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External Evaluation and Review Report

Thoughtplanters Limited

Date of report: 10 November 2022

About Thoughtplanters Limited

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

Type of organisation:	Private training establishment (PTE)
Location:	352 Kingseat Road, Pukekohe, Auckland
Code of Practice signatory:	No
Number of students:	<p>In 2021, 45 learners were enrolled in the NZQA-approved training scheme; Māori 8 per cent, male 100 per cent</p> <p>In 2021, 1972 learners were enrolled in Primary Industry Training Organisation courses; Māori 13 per cent, Pasifika 2.5 per cent, male 66 per cent and female 34 per cent</p> <p>No data was available on disabled learners.</p> <p>International: nil</p>
Number of staff:	Three full-time equivalents
TEO profile:	Thoughtplanters Ltd
Last EER outcome:	NZQA was Confident in Thoughtplanters' educational performance and self-assessment at the last EER in 2018.
Scope of evaluation:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Training Scheme: Insulated tool zone vegetation control worker (Close Worker) (Level 4)• Training provided under contract to Primary ITO
MoE number:	7875
NZQA reference:	C50791
Dates of virtual EER enquiry:	30 and 31 August 2022

Summary of results

Thoughtplanters' extensive industry experience and training expertise leads to highly valued outcomes for all stakeholders. Self-assessment practices are effectively informing improvements.

Highly Confident in educational performance

- Outcomes are highly valued by stakeholders, contributing to tree care and the tree industry in New Zealand and internationally.
- Learners complete courses, achieve unit standards, gain and renew licences, enhance safety practices, and improve their communication skills and teamwork.
- Courses are relevant, incorporate practical application of knowledge and skills, and are kept up to date with industry standards and regulations relating to trees and power lines.

Confident in capability in self-assessment

- Trainers who are actively working in the industry share their expertise, facilitate engaging learning experiences, and support learners to complete.
- Assessment and moderation practices have been strengthened. Input from an external moderation consultant, redeveloped assessments and marking schedules, professional development, and clarifying expectations of evidence collection have contributed to this.
- Thoughtplanters has a clear purpose and is well governed and managed. The appointment of a general manager has strengthened the management structure and enhanced systems, communications and academic leadership. Important compliance accountabilities are generally well understood and managed.
- Self-assessment and reflective practices are inherent in the operations of this small business, and are leading to improvements in training and resources. There are opportunities for further formalisation and documenting of data and stories of the value of outcomes.

Key evaluation question findings¹

1.1 How well do students achieve?

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

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Good
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Of the 459 learners enrolled over 2018-21, 446 successfully completed the Close Worker training scheme. This high achievement rate (97 per cent) meets Thoughtplanters' expectations that everyone will complete if they actively participate and complete the assessment. Quality training and facilitation, close monitoring of the learning, and providing learners with the opportunity to complete assessments after the course contribute to these excellent results.</p> <p>Learners need to gain and maintain the required skills and licences to retain their employment and work in high-risk environments, which also creates motivation to complete.</p> <p>Achievement of transferable skills, including communication and teamwork are valued by the learners, assisting them at work and in their personal lives. Completion of the course increases the likelihood of higher remuneration and enhances careers, such as progressing to a team lead role. Employers also participate in the course to maintain their skills and currency. They value the availability of this training as it contributes towards attracting and retaining staff, maintaining safe work practices, and strengthening proposals for new contracts.</p> <p>Training provided under contract to Primary ITO focuses on arboriculture skills within the horticulture and landscaping industries. Over the period 2018-22, 4783 learners completed their courses, with 418 (8 per cent) not achieving or not submitting their assessments. This performance is rated highly by the contractual partner. Through working closely with Primary ITO regional coordinators and field staff, Thoughtplanters follows up on engagement and outstanding</p>

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

	<p>assessments. The recent introduction of an extra fee for late submissions is intended to encourage completions within the deadlines.</p> <p>Thoughtplanters' directors and owners add value to the arboriculture industry through their membership and leadership roles in national and international bodies and associations. They are well respected and acknowledged for their commitment to high standards and supporting the industry.</p> <p>Achievement data, including that for Māori and Pasifika learners, is collected and collated. Some improvements have been made based on the findings. Feedback and stories of the value Thoughtplanters provides were shared with the evaluators. Recording systems are currently being implemented, and ideas for sharing their value-add with stakeholders are considered by management.</p>
Conclusion:	Learners complete courses, achieve unit standards, gain and renew licences, enhance safety practices, and improve their communication skills and teamwork. Thoughtplanters' contribution to the arboriculture industry and training outcomes is highly valued by all stakeholders. There are opportunities to continue to strengthen self-assessment processes and practices.

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

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Excellent
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>The training scheme and short courses are purposefully designed to meet compliance requirements and to develop arborists' skills and knowledge. Thoughtplanters' directors and tutors regularly participate in industry reviews and contribute to unit standard writing and peer reviewing of minimum industry standards. These activities contribute to their knowledge currency and the development of teaching resources and assessment materials.</p> <p>Courses and resources are regularly reviewed and updated. Regular newsletters include assessment 'reminders and tips'. The Close Worker refresher course is annually updated to avoid</p>

	<p>repetition and to provide interest for learners. Feedback is provided to Primary ITO's product team, and there is a responsive approach taken to updating resources and assessments.</p> <p>Post-course evaluations are consistently positive. The majority of learners rate their satisfaction with the planning and preparation, delivery, teaching strategies and tutor knowledge, attitudes and values as 'strongly agree' on a five-point scale. These ratings confirm that learners' needs are being well met and that course delivery is aligned to expectations.</p> <p>Student feedback forms are reviewed by tutors and management, and suggestions followed up. Interviews confirmed that tutors assess their teaching and continually seek ways to improve and meet the learning needs of the learners.</p> <p>ITO moderation results for 2019-21 have consistently been positive.² Thoughtplanters was deemed compliant overall in moderation following a Primary ITO on-site moderation visit in April 2021.</p> <p>NZQA national external moderation results in 2021 showed that Thoughtplanters' learner samples and some of Primary ITO's assessments did not all meet the standard in core skills and communication skills systems. Thoughtplanters submitted an action plan to NZQA, although this was not required, and has been implementing the plan with the support of an external consultant. They have strengthened internal moderation, provided professional development and regular tutor discussions on moderation, and clarified what constitutes 'defendable evidence' with tutors.</p>
<p>Conclusion:</p>	<p>Courses are relevant, incorporate practical application of knowledge and skills, and are kept up to date with industry standards and regulations relating to trees and power lines. Evidence collection practices and internal moderation systems are being strengthened.</p>

1.4 How effectively are students supported and involved in their

² Connexis 2020, 70 per cent satisfactory, and 2021, 100 per cent satisfactory, with all five samples meeting the standard; Competenz 2019, 100 per cent satisfactory (two units), Competenz 2021, 100 per cent satisfactory (two units); Primary ITO 2021, 75 per cent satisfactory (six units).

learning?

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Excellent
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Tutors understand their learners' needs and aspirations well. The ITOs provide Thoughtplanters with information about learners' specific needs and literacy and numeracy levels prior to course commencement. This flow of information is now more useful and timely, with regular and structured communications between the parties, led by the general manager.</p> <p>Learners are provided with comprehensive support by Thoughtplanters' tutors and ITO training advisors, such as reader-writer support where required, to support engagement in learning and successful completion of the assessments.</p> <p>Interviews with learners confirmed that the experienced tutors create inclusive learning environments, are sensitive and respectful of individuals, and use a variety of teaching strategies to meet the learners' needs. Learners value the tutors' expertise and knowledge in the arboriculture field, their ability to make learning interesting and meaningful through sharing real-life experiences, and the encouragement they give learners to pursue their careers. Learners report that assessment feedback is helpful and consolidates their learning.</p> <p>The Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Students) Code of Practice 2021 (the Code) is well understood, and supported by Thoughtplanters in the context of short course delivery. The quality management system and policies have been reviewed against the Code outcomes. This exercise is about to be updated in respect of the new Code, and will be more formally documented prior to submitting the attestation to NZQA later this year.</p>
Conclusion:	Experienced tutors facilitate engaging learning experiences, and support learners to complete.

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

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Good
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Thoughtplanters has a clear purpose and direction. The strategic plan for 2020-25 sets out goals and next steps for the business. The directors are mindful of the changing tertiary education landscape and are mitigating risk through purposeful relationship management with clients, focusing on their niche courses and seeking out new opportunities.</p> <p>The business has expanded into Australia and Asia, offering services through training providers and delivering ‘train the trainer’ courses in some jurisdictions to support their developing arboriculture industries. This expansion has had a positive impact on Thoughtplanters’ New Zealand training operations though sourcing new resources, engaging in other quality assurance systems, and gaining learnings from other regulatory regimes such as the Australian work health and safety legislation.</p> <p>The recent appointment of a general manager has strengthened management and allowed time for the chief executive to maintain his currency in the industry. Recording systems and processes are being augmented, structured and regular engagement with ITO partners is resulting in more coordinated support for learners, and regular communications with tutors has been implemented via newsletters. Academic leadership was evidenced in the strengthening of assessment practices and more structured internal moderation processes.</p> <p>Governors, management and tutors are reflective practitioners and know their business well. Feedback from learners is reviewed and improvements are made, and stories of the value of outcomes are abundant and recalled with pride. There are opportunities to capture and use this information more effectively to further inform the training and partnerships with stakeholders.</p>
Conclusion:	Thoughtplanters has a clear purpose and is well governed and managed. The appointment of a general manager has strengthened the management structure and enhanced systems, communications and academic leadership.

1.6 How effectively are important compliance accountabilities managed?

Performance:	Good
Self-assessment:	Good
Findings and supporting evidence:	<p>Key compliance accountabilities are generally understood and overseen by the directors.</p> <p>A schedule of NZQA compliance activities guides the completion, timely reporting and submitting of attestations. Reporting to Primary ITO meets requirements.</p> <p>The self-review of the Code of pastoral care was undertaken; however, this was not documented and available for audit purposes, if requested.</p> <p>Contracts for the delivery of training services for industry training organisations³ are signed and are current. Primary ITO has recently signed a 'novation' contract with Thoughtplanters. This is intended to allow for the substitution of a new party, once Primary ITO transfers to Te Pūkenga Workbased Learning division.</p> <p>Thoughtplanters maintains trainer status with a large electricity supplier in New Zealand and has plans to gain other such approvals in line clearance training.</p>
Conclusion:	Important compliance accountabilities are generally well understood and managed.

³ Contracts with Primary ITO for 2022 and Te Pūkenga Workbased Learning Limited (trading as Connexis) for 2022.

Focus areas

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

2.1 Focus area: Training Scheme: Insulated tool zone vegetation control worker (Close Worker) (Level 4)

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Good

2.2 Focus area: Training provided under contract to Primary Industry Training Organisation

Performance:	Excellent
Self-assessment:	Good

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:

- Continue to strengthen its self-assessment systems and processes in order to add value for stakeholders and learners, including priority learners.
- Document self-review of the Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Students) Code of Practice 2021 (the Code).

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 fraud⁴*
- *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.*

⁴ 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 under 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 authorised as responsible for Part 20 of the Education Act.

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, and*
- *maintaining consent to assess against standards on the Directory of Assessment Standards for all TEOs including ITOs but excluding universities, and*
- *maintaining training scheme approval for all TEOs other than universities.*

The requirements for participation and cooperation are set through the Programme Approval and Accreditation Rules 2018, the Consent to Assess Against Standards Rules 2011 and the Training Scheme Rules 2012 respectively. These rules were also made by NZQA under section 253 of the Education Act 1989 and approved by the NZQA Board and the Minister.

In addition, the Private Training Establishment Rules 2018 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 2018 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, training schemes and consents to assess and 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). All rules cited above are available at <https://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/legislation/nzqa-rules/>, 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/>.

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