA Rules and relevant regulations promulgated by other agencies.*

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

# Appendix

## Conduct of external evaluation and review

*All external evaluation and reviews are conducted in accordance with NZQA's published rules. The methodology used is described in the web document <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/>. 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.*

### *Disclaimer*

*The findings in this report have been reached by means of a standard evaluative process. They are based on a representative selection of focus areas, and a sample of supporting information provided by the TEO under review or independently accessed by NZQA. As such, the report's findings offer a guide to the relative quality of the TEO at the time of the EER, in the light of the known evidence, and the likelihood that this level of quality will continue.*

*For the same reason, these findings are always limited in scope. They are derived from selections and samples evaluated at a point in time. The supporting methodology is not designed to:*

- *Identify organisational fraud<sup>3</sup>*
- *Provide comprehensive coverage of all programmes within a TEO, or of all relevant evidence sources*
- *Predict the outcome of other reviews of the same TEO which, by posing different questions or examining different information, could reasonably arrive at different conclusions.*

---

<sup>3</sup> NZQA and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) comprehensively monitor risk in the tertiary education sector through a range of other mechanisms. When fraud, or any other serious risk factor, has been confirmed, corrective action is taken as a matter of urgency.

## Regulatory basis for external evaluation and review

*External evaluation and review is conducted according to the Quality Assurance (including External Evaluation and Review (EER)) Rules 2016, which are made by NZQA under section 253(1)(pa) of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.*

*Self-assessment and participation and cooperation 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 Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2018, 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 Quality Assurance (including External Evaluation and Review (EER)) Rules 2016 require registered private training establishments to undertake self-assessment and participate in external evaluation and review 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 Quality Assurance (including External Evaluation and Review (EER)) Rules 2016. 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](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz)). The Quality Assurance (including External Evaluation and Review (EER)) Rules 2016 are available at <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/legislation/nzqa-rules/ga-rules/external-evaluation-rules-2016/1/>, while information about the conduct and methodology for external evaluation and review can be found at <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/>.*

NZQA

Ph 0800 697 296

E [qaadmin@nzqa.govt.nz](mailto:qaadmin@nzqa.govt.nz)

[www.nzqa.govt.nz](http://www.nzqa.govt.nz)

Final