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Report of External Evaluation and Review

New Zealand Language Centres
Limited trading as New Zealand
Language Centres

Highly Confident in educational performance

Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 21 March 2018

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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:	New Zealand Language Centres Limited trading as New Zealand Language Centres (NZLC)
Type:	Private training establishment (PTE)
First registered:	1 April 1991
Location:	Level 2, 104 Customs Street West, Auckland
Delivery sites:	Levels 1 and 2, 4 Hobson Street, Auckland Level 4, 186 Willis Street, Te Aro, Wellington
Courses currently delivered:	General English (including IELTS ¹ and Cambridge exam preparation) CELTA (Certificate in Teaching English to Adults) TECSOL (Teaching English to Child Speakers of Other Languages) TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages)
Code of Practice signatory:	Yes
Number of students:	Domestic: 12 – recent residents International: 644 (500 in Auckland and 144 in Wellington) from 23 countries, predominantly Japan,

¹ International English Language Testing System

	China, Colombia, Brazil, Korea, Chile, Switzerland and Thailand, with a smaller proportion (around 1 per cent) from other countries.
Number of staff:	Full-time 40; part-time 58
Scope of active accreditation:	General English (includes preparation for IELTS and Cambridge examinations) TESOL (teacher training) CELTA ² (Cambridge teacher training)
Distinctive characteristics:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established 1984 (33 years in existence) • Winner four years running (2014-2017) of the ST Star Awards English Language School Southern Hemisphere • Member of English New Zealand which represents 27 English language schools throughout New Zealand • Offers English language courses to international students and preparation for examinations such as Cambridge and IELTS
Recent significant changes:	<p>Addition of another training site in Hobson Street, Auckland in 2016, and a new site in Willis Street in Wellington in 2015.</p> <p>Since the last external evaluation and review (EER) in 2014, NZLC has continued to grow significantly in student numbers, and the academic and administration teams have doubled.</p>
Previous quality assurance history:	<p>The previous NZQA EER was held in 2014 – NZQA was Highly Confident in NZLC’s educational performance and in its capability in self-assessment. The EER report contained the following recommendation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘NZQA recommends that NZLC continue to closely monitor and assess the diverse range of surveys and other data gathering measures in place. NZLC will need to ensure that these measures are being utilised effectively – and are cost-efficient –

² Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults

providing useful and actionable insights, to understand where and how 'value' is being added, and ultimately for making comprehensive improvements.'

NZLC has responded well to this recommendation.

July 2017: English New Zealand Quality Assurance Audit 'To Standard' with commendations given by the auditors. English New Zealand found that:

- 'NZLC Auckland is a well-run professional school, which is clearly committed to maintaining quality and ongoing improvement. In recent times the school has expanded considerably, and is to be congratulated on achieving this growth while at the same time maintaining quality and growing its reputation.'

And that:

- 'NZLC Wellington is a professionally run school, with comprehensive systems and processes which are governed by a clear commitment to ongoing quality improvement. As with NZLC Auckland, recent growth has been managed without loss of quality provision.'

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

Three focus areas were included in this evaluation:

International students: support and wellbeing

NZQA introduced a standard focus area for all EERs of tertiary organisations that enrol international students. This focus area examines how effectively the organisation under review is discharging its pastoral care responsibilities towards its international students.

General English

This is NZLC's largest programme area which enrolls the majority of international students (75 per cent). This is also the base course from which some students choose to pathway to the academic or TESOL courses offered.

IELTS

This is an optional specialism within NZLC's General English programme focusing on preparation for the IELTS exam.

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 spent three days visiting both sites where they met with management teams, administration and student support staff, and tutors of both teaching focus areas. The evaluators reviewed an extensive range of documentation before the EER, and during the EER visit the evaluation team was provided with a range of operational and self-review documentation. The evaluators also spoke to representatives of client and stakeholder organisations and host families. The evaluation team met with students from both General English and IELTS and viewed a random selection of eight student files.

Disclaimer

The findings in this report have been reached by means of a standard evaluative process: <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers-partners/external-evaluation-and-review/policy-and-guidelines-eer/introduction/>. 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 fraud³*
- *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.*

³ 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.

Summary of Results

Statements of confidence on educational performance and capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance and **Highly Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **New Zealand Language Centres Limited trading as New Zealand Language Centres**.

As noted in their self-assessment summary, NZLC has enjoyed significant growth and development (640 students in 2017) since 2013 (300 students). The evaluators agree with English New Zealand that the recent growth has been managed with no loss of quality provision across both the Auckland and Wellington sites. NZLC is clearly committed to maintaining quality and continuous improvement.

NZLC has a systematic and purposeful whole-of-organisation approach to maximising educational performance, and staff are wholly supportive and involved in this. As found in the previous EER in 2013, a significant cross-organisational effort is made to ensure that valid, high-quality analysis and reporting of performance information is captured to gain a clear understanding of achievement and outcomes.

The governance and management team are insightful and constantly strive to understand and improve student achievement and valued outcomes through effective self-evaluation. NZLC has a clear organisational purpose informed by data-driven self-reflection directed towards coherent and clearly articulated goals.

The governance and management of NZLC has an in-depth understanding of the relevant and important quality and compliance requirements that inform their processes. Key internal processes are robust and effective, and the most important needs of students and other key stakeholders are consistently being met over time.

High numbers of students surveyed by NZLC report that studying at NZLC has improved their English, increased their confidence in communicating in English, and improved their language learning skills. Educational pathway providers also reported useful and meaningful valued outcomes for themselves and students as a result of the relationship with NZLC.

Staff are highly valued and the organisation has invested in activities to assist staff to develop with relevant and effective professional development. All staff are constantly focused on the reliability of their teaching and support tools and work to improve them with the full support of management.

Regular feedback is collected from students, teachers, homestay providers and agents. This self-assessment information is effectively used to inform specific actions that bring about improved performance.

Examples of responding to needs and efficiencies as a result of robust self-assessment activities, where the outcomes are used to identify areas for improvement and inform priority development areas, include:

- Increased use of up-to-date technology to assist teaching
- Afternoon classes for General English reshaped to ensure efficiencies of learning outcomes
- Formation of the NZLC Proficiency Scale to alleviate variance in placement testing
- Increased support for students with goals of further study after NZLC observed this as a more prevalent pathway than employment among exam class students
- Immediate follow-up with students who express dissatisfaction to ensure concerns are investigated and addressed.

There was evidence throughout the EER that the many tools and evaluation processes are aligned to the mission statement, strategic goals and the NZQA Tertiary Education Indicators. NZLC uses these tools and processes efficiently and effectively to measure, monitor and understand its educational performance.

NZLC has purposeful, comprehensive and effective self-assessment processes in place which evaluate all the key areas relevant to educational performance. Therefore, NZQA is highly confident in NZLC's educational performance and capability in self-assessment.

Findings⁴

1.1 How well do students 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**.

Students at NZLC achieve excellent results in both General English and IELTS as evidenced by the careful tracking of improvement in test scores against class and longer-term averages and by progression through the levels of proficiency. Robust assessment processes are used to assess progression, and students succeed well in international proficiency exams.

Two cohort studies carried out by NZLC in 2017 sought a better understanding of rates of improvement in IELTS and Cambridge courses. These studies aim to provide prospective exam course students with more concrete, specific and accurate guidance on how long students will need to study to achieve their proficiency goals. The Cambridge study also highlighted a particular cohort (students from two particular nationalities) who progressed more slowly than others. Additional support in the form of a prioritised referral system has subsequently been put in place for these students to ensure their progress.

NZLC tracks pass rates (as noted above) and students who do not move up a level are analysed by cohort. Any long-term trends are noted in the academic department's quarterly reports, and the results of this analysis are fed into annual departmental goals. Teachers are informed about the test results of repeat students, along with a reminder of the language systems and skills they need to prioritise. Progress reports are regularly sent to parents of students under 18 years of age.

Since the last EER, NZLC has introduced new reading/vocabulary/grammar, writing and speaking proficiency/placement tests. Performance data for placement tests had shown significant variance in individual student performance on different components of the tests. The new tests were trialled, revised and benchmarked against the CEFR⁵ and implemented in 2016. NZLC has since found a reduction in the variance in individual student performance on the tests.

⁴ The findings in this report are derived using a standard process and are based on a targeted sample of the organisation's activities.

⁵ Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

More accurately assessing General English student proficiency on placement and their progress in the week 5 and 9 tests led to the formation of the NZLC Proficiency Scale. The scale (analogous to the Cambridge Scale) uses the results of internal proficiency tests benchmarked against the CEFR (and each other) to plot students' progress over the course of their enrolment. This has the benefit of enabling NZLC to track students' progress even when they do not move up to the next CEFR level after 10 weeks of full-time study, and gives students at graduation a clearer picture of the value of studying at NZLC.

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

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**.

Comprehensive evidence of valued outcomes – where useful and meaningful English proficiency skills and knowledge are gained – is gathered and analysed by NZLC from feedback from students and pathway providers.

Further evidence of value exists in qualitative data which shows that former students of IELTS preparation courses are successfully using the knowledge and skills they gained to study in higher education in New Zealand and overseas. This information is tracked, and 96 per cent of students whose main goal was employment report that studying at NZLC has helped them achieve their goal or that they believe it will do so in the future.

NZLC gathers and analyses information from students at graduation, and an average of 20 per cent of students one year after they graduate. Eighty-eight per cent of 2015 graduates and 82 per cent of 2016 graduates whose main goal related to further study reported that studying at NZLC helped them to achieve this goal. The 2016 graduate survey also shows that 12 months following study 49 per cent are working and 37 per cent are in further study.

NZLC notes that for the 2016/2017 years an increasing proportion of students have chosen the goal of moving to further study. In response, the PTE has put in place relevant learning areas to assist a smooth transition to further study. NZLC has also established a number of external pathway agreements allowing direct entry to a range of institutions to support the goal of further study. The PTE also recently created a 'pathways' role within the student services team to maintain relationships with other education providers and advise students of pathway options. NZLC is planning a survey of these education providers to better inform its understanding of what learners need to succeed in their pathway courses.

Sixty-five per cent of graduates report using English regularly 12 months after graduation, and nearly 100 per cent report using English at least occasionally. This shows the long-term value of the students' investment in their English language proficiency at NZLC.

Students are proud of their learning and say they are able to use the English language to a proficient level within their respective classes. They gain confidence in their ability to mix with different cultures because they can use a common language. There is frequent interaction with the surrounding community, which is organised and monitored by NZLC.

The two agents interviewed during the EER indicated high satisfaction with their relationship with NZLC and the positive reputation of the school. Homestay providers interviewed said they were satisfied with and received excellent information from NZLC about their role and the accommodation provided.

NZLC provided many examples of effective self-assessment to improve student outcomes with the integration of online learning, the new more structured afternoon curriculum, the timing of assessments, and the updated teaching resources.

The NZQA evaluators' single recommendation in 2013 was for NZLC to further understand the value of outcomes for students and how best to use the data collected to prioritise and evaluate the impact of the changes made. NZLC has taken considerable steps to further develop their evaluation and self-assessment to meet this requirement.

NZLC collects and analyses achievement data to provide useful information for future students' programmes of study and support. The resulting data demonstrates the long-term benefits the NZLC courses provide to all graduates.

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

The students are fully engaged in their learning, and student feedback states that the programme outcomes meet the needs of the students. Students are supported in formulating study plans, including progression through General English levels, exam classes and pathways to partner institutions. Effective assessment identifies gaps in students' understanding and abilities as well as what they already know and can do. NZLC targets learning activities to address these gaps and build on existing knowledge, skills and attributes.

NZLC provides a range of English language courses to cater to diverse interests and needs, with different timetables and course combinations available. The two most popular programmes are the General English and IELTS. NZLC notes that these two programmes have the same principal aim: to provide teachers with greater structure and support in the form of clearly defined language and skills aims, prescribed materials and suggested timetables. After highlighting common processes and challenges within each and researching ways to overcome them, NZLC has introduced new curricula for both General English and IELTS, with the emphasis on coherence and consistency. Teacher time is now more focused, and feedback from students notes better consistency of teaching.

Student intakes are well planned, with classes structured to ensure students engage and learn with students from different nationalities. With the new placement test, NZLC found reduced variance in individual student performance on different components of the test.

Resources are current and relevant, new textbooks are introduced as they are updated regularly, and exam courses are updated to reflect changes in exam format and content, and emergent learner needs. Computers and wireless internet support students' learning. An online component to the CELTA course in 2016 was developed, trialled, revised and implemented in 2016, including access to CELTA pre-course and on-course materials and a language awareness course.

Programme design and delivery (including learning activities and assessment tasks) align with the intended learning and graduate profile outcomes, which allows students to reflect on their progress. This enhances their engagement which then strengthens their motivation to learn. Evidence that these systems are working is shown in language acquisition and learner satisfaction with their progress.

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

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 governance group has prioritised student support across all aspects of students' learning. This decision was made in response to the rapid and extensive growth in student numbers over the past three years. The aim is to ensure that student safety and the resourcing of student support remain an intrinsic part of the learning culture at NZLC. This is evident across both sites as follows:

- Regular checking of student progress and goals.
- Comprehensive feedback given by teachers – with extra help and support offered if needed.

- Comprehensive support offered to students when grades either drop or plateau during the 10-week course.
- A one-hour after-school Study Support service timetabled at the end of each day for exam preparation students.
- A process to gauge how much longer the student may need to complete a course or may need before having the required level of proficiency to start a course.
- A process for dealing with complaints about classes and/or teachers – responses include class observations, which ensure quick assessment and resolution of the problem.
- Revision of the pre-departure manual and introduction of an accompanying animated video in eight languages to ensure good understanding of NZLC and its purpose.
- Revision of the Young Learner manual and orientation to ensure clarity and to meet the needs of young learners specifically.
- Appointment of an advisor and senior teacher for young learners to promote better communication between the departments and ensure young learners' welfare needs are consistently identified and better met.
- Improved guidance to teachers on raising concerns around students' welfare, and clarification of procedures to follow when responding to issues identified by staff and students.
- External training for academic and student services staff on recognising and supporting homesick or upset students.
- Introduction of a full-day (previously half-day) orientation to allow more time to meet students' needs and address any concerns on their first day.
- A new afternoon curriculum which better addresses learners' long-term language learning goals.
- Exam preparation courses with additional Study Support services to ensure the needs of learners with proficiency exam goals are met.

NZLC has worked purposefully to get good student responses to their progress surveys, and follow up with students who express dissatisfaction. This means NZLC can learn from the small number of students who believe they have not made progress. For example, feedback from a recent graduate on the exams preparation course highlighted the importance of learner training around effective exam preparation (as opposed to exam practice).

NZLC could benefit from improving its communications to students about the use of relief teachers and changes to timetabled content.

1.5 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**.

NZLC directors have set a clear vision and mission and align the strategic and operational goals around these. They have a systematic and purposeful whole-of-organisation (and site) approach to maximising educational performance and managing growth. Activities and improvements are purposeful and careful consideration is given to effective process improvement. This is driven by a solid evidence base using the PTE's own research.

An example of this was the formation of a new mission statement early in 2016, following an organisation-wide consultation across both campuses, which gave clear direction informed by self-review and significant data collection and analysis.

The evaluators saw evidence of a collective sense of the NZLC mission as an organisation and how each individual role contributed to it. Evidence includes:

- The ease with which staff at all levels of the organisation made links between the work they do and the mission statement.
- The development of strategic and departmental-level frameworks and goal formulation tools that link NZLC goals to the mission statement and NZQA's outcome and process-level tertiary evaluation indicators.
- The introduction of a quarterly reporting structure based on a cross-campus departmental model which ensures that insights gained from surveys and other feedback inform departmental and strategic-level decision-making.
- Support with professional development for teachers – intentional and unplanned, e.g. internal and external professional development workshops and sending staff on overseas marketing trips.
- Ensuring staff feel valued and putting in place activities to show this, e.g. group health insurance cover, recognition, use of their input into TEO decisions.

As noted, NZLC directors have been proactive in managing the growth in student numbers. This has required complex change in the organisational structure which included:

- Doubling permanent administration and academic staff (not counting teaching staff)
- Increased and updated facilities and quality systems
- Strategic appointments:

- Academic director to manage academic departments
- Exams manager to manage the exams department including analysing the results of exam preparation courses
- Evaluations manager to further develop systems of self-assessment and review
- Coordinator, senior teacher and assistant academic roles to ensure students and teachers are fully supported
- Extra student services and accommodation staff
- New office manager.

The growth in students and staff has provided opportunities for investment in research and development, which has resulted in increased expertise and contribution to the wider community.

Training and professional development for staff has remained a priority. Examples include the training of a second permanent Cambridge CELTA teacher trainer in-house as well as several academic staff supported towards completing their DELTA.⁶ Staff have also attended training sessions around the Code of Practice, student welfare, Lifeline, and evaluation and review.

Recently, NZLC won the ST Star Awards English Language School Southern Hemisphere for the fourth year running. The Star Awards demonstrate the confidence of agents in NZLC. The awards are an international award in the English language field, and votes come from overseas partners and other providers, suggesting that these organisations recognise NZLC's ability to deliver on educational performance.

1.6 How effectively are important compliance accountabilities managed?

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**.

NZLC has a clear understanding of its compliance accountabilities and manages these effectively and proactively to ensure obligations are met. Relevant staff have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and take all reasonable steps to meet their important compliance and wider legal and ethical responsibilities.

A comprehensive self-review undertaken in response to the introduction of the revised Code of Practice and its outcomes focus showed that NZLC is compliant

⁶ Diploma in English Language Teaching to Adults

with relevant regulations and that the intended outcomes from the Code of Practice are being met. Key staff undertake external professional development on the implications of the outcomes focus of the revised code.

NZQA attestations and returns have been met within required timeframes, and the evaluation team saw evidence of robust and regular internal audits against English New Zealand standards and the Code of Practice. Attendance reviews are also a regular occurrence. Regular programme reviews show the courses are being consistently delivered in accordance with NZQA approvals. The organisation supplied the evaluators with a detailed risk management plan for both sites for all key operations.

As required by Immigration New Zealand and NZQA, scrutiny of agents is sound and the administration of entry, enrolment and attendance is fairly applied with warnings and sanctions delivered when student attendance wavers.

Random samples of student files selected and checked during this EER revealed that all necessary information on each student was accurate and readily accessible. This included pre-entry guidance and verification of entry criteria, including English test scores, timely insurance and visas.

Focus Areas

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

2.1 Focus area: International students: support and wellbeing

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: General English

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

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

2.3 Focus area: IELTS

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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