

Report of External Evaluation and Review

The Whanganui Learning Centre Trust

Highly Confident in educational performance

Highly Confident in capability in self-assessment

Date of report: 30 August 2011

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MoE Number: 7956
NZQA Reference: C05130
Date of EER visit: 3 August 2011

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:	232 Wicksteed Street, Wanganui
Type:	Private training establishment
First registered:	2010
Number of students:	390 domestic students in 2010
Number of staff:	Six full-time tutorial staff, two administration staff
Scope of active accreditation:	Foundation programmes in literacy, numeracy, computer and digital technology, and workplace literacy.
Sites:	One as above
Distinctive characteristics:	The Whanganui Learning Centre Trust's mission statement is: "to provide effective and holistic learning services which enable adults to participate confidently in their communities". It is a community organisation and a foundation skills training provider which specialises in delivering services that meet the needs of the local community. Literacy services include literacy learning programmes and educational counselling for students. The trust works with individuals who have identified a need to develop their literacy and numeracy skills. Tuition is provided in both one-to-one and group situations. The organisation also works with local businesses, schools, government departments, and other community organisations to support the business goals and needs of staff, clients, students, whānau, and/or target groups. Literacy programmes are designed to meet the

assessed literacy needs of each learner and tuition is provided contextually to achieve the negotiated learning goals.

Recent significant changes: The Whanganui Learning Centre Trust (WLCT) was formerly Literacy Aotearoa Whanganui. WLCT is a charitable trust first registered with NZQA in June 2010. It reports to and receives funding from the national parent body, Literacy Aotearoa. In 2010 a separation between the Whanganui Learning Centre Trust and Wicksteed Community Trust was formalised with WLCT responsible for educational matters and Wicksteed Community Trust responsible for legal and financial issues. At the time of the evaluation visit, WLCT was in a process of change management after an extensive review of its services.

Previous quality assurance history: An NZQA risk monitoring visit in December 2010 reported that WLCT met all requirements.

2. Scope of external evaluation and review

The focus areas selected were: governance, management, and strategy, and the foundation programmes of Computer Technology and Learning Literacy. These represent the core business of WLCT.

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 EER team comprised one lead evaluator and one external evaluator and was held over two days on site at Whanganui. The evaluation team spoke to the manager, the cultural liaison and research and innovation officer, staff, students, graduates, the board of trustees, the local advisory group, and external stakeholders. The team also reviewed a range of documentation from the organisation, including self-assessment documents and the strategic plan.

The Whanganui Learning Centre Trust will have an opportunity to comment on the accuracy of this report, and any submissions received will be fully considered by NZQA before finalising the report.

Summary of Results

Statement of confidence on educational performance

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the educational performance of **The Whanganui Learning Centre Trust**.

- WLCT governance, management, and staff adhere to a shared philosophy and “strengths-based” model that focuses on what learners can do, rather than a deficit model that focuses on what they cannot do. Improving learner outcomes for the Whanganui community is the reason for the trust’s existence.
- Learners meet Tertiary Education Commission benchmarks and make measurable progress in literacy, language and numeracy.
- Learners acquire skills in computer technology through two programmes: Stepping Up and Computers in Homes. Since 2009, over 700 learners have completed the Stepping Up programme, a free community-based computer and internet training programme.
- WLCT has also partnered with Computers in Homes since 2010. Since then, 60 families, whānau, and fanau have participated in six classes. The partnership is successful because of the strong connection WLCT has with low-income families, the target client group of Computers in Homes.
- A positive and non-judgemental regard for all learners, irrespective of their backgrounds and abilities, small class sizes to ensure individual attention, and modelling of effective communication by staff has resulted in learners developing their cognitive abilities, including self-management, learning to learn skills, and awareness of themselves as learners.
- WLCT staff are well qualified academically, including having qualifications in adult education. They are active in research, highly collaborative, collegial, have lots of energy, and enjoy robust conversations about teaching and learning. The organisation supports staff with professional development opportunities and fosters a lively learning environment where teachers are supported and recognised as vital to ensuring learner engagement and progress.
- Learners achieve well beyond their expectations at WLCT because the organisation has created a genuine learning environment where learners feel safe and are treated with dignity, and where staff are discreet, passionate, and committed to “making a positive difference” for their learners.

Statement of confidence on capability in self-assessment

NZQA is **Highly Confident** in the capability in self-assessment of **The Whanganui Learning Centre Trust**.

- WLCT is an organisation that has used self-assessment to understand its educational performance over several years. It does this formally through regular learner and stakeholder surveys and informally as part of its day-to-day interactions within the organisation and in the wider community.
- Self-assessment processes, such as learner satisfaction ratings of their programmes and electronic records of progress, are used to review the quality of the learner experience at WLCT. These processes are used alongside qualitative data sources such as learner reflections on their own progress, case studies, and journals, to gauge how well learners have improved their well-being and enhanced their abilities and skills.
- The organisation has a history and been proactive in building its research capability by linking with relevant external educational organisations, for example, Ako Aotearoa and Massey University.
- WLCT has developed a competency-based board and local advisory group to ensure the organisation is meeting current community needs and is responsive to emerging community needs. Both these bodies are very engaged and motivated about the trust's work and future possibilities.
- WLCT has an integrated model of academic and pastoral support resulting from its understanding of the relationship between personal well-being and academic performance. Self-assessment is thorough and across all levels of staff. There is systematic collection of data, reporting of conclusions, and reviews of any actions taken in a cycle of ongoing improvement. The evaluation team was impressed by the success of the strengths-based model that informs the organisation's approach, and by the ongoing review of this model to ensure it continues to meet learner needs well.

TEO response

To be completed by the lead evaluator when the draft has been accepted by the TEO.

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**.

Learners who enrol at WLCT may not have succeeded in previous learning environments and are often anxious about learning. However, the evaluation team noted that WLCT has the staffing, knowledge, and passion required to facilitate these learners to genuinely engage with learning. The result is that individuals acquire useful and meaningful skills and knowledge, including awareness of themselves as learners. These changes occur as a result of the holistic approach WLCT adopts with people. This approach involves “walking alongside” the learner to facilitate a process where individuals gain insight into their lives and their learning journey to this point.

The key factor influencing learner achievement at WLCT is the strengths-based approach. This approach works by building constructive relationships between staff and students, students and students, and staff and staff. Learners interviewed by the evaluation team described the progress they had made as a result of being valued and affirmed by others, sometimes for the first time in their lives. This positive and non-judgemental regard for all learners, irrespective of their backgrounds and abilities, and modelling of effective communication has resulted in learners developing their cognitive abilities, including self-management and learning to learn skills.

Learners develop individual learning plans in collaboration with their tutors. They also self-assess by recording their progress, and how they feel about their progress, daily in a diary. This helps learners to know what they know, know what they don't know, and then decide what they need to do next, encouraging them to progressively take responsibility for their own learning. This might involve developing musical skills, learning how to drive, or learning ways to keep learning. A good example of the latter was a student who had increased their vocabulary as a result of being able to understand how to use a dictionary as a tool.

WLCT consistently meets and improves learner outcomes on an ongoing basis. The WLCT database sighted by the evaluation team showed considerable learner progress across learners and over time. The organisation reports learner outcomes for literacy and numeracy every month to the parent body, Literacy Aotearoa.

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

Learners acquire skills in computer technology through two programmes, Stepping Up and Computers in Homes. Since 2009, over 700 learners have completed the Stepping Up programme, a free community-based computer and internet training programme. WLCT has also partnered with Computers in Homes since 2010. Since then, 60 families, whānau, and fanau have participated in six classes. The partnership is successful because of the strong connection WLCT has with low-income families, the target client group of Computers in Homes.

The coordinator of both these programmes said the success of Stepping Up and Computers in Homes was due to several factors: WLCT's attention to meeting learner targets and contractual obligations; providing reports and evaluations of learner participation; the high quality delivery of the programmes; the excellent training facilities and resources; and the competency of WLCT management and staff who strive to ensure the best possible outcomes are achieved for the learners. An example of excellent outcomes is the four computing technology students who have gone on to do a computer graphics degree. Other evidence of learner achievement sighted by the evaluation team was in the form of case studies where a learner's progress was written as a story, incorporating written or pictorial excerpts from the learners themselves.

Learners achieve well beyond their expectations at WLCT because the organisation has created a genuine learning environment where learners feel safe and are treated with dignity, and where staff are discreet, passionate, and committed to "making a positive difference" for their learners. Self-assessment processes, such as student satisfaction ratings of the programmes and electronic records of progress, are used to review the quality of the student experience at WLCT. These are used alongside qualitative data sources such as student reflections on their own progress, case studies, and journals to gauge how well learners have improved their well-being and enhanced their abilities and skills.

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**.

WLCT's approach works well because it is based on meeting the needs of the community and what the community values. The board and the local advisory group are representative of the community and share the same philosophy and approach as WLCT. The evaluation team was impressed by the commitment, passion, and appreciation shown by both these groups for the learner results achieved by WLCT.

The greatest value for learners is the opportunity WLCT provides to make life changes that will enable them to learn and plan a career, often for the first time in their lives. This happens because WLCT believes in people's ability to transform

their lives. The approach encourages self-awareness and self-reflection in an atmosphere of acceptance of all people, irrespective of their past lives. The evaluation team spoke to many learners with a range of backgrounds, including drug and alcohol abuse, histories of violent relationships, and long-term mental health issues who now have goals for their future learning. For example, one woman had gone on to meet her goal of enrolling at a polytechnic to pursue her nursing training. Learners spoke of the personal change that is possible when respect, acceptance, and regard for them as individuals combine with a stimulating learning environment and positive staff role models.

Many life-changing case histories were sighted by the evaluation team. Learners described being able to help their children with their school work for the first time, and how proud this made them and their children feel. They spoke of how important it was for them to guide their children to find a way of life different to the one they chose – a way with more options than alcohol, drugs, and gang life. Learners described how breaking the cycle of abuse and violence was now a possibility for their families because they themselves understood the reasons why they had made these life choices.

Ongoing, daily self-assessment is “business as usual” for WLCT staff, students, the board, and local advisory group members. WLCT nurtures a close-knit group of people who are committed to the learner as their primary focus and point of reference for any discussion and actions to be taken. All key stakeholders spoken to, including representatives from government agencies who refer people to WLCT, recognised the value the organisation adds to students, staff, and the wider Whanganui 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**.

WLCT retains its relevance to learners because it is a highly responsive and politically aware organisation. This is evident in the welcoming response to individuals who visit its premises, in its links to community initiatives, and in its understanding of changing government policy and direction. To maintain this responsiveness it is necessary for the organisation to engage with the strengths of people, both within WLCT and in the wider community. In this way, genuine community development can occur.

An example of this engagement is WLCT’s recognition of the need to train more Māori tutors to build capacity and provide positive role models for Māori youth. Another example is a plan to work with a local marae where the marae will use WLCT’s accreditation to deliver computing programmes. WLCT will provide the structure of the programmes and the marae will supply the premises and the

learners. The marae is a familiar, welcoming environment which attracts mixed-age groups. It is hoped that these groups will help each other in their study. WLCT is also committed to preparing its learners with digital, numeracy and literacy, and language skills to prepare them for the workplace. It recognises that the nature of work has changed and that manual labouring jobs have been replaced by technological work. Many learners come to WLCT with no formal school qualifications. This means that the organisation needs to fill this learning gap. All stakeholders, including the learners, agreed that a learner cannot learn anything if their self-esteem is low and they feel worthless. Therefore, learning can only begin once self-esteem issues are resolved.

WLCT is an organisation that has used self-assessment to understand its educational performance over several years. It does this formally through regular learner and stakeholder surveys and informally as part of its day-to-day interactions inside the organisation and in the wider community. WLCT is only involved where it can “make a difference for learners”. It monitors this progress on an ongoing basis by analysing a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to identify trends.

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**.

WLCT has small class sizes to ensure individual attention can be given to all learners. Many learners have had poor experiences in formal education and have formed a negative opinion of their abilities. All learners who spoke to the evaluation team said that their progress was directly attributable to the personal qualities of the teachers and the effectiveness of their teaching. They described the teachers as inspiring, empathic, caring, kind, cheerful, considerate of their individual circumstances, and endlessly patient. Learners said the teachers acknowledged their individual differences, including their different learning styles. They also said that the teachers never seemed to get tired of explaining a teaching point to them, provided one-to-one assistance and attention, and encouraged the learners to ask lots of questions until they understood the point.

Learners keep a daily diary where they record what they have learnt and how they felt about the day. They are also asked to identify what they might need to learn next, which provides continuity to the next day’s learning. This commitment to reflective practice is part of the fabric of WLCT, with teachers also using journals to identify possible professional development needs and to track their overall teaching practice. Staff work well together, modelling the strengths-based philosophy with each other.

The evaluation team noted that the staff were highly collaborative, collegial, had lots of energy, and enjoyed robust conversations about teaching and learning. WLCT employs and retains high-quality teachers. The staff are well qualified

academically, including holding qualifications in adult education, and are active in research, with many writing for educational journals. Staff interviewed said there are regular observations of each other's teaching by their peers and by management. Teachers viewed ongoing feedback from learners as vital to informing their practice and to ensuring that their teaching was "making a difference" where it mattered.

The evaluation team saw evidence of sound internal and external moderation processes and procedures. In addition, some internal benchmarking is occurring between tutors from WLCT and Literacy Aotearoa Wellington, focussing on the possible reasons for different learner outcomes. Another initiative to support the academic staff is the contracting in of a highly experienced educator who meets with staff fortnightly to discuss their practice.

The organisation has been proactive in building its research capability by linking with relevant external educational organisations, for example Ako Aotearoa. It has negotiated a project with Ako Aotearoa to carry out some long-term tracking of student outcomes. WLCT fosters a lively learning environment where teachers are supported and recognised as vital to ensuring learner engagement and progress.

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**.

WLCT has created a friendly, welcoming front office. It understands that it is difficult for many people to summon the courage to visit the organisation and that it needs to be responsive and helpful to enquirers. Once enrolled, learners are well supported, with access to counselling and other pastoral support if required. This approach fits in with the recognition that learning will not happen if personal issues predominate and that once personal issues are in balance, learning can occur. WLCT also supports learners by regular daily follow-up if they are absent without a reason. This is used in combination with a trusting and flexible approach to attendance where notification of absence is made. A member of staff will visit the family of a student if absence becomes an issue. The organisation has a complaints process and has received only one formal complaint over the last four years. Because tutors and learners have good rapport, any issues that arise are dealt with promptly by the learner's tutor.

WLCT is held in high regard by former graduates. Learners repeatedly said, "this place has saved me". One way learners show their gratitude is by coming back to the organisation as volunteers to support and encourage other learners. One volunteer said that her life had changed for the better because of her involvement with WLCT and that she had volunteered because she wanted to return some of this benefit to others. Other guidance and support comes from a women's group for female students which meets outside formal class time. Women interviewed

said that the group was very valuable as it provided them with extra support around personal and work issues.

WLCT has an integrated model of academic and pastoral support, resulting from its understanding of the relationship between personal well-being and academic performance. The evaluation team was impressed by the success of the strengths-based model that informs the organisation's approach to guidance and support, and by the ongoing review of this model to ensure it continues to meet the learners' needs well.

1.6 How effective are governance and management in supporting educational achievement?

The rating for performance in relation to this key evaluation question is **Excellent**.

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

Governance and management at WLCT are highly effective and centred around supporting learner achievement. The organisation regards learning as a basic human right. Governance supports learner achievement by understanding the needs of the community, formally through the board and local advisory group and informally through the well-developed networks of contacts at regional and national levels, including local marae, the Accident Compensation Corporation, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Social Development. The manager of WLCT is also on the advisory committee of the Universal College of Learning.

The organisation has a strategic plan (2010-2015) which drives the business. This plan is monitored by a strategy working party whose membership covers the range of initiatives outlined in the plan. WLCT has comprehensive support from across the wider Whanganui community, including local benefactors and families who contribute to the organisation. However, WLCT would like to develop new funding streams (other than the traditional funding streams, for example the Tertiary Education Commission funding accessed through Literacy Aotearoa) to maximise the impact it can make locally. The organisation also wants to incorporate capacity-building by developing courses to, for example train Māori tutors, at present under-represented among the tutorial staff. WLCT believes that a "whole-of-community solution", where education, health, and justice work together as wrap-around government services, would be an effective way to work collectively with the community to improve learner outcomes.

WLCT uses research and evaluation to inform practice. The focus is on action research where the results can inform a deepening understanding of the issues and the range of possible responses. The organisation also uses the Whanganui Volunteer Centre to provide learners with work experience and to expose them to different ways they can contribute. This enables learners to help and learn at the same time.

WLCT is an organisation that has inspired leadership. This leadership is evident among the staff group also. Their shared philosophy provides an integrated, comprehensive, and systematic approach to monitoring learner progress, redesigning learning programmes, and targeting appropriate interventions. Self-assessment is thorough and across all levels of the staff. There is systematic collection of data, reporting of conclusions, and reviews of any actions taken in a cycle of ongoing improvement.

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: Foundation programmes

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

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 non-university TEOs continue to comply with the policies and criteria after the initial granting of approval and accreditation of courses 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 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-eeer/introduction/>*

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