ORGANISATIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT

IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

This case study is part of a series of case studies looking at self-assessment of organisational activities in practice. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and Ako Aotearoa identified a number of tertiary education organisations (TEOs) across the country that have participated in external evaluation and review, and conducted interviews with senior staff, and considered relevant internal documentation and external reports. Each case study focused on a different way self-assessment is being used. These case studies offer examples of effective practice in a variety of settings, and illustrate self-assessment that has been done well and has led to good outcomes.

CASE STUDY

PEOPLE POTENTIAL

Self-assessment and **developing sustainable programmes**

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The following case study represents the views of People Potential, and reflects the understanding that NZQA and Ako Aotearoa drew from the interviews. NZQA and Ako Aotearoa thank People Potential staff for agreeing to take part in this work, and their openness during the interviews.

In considering the approach People Potential takes to its self-assessment, NZQA and Ako Aotearoa identified the following key themes:

Embrace change, but avoid making wholesale changes without a clear rationale; focus on incremental and systematic change.

It is important for the whole organisation to take responsibility for self-assessment practice, and management should be clear and consistent about what it expects from staff and allow flexibility for responsive self-assessment practice.

Creating an environment that supports innovative thinking is important; this means accepting that some ideas may not work out in practice, and ensuring that the organisation and staff are able to reflect on and learn from these experiences.

Meeting external requirements and measures of success put in place by funding bodies is necessary and important, but an organisation needs to consider what it is trying to achieve and develop its own way of thinking about what success means for its learners and programmes, and how this can be realised.

SELF-ASSESSMENT PERFORMANCE
IN THE TERTIARY EDUCATION SECTOR

External evaluation and review is a periodic evaluation of a TEO to provide a level of confidence (judgement) about the TEO's performance in achieving outcomes relevant to identified stakeholders and its capability to use self-assessment to improve its performance. From September 2009 to September 2013, 604 PTEs participated in 670 external evaluation and reviews.

External evaluation and review uses a systematic process to make independent judgements about educational performance and capability in self-assessment.

EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE is the extent to which the educational outcomes achieved by the PTE represent quality and value for learners and the wider community. An evaluation of educational performance involves answering questions focused primarily on the quality of learning and teaching, and the achievements of learners.

CAPABILITY IN SELF-ASSESSMENT is the extent to which the PTE systematically uses self-assessment information to understand performance and bring about improvement. It reflects the extent to which the organisation effectively manages its accountability and improvement responsibilities.

"…THE VALUE IN IT IS THAT EVERYONE THINKS ABOUT IT."

People Potential is a private training establishment (PTE) based in Whangarei with a branch in Kaikohe. Registered as a PTE in 1995, People Potential has approximately 350 learners studying in 35 courses and programmes, ranging from Youth Guarantee and training for work programmes to certificates in information technology and hairdressing.

These courses are funded from a variety of sources, including student achievement component (SAC) funding, Youth Guarantee, and the Ministry of Social Development. A large proportion of People Potential's students are 'at-risk' or 'second-chance' learners.

In its most recent external evaluation and review report (2013), People Potential received statements of *Highly Confident* in self-assessment capability and *Highly Confident* in educational performance.

People Potential began thinking about the concept of self-assessment in 2009, when it was introduced by NZQA. Prior to this, People Potential used a comprehensive Quality Management System.

Initially, self-assessment appeared to be a complicated and difficult process. For People Potential, it was a particularly challenging prospect to validate its own performance on the basis of benchmarks developed within the organisation, knowing that its external evaluation and review would not occur for another four years. People Potential had grown accustomed to aligning itself with external benchmarks and achieving good results. Given that People Potential had been successfully operating under a quality audit model, the initial driver for change was NZQA's new requirements, and not any apparent issues with how the organisation had been operating. Regardless of this, People Potential made sweeping changes to its processes to align itself with this new approach and set itself on "an adventure of self-discovery."

People Potential questioned all the activities it had previously undertaken to assure its own quality, and learning about about self-assessment. This involved accessing all materials published by NZQA, attending workshops on self-assessment and external evaluation and review, utilising the services of private consultants, and inundating itself with data about the organisation.

Prior to the introduction of self-assessment, People Potential had a system for reviewing all its programmes on an annual basis. Following an examination of its existing systems and processes for undertaking programme reviews, People Potential identified evidence gaps and instances where processes were being carried out informally. Initially, this review process would only include basic statistical data, such as the number of enrolments, completions and withdrawals. Staff collected feedback from learners and stakeholders but some reviews collected more comprehensive feedback than others. People Potential had a process for collecting feedback from stakeholders, at a fixed time each year, but had a low formal response rate and generated feedback of limited value.

People Potential soon recognised that it needed to assure itself that its programme review process was comprehensive and consistent, and based on robust data analysis and collection.

People Potential subsequently developed processes to collect as much data as possible, and thoroughly analysed and reported on it. The organisation found this, however, to be an extremely lengthy and resource-hungry process. With a plan to review a quarter of its programmes each year, over a four-year period, People Potential realised that this would entail a large amount of time, energy and paper. The organisation subsequently looked at the processes it had implemented to identify aspects that were already adding value to the organisation, and what aspects could be adding value but were not necessarily being measured or recorded.

The most common statement of confidence in self-assessment capability for PTEs is:

CONFIDENT

STATEMENTS OF CONFIDENCE IN SELF-ASSESSMENT CAPABILITY ACROSS ALL TEOs†

Legend: Not Confident · Not Yet Confident · Confident · Highly Confident
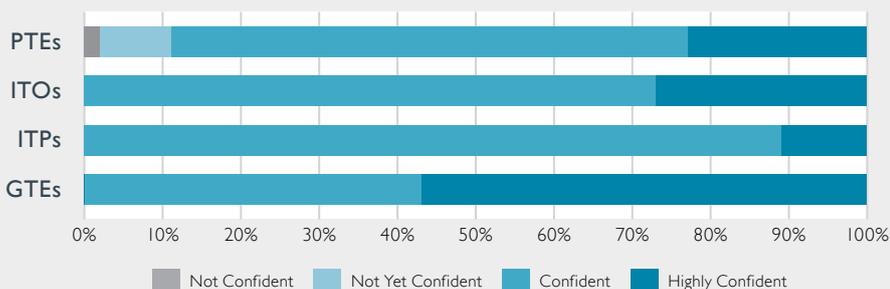
† One wānanga has participated in external evaluation and review, resulting in *Confident* in self-assessment capability.

ORGANISATIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT
Implementing effective practices

Other case studies include:
Self assessment and…

Creating fit-for-purpose learning
BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION ITO

Improving organisational capability
OTAGO POLYTECHNIC

Enhancing learning and teaching
TŪRANGA ARARAU

Pursuing effective change
EASTERN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

APPROACHING
SELF-ASSESSMENT

KEY POINTS

People Potential has developed a basic structure for programme reviews, which sets out overall expectations but allows flexibility in how these expectations are met.

The organisation has developed a culture of resilience where staff embrace change and respond positively to it.

People Potential encourages greater involvement from staff in organisational-level decision-making.

People Potential looks externally for ideas, but recognises the need to own its self-assessment.

People Potential re-designed its review process to cover both quantitative and qualitative data. Tutors are given more freedom to collect feedback throughout the year, at times they consider to be appropriate. This feedback is analysed and feeds into programme reviews, along with other external factors such as changes to funding.

Regular meetings are held with students in class groups, rather than as one large student body, to discuss their experiences, and any concerns or requests. A member of the senior management team is present at these meetings, which often means student queries receive an immediate response.

Data on learner achievement, and feedback from learners and stakeholders, is compiled and analysed, with a view to finding any trends or patterns. As a result of the subsequent analysis of feedback, People Potential report that tutors are better able to identify learner needs. Tutors also report that these ongoing reviews of data allows them to prioritise actions, get higher level management 'in the room', and be more responsive.

Tutors meet daily with the departmental managers, either one-to-one or as a team, and each week managers engage in 'team talk', which starts with the question ''what's gone right?'' Feedback from tutors is also collected more consciously/deliberately and systematically within the organisation.

Each week, the departmental managers sit with programme leaders to look at the information and see how it is tracking. People Potential reports that with the revised information-gathering and analysis, decision-making is more straightforward, and the optimum choice becomes almost self-evident. While this has not made the tough programme review decisions easier, People Potential believes that decisions are based on clear evidence.

Monthly management team meetings are held to ensure consistency across the organisation, and these meetings are scheduled for a whole day if required, and are an opportunity for staff to share and collaborate.

People Potential runs a number of programmes in collaboration with other organisations that have qualifications approved at the appropriate level they are looking to train at, including programmes in information technology. People Potential views these relationships as important in the post-targeted review environment, where individual providers cannot develop qualifications that are the same as those already listed on the New Zealand Qualifications Framework. The organisation recognises the challenges of working with a programme developed by another provider. In some situations, People Potential has little control over the programme content, so it focuses on reviewing delivery and ensuring that it is suitable for the individual and collective needs of People Potential learners.

Decisions to deliver new programmes are now based on whether the programme arises from a need, meets strategic goals of growth, and fits with organisational values. Programmes are reviewed within the framework of NZQA's six key evaluative questions, but People Potential also has additional questions:

> Is the programme good for students?

> Why is it being delivered?

> How can it be done better?

> Is there commitment from the team?

People Potential develops its own targets, beyond those set by funding bodies such as the Tertiary Education Commission and the Ministry of Social Development. While the organisation believes these external targets are important to achieve, if it sees their own goals and targets as being more meaningful to its business.

BENEFITS OF USING SELF-ASSESSMENT

KEY POINTS

People Potential is growing in a constrained financial environment.

People Potential feels better able to identify and respond to stakeholder needs to help it grow as a business.

Staff feel that decision-making at all levels has become easier, with solutions often becoming evident through self-assessment.

The organisation encourages its staff to innovate, which is helping to support a confident and committed workforce.

As each year has passed, People Potential has refined its system to strengthen its self-assessment and ensure it adds value to the organisation.

The organisation sees the changes it has made to its existing practices as a significant factor in its ability to maintain – and indeed, increase – its business in a financially constrained environment. In particular, People Potential credits its growth in SAC-funded programmes, from 24 in 2010 to 73 in 2012, to its increased understanding of learners and community needs.

People Potential also believes that self-assessment has given it a better understanding of the needs of stakeholders and its learners through better communication. Self-assessment has also led to a number of assumptions, which may have led to action in the past, being surfaced and examined and proven incorrect. For example, staff operated on the assumption that youth in a particular class were not attending because they were unmotivated or struggling with issues at home. Once this assumption was tested, however, it was found that many of these learners were absent because they had found work. The learners still considered themselves to be enrolled in the course, but also wished to make themselves available for employment opportunities. People Potential subsequently incorporated part-time work into the course, which led to an immediate increase in attendance. Alongside this, People Potential constantly maintains awareness amongst its staff of issues commonly faced by students, and people from within the community are regularly invited to speak with learners about services available to them (e.g. health services).

Another major advantage that People Potential derived from the use of self-assessment was that it has encouraged tutorial staff to focus more strongly on creating good learning experiences. Tutors now have far greater flexibility in how they work in the classroom, built around consistent quality assurance processes. For example, while tutors are required to collect feedback from their learners, they can collect feedback whenever they consider it appropriate, rather than at a fixed time each year. This has resulted in better quality and more comprehensive feedback being collected. The regular review sessions also allow staff to know how well the programmes are meeting targets, which has led to easier and improved decision-making. After examining the evidence, staff say, that most often the best possible alternative becomes self-evident.

Innovation and creativity in programme delivery has also increased, with tutors able to try different strategies to raise learner achievement. An example of innovation is in the retail course, where the tutor has organised a second-hand clothes shop run by the retail students. Clothing is donated by the community, staff and students. All tutors throughout the organisation participate in the scheme by issuing "spending tokens" to students in recognition of various achievements. These tokens can then be used in the retail shop to buy items from the shop. The scheme has helped the retail students to gain practical experience but also acts as a motivational factor to students on other courses as they can also earn tokens to spend in the shop. With the use of self-assessment, the success (or failure) of such schemes can be evaluated, and the decision on whether to continue, or not, is more easily made.

Overall, the organisation has found that staff at all levels are more engaged in decision-making and their confidence has increased. Staff can now see exactly where they are succeeding and why, what their individual contribution to the organisation is, and impact on learners. When there are setbacks or obstacles staff can see why these have occurred and how they can be rectified or overcome. Tutors say they are more aware now of why things happen and what they and the organisation can do about them. They believe that the organisation is moving from having 'good' systems to having 'excellent' systems that lend themselves to greater consistency and improved performance.

CHALLENGES FACED

KEY POINTS

A big challenge faced by People Potential was focusing its reasons for change on identified needs to ensure it made valid and worthwhile improvements. The organisation also recognised the need to pace itself.

It has been important for the organisation to create an environment where staff recognise and understand the value they are adding.

It has also been important to confront negative outcomes head on and identify lingering assumptions.

People Potential uses evaluative checklists to help prompt reflective practice and provide consistency of approach.

People Potential receives funding from various government sources, and, as a result it is subject to a range of external influences relating to policy decisions. Despite operating in such an environment, for People Potential it has been vital to identify internal drivers for change and set benchmarks for success that are relevant to the organisation's purpose and direction. People Potential sees self-assessment as an enabler of change; the organisation is able to identify the location and impact of the change and develop and implement strategies in response.

People Potential's initial response to the introduction of self-assessment was to assume that their practices were geared toward meeting the requirements of audit. The organisation spent a good deal of time developing new strategies. While People Potential believes this gave them the opportunity to look at their business in a new way, they realised they could build on present practice to avoid reinventing the wheel. This results in a more balanced and incremental approach to change, which recognised that much of the existing system already incorporated an evaluative approach.

A challenge of self-assessment is that to be authentic and transparent an organisation must confront both the good, and not so good, elements of its business. People Potential worked on the principle that everything it did had to add value to the organisation and contribute to learner achievement. This approach involved a closer investigation of negative learner outcomes. In the past, these tended to be viewed in isolation, whereas now they are explored so that the causes of any poor performance can be identified and corrective measures put in place. One interviewee articulated their take on self-assessment as "looking at what is going right, and what's not making us happy."

For People Potential, it has been important to foster an environment where staff are highly engaged in the process and open to engaging with all possible results – negative as well as positive. There is a risk that when negative outcomes are exposed, it can, at first, be confronting. Comparisons between results and outcomes can lead to feelings of inadequacy and insecurity. People Potential managed this risk by fostering a culture where issues are identified and owned by everyone, and support and professional development is offered where needed. Most importantly, People Potential seeks to ensure that success is recognised and celebrated to encourage a positive atmosphere, and any shortcomings are seen as opportunities for improvement.

Moving away from an audit approach, where activities are tightly prescribed, into one where staff are encouraged to use their judgement presented its own challenges. In the past, certain activities occurred at fixed times – staff were advised when and how to undertake these activities. Now, staff have greater freedom about how and when to review. In response to this, People Potential has developed evaluative checklists to prompt staff about their self-assessment activities. The organisation went another step further by bringing in dedicated administrative support so that tutors can focus more on what is important to them.

People Potential also found the key evaluative questions useful, but it took practice to use them effectively. The organisation found that the use of checklists ensured consistency of practice, and also provided the basis for applying the key evaluation questions.

In line with this, People Potential challenged itself to keep self-assessment "simple, alive and rolling."

OPPORTUNITIES
AND FACTORS
FOR SUCCESS

KEY POINTS

People Potential believes it has developed a confident business with strong leadership, a clear vision and a strong value system.

Role-modelling and leadership by senior management has been critical.

The organisation recognises what motivates tutors and utilises internal drivers for improvement and change.

All information is accessible to staff.

People Potential uses external benchmarks, models and lessons, but ensures they are adapted to fit the People Potential context.

People Potential believes that it has always been doing some form of self-assessment; however, it is now more confident in what it does. As a more confident business, People Potential believes the hard decisions are less difficult, and it seeks genuine feedback and better understands the impact the organisation is having on the community.

Success for People Potential has been driven by the governing body and management team committing to using self-assessment to drive continuous improvement. This commitment has involved allocating resources to the development and implementation of self-assessment, as well as being actively engaged in the process of self-assessment. The management team built the backbone of the self-assessment process, but allowed staff the freedom to use their judgement and initiative to continuously evaluate the success of the system and find ways to improve.

The leadership has demonstrated an positive attitude towards the organisation and its purpose to serve the needs of learners, and this positivity has filtered through to a staff team that is resilient and willing to embrace change. People Potential has also found that by inviting staff into discussions about the wider concerns and constraints faced by the organisation, staff are better able to take ownership for change.

The organisation believes that self-assessment has been an important tool for lifting tutors out of their everyday worries and concerns into thinking about, and being accountable for, performance. Staff are now more willing to express an opinion, because they can support this with evidence, and hence have a greater influence on decisions that are made.

This culture of resilience and confidence has arisen from a common vision, where everyone takes personal responsibility for their area and people are not afraid to try new things. Problems and difficulties that arise are dealt with as a team rather than individually, and successes are recognised and celebrated.

One of the strengths of the organisation, which has manifested itself throughout, is the vision of its management and the resilience of its staff. Senior management within People Potential is very clear about what it wants to achieve for the organisation. As one interviewee noted, we "haven't lost sight of what's always been important."

People Potential suggests that, to successfully implement self-assessment, organisations must, most of all, keep it simple and "stick to your knitting." People Potential notes that, for them, key to their success has been doing and creating their own approach to self-assessment. People Potential realised that, even after engaging the services of experienced and knowledgeable experts, self-assessment could not be transplanted from outside, but needed to be grown and nurtured within the organisation. Most importantly, People Potential always believes there is room for improvement, and as one interviewee put it, "you are never *there.*"

Now, People Potential realises that it cannot do without self-assessment as it affects every single student and as the expertise of the team increases this effect becomes more pronounced. Ultimately, People Potential believes that "self-assessment is one of the best things that has happened to [their] business" because it has given them the means to think strategically about future directions, and the steps needed to get there.

Self-assessment

Self-assessment is a key component of NZQA's evaluative quality assurance framework. Evaluative self-assessment requires a TEO to evaluate itself, by focusing on how well it is identifying, responding to and meeting learner and stakeholder needs, and taking appropriate action in light of the understanding gained.

Self-assessment across an organisation focuses on: the outcomes sought, and evidence of learner and organisational achievement of these outcomes; the key processes influencing achievement of these outcomes, including processes for continuous improvement of quality and identifying stakeholder needs, and compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements.

The specific processes for self-assessment are not prescribed. To ensure that the framework works in a consistent and comparable way, however, TEOs are required to apply the following high-level requirements for self-assessment:

> Implement self-assessment using the key features of effective self-assessment.

> Answer the key evaluation questions to provide a common basis for both the self-assessment and external evaluation and review processes.

> Use relevant minimum quantitative and qualitative data on such matters as learner enrolments, retentions and completions.

KEY FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE SELF-ASSESSMENT

Self-assessment includes the ongoing processes a TEO uses to gain evidence of its own effectiveness in providing quality education. Processes used for self-assessment should be comprehensive, authentic, transparent, robust, and focused on the following areas:

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

To what extent is the TEO systematically determining and addressing the needs of relevant learners, employers and the wider community? *

PROCESSES AND PRACTICES

To what extent are processes and practices supporting successful learning and helping achieve outcomes?

LEARNER ACHIEVEMENT

To what extent is educational provision having an impact on learner progress and the achievement of intended learning outcomes?

OUTCOMES

What outcomes are learners achieving, including educational achievement and longer term economic, social, and cultural benefits? What is the value of those achievements for the relevant learners, employers and the wider community? *

USING WHAT IS LEARNED

To what extent have evidence-based conclusions and decision-making been incorporated into strategic and business planning to drive improvements?

ACTUAL IMPROVEMENTS

What has improved? To what extent have those improvements been relevant and worthwhile? How do you know that the changes you made have had the effect you intended? Has the change had an impact on the problem identified?

*Including, where EER involves mātauranga Māori evaluative quality assurance (MMEQA) criteria, whānau, hapū, iwi, hāpori Māori and mātauranga Māori as a body of knowledge.

KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The key evaluation questions explore important dimensions of educational quality: outcomes, programme content and design, and delivery. These questions provide a common basis on which TEOs are reviewed by NZQA. The six, high-level, open-ended questions focus either on the outcomes achieved or the key processes that contribute to those outcomes.

How well do learners achieve?

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

How well do programmes and activities match the needs of learners and other stakeholders?

How effective is the teaching?

How well are learners guided and supported?

How effective are governance and management in supporting educational achievement?