Guide to external evaluation and review – for tertiary education organisations

NEW ZEALAND QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY
MANA TOHU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA

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

Contents

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Introduction – why this guide?

This guide is written primarily for 'end-users'. That is, for members of tertiary education organisations (TEOs) who participate in external evaluation and review (EER) and the evaluators who carry out the work.

It is also for anyone else with an interest New Zealand's tertiary education system. This includes students, trainees, whānau, community groups, industry representatives and other government agencies.

The guide aims to describe the 'building blocks' of EER – what it is, how it works – in ordinary, educated English. It avoids jargon wherever possible. Where specialist terms are used, they are defined.

If any ambiguity remains, NZQA welcomes your feedback. If EER is to work effectively, it requires a common understanding of 'what matters most'.

Learning from feedback

Like all communities, those of us involved in EER learn from direct experience. EER after EER teaches us what works well, and where there are further opportunities for improvements.

And we remain dedicated to continuous improvement. If you believe that we could be doing some aspect of our work better, we invite your constructive feedback.

This guide should therefore be considered a 'living' document. As tertiary education changes, as policies (or markets) shift, so must EER. Our practice moves with the times.

Keeping you in the frame

Whenever minor changes are made to EER practice, we will advise you and explain our thinking. Whenever those changes are more substantive, we will consult with you and respond to your feedback. For any major shifts in EER policy, we will involve you directly in a process of 'co-design'.

As we say in many of our written communications, 'thank you for your participation in EER!', and we hope that you find this guide of value.

1. What is external evaluation and review?

External evaluation and review (EER) is the name given to the periodic review of tertiary education organisations (TEOs), conducted by NZQA. It is one essential element in NZQA's Evaluative Quality Assurance Framework.

Every EER produces a report on the relative quality of a TEO. These reports are published on the NZQA website.

1.1 The context of EER

Purposes of EER

EER has two interlocking goals: TEO accountability and TEO improvement.

EER holds each TEO accountable for the quality of its performance, on behalf of its learners and the community at large. As such, EER is a regulatory instrument.

EER also enables TEO improvement. Every EER offers an independent view of what is working well and where there are further opportunities for positive change. In addition, the growing store of online EER reports enables TEOs to learn from the practice of others.

Other public benefits accrue from EER. For example, over time the findings of EER reports help inform government policy. Analysis of reports to date has already identified trends, gaps and progress in important areas (such as Māori learner achievement).

The TEO sector

EER encompasses a wide range of organisations. Most recognised or registered TEOs participate.[1]

Types of TEOs undertaking EER include subsidiaries of Te Pūkenga, government training establishments, and private training establishments.

TEOs are notable for their diversity. They range in size from the very small to the very large. They cover all types and levels of education or training, from foundation programmes to degrees. They encompass many subjects, industries and fields of study.

Learning may occur on-job or off-job, in the classroom, online, or through practicums. Students can be local (domestic) or international, young or old.

[1] The notable exception is the university sector. Universities are periodically reviewed through the Academic Quality Agency of Universities New Zealand.

What you can expect from EER

Every EER is guided by a set of operating assumptions. It should be

Fair and balanced. NZQA needs to ensure that its judgements are defensible, and that its own quality standards have been properly followed.

"Owned" by the TEO. EERs glimpse a TEO's performance for a short period between relatively long intervals. The TEO knows itself better than any outsider can, and uses organisational self-assessment for the benefit of its stakeholders. A high-performing TEO assumes full responsibility for the effectiveness of its own processes and outcomes.

Collegial. In every EER, NZQA undertakes to work in a professional manner with the TEO. NZQA expects the TEO to do the same. Both parties should engage collegially. Both should do all they reasonably can to manage the engagement efficiently and openly.

Flexible. NZQA acknowledges the distinctive features of the TEO under review, and the sector or environment in which it operates. Every evaluator tailors their practice accordingly.

Types of EER

There is a 'standard' model of EER which is explained in this guide. This model is flexible enough to respond to most instances of TEO diversity.

For some sectors, however, additional or modified resources are needed. The English language sector, for example, is supported by specialist guidelines.

In one field, however, a wholly distinct approach has been developed. TEOs that wish to have their performance reviewed within a specifically kaupapa Māori framework engage with NZQA by means of Te Hono o Te Kahurangi EERs. Further information can be found on the NZQA website.

1.2 What is evaluation?

Evaluation is the act of judging the merit, value or worth of something.

The object judged could be an action, a process, an object, a person, or an organisation.

Evaluation is a common human activity. We do it all the time, in every walk of life. For example, the act of preferring one brand of soap over another is itself evaluative. We may be guided by considerations of cost, quality or accessibility. But when we decide to put that particular brand of soap in our shopping basket, we have made an evaluative decision.

Evaluation in practice

We watch a game of netball. When the game finishes, we turn to a friend and say, 'Lee played really well tonight'. What does this single act of judgement involve?

Clearly, it is based on specific examples of Lee's activity on the court. We saw many instances of Lee passing and (maybe) shooting. We believe that Lee followed the rules throughout.

More than that, our experience of watching many netball games gives us a series of useful reference points to evaluate performance. Shooting a goal, for example, is always desirable – and Lee shot goals. We noted too that Lee's accuracy throughout the game was better than 'normal'. Of course, our view of Lee's performance may change. Replays of the game may indicate some unforced errors that we missed at the stadium ('Lee was actually inconsistent'). Or this game may prove to be the single highlight of Lee's season ('everything considered, Lee was pretty poor this year').

But on the night, we believed that we had enough information on the better aspects of Lee's performance to make a more positive judgement, with reference to our standards of what 'good' looks like.

EER as formal evaluation

Formal evaluation follows much the same path across a range of disciplines. Every formal evaluation:

- works within a framework of rules
- identifies and gathers information
- analyses and interprets that information
- produces a series of value judgements ('good', 'poor', etc.) on aspects of performance
- expresses an overall view of the quality of the subject being evaluated (the 'evaluand')
- communicate these findings.

These common evaluative features guide our practice in EER. They also inform the shape and content of these guidelines.

The building blocks of EER

Our *framework of rules* include legislation (such as the Education Act), NZQA's quality assurance Rules, and many sector-specific or industry requirements. This framework tells us what is allowable. They underpin policy. They clarify which outcomes are desired and which are discouraged.

Our *enquiry methods* teach us how to be understand context. We already know a lot about TEOs of 'this kind'. We often have a good deal of information on a specific TEO's prior performance before the EER begins. Enquiry methods also teach us how to identify, gather and understand relevant information.

Our *judgement tools* assist us to reach defensible ratings.

In EER there are two primary sets of tools: the Tertiary Evaluation Indicators (indicators) and the Rubrics (refer Appendices).

- The *indicators* are merit criteria. They constitute a database of what 'good' looks like in tertiary education, based on research and experience. For example, the indicators remind us that motivated students tend to learn better. A TEO in which the students are motivated has at least one of the features of high-quality performance.

  At each phase of an EER, evaluators consult the Indicators as points of reference. The indicators direct our attention to what matters most, and why. The Tertiary Evaluation Indicators can be found on the NZQA website.

- The *rubrics* are performance criteria. They help us decide where the performance of an organisation or a programme or a topic lies on a quality scale. Is performance good, bad, or something in-between?

  In making judgements on quality, NZQA evaluators aim to align their findings with the descriptors for each of the relevant rubrics. The External Evaluation and Review Rubrics can be found on the NZQA website.

Our *communication* extends throughout the EER process. TEOs participating in an EER are repeatedly kept informed of what is happening, and why. They are alerted if there are changes to the process and timelines. They are advised by means of the draft EER report when outcome decisions are reached following the enquiry phase. The EER report is the most important means of communication, and the final version is published on the NZQA website.

Conclusions

- Evaluation is a common human activity. It has also developed over time as a formal practice, embedded across many disciplines.
- EER is the specific application of the evaluation method to tertiary education in New Zealand.
- EER is always guided by background information and the context of the education or training under review.
- EER uses standard methods of enquiry to gather and understand the relevant evidence.
- In making judgements, EER refers to standardised notions of merit and performance.
- EER findings culminate in reports published on the NZQA website.

1.3 What EER covers

In scope

All EER reports include two statements of NZQA's confidence in a TEO. One statement covers educational performance; the other, the TEO's capability in self-assessment.

Educational performance means the relative quality of the outcomes achieved by a TEO as a whole, on behalf of its learners and community. It also takes into account the key supporting processes of the TEO and the resources it holds.

Some common features of high-quality performance are:

- high learner achievement rates
- strong pastoral support
- good educational practices consistently used within the TEO
- effective management of compliance responsibilities.

Capability in self-assessment refers to the TEO's relative effectiveness in understanding its own mission (or kaupapa), and the needs of its learners and other stakeholders. It considers how well the TEO responds to these needs. It also considers how this self-assessment has contributed to improved performance.

Some common features of effective TEO self-assessment are:

- timely and comprehensive programme reviews
- good data-gathering and analysis
- ongoing engagement with industry (or community)
- improvements to design, delivery or provision as a result of stakeholder feedback
- proactive self-management of 'risk'.

Out of scope

Although every EER aims to be rigorous in its findings, the EER system has certain inevitable limitations to its coverage.

EER is time-bound. It provides assurance based on information available at a point in time. Policies, markets and TEOs themselves change, sometimes rapidly. A TEO rating from four years ago may not match the reality of the present moment.

There are limitations of scale. EERs are restricted in terms of time and money. We look at some programmes closely and may look less closely at others. Sampling exercises may miss key data (although our system is designed to minimise such omissions).

EER is not designed to detect organisational fraud. Fortunately, this is a relatively rare event, and NZQA has other means of identifying organisational fraud when it does occur.

EER cannot be used to predict the outcomes of other reviews of the same TEO which, by posing different questions or examining different information, could reasonably arrive at different conclusions.

1.4 Overview of the EER process

An EER runs from the moment it has been scheduled and first contact made until all work has been completed and a report is published.

Every EER aims to gather enough information to reach an accurate view of the current overall quality of a TEO.

The following EER phases are the norm. They will usually occur as described and in sequence, whatever the TEO under review.

Under special circumstances, however, NZQA may need to change the process or timing of one or more of the phases. Whenever this happens, NZQA will give the TEO advance warning and explanation, and invite a response (as appropriate).

EER phases

1. **Scheduling:** NZQA will advise a TEO of when it will conduct enquiry for their next EER. NZQA will allocate a team to conduct the EER.
2. **Scoping:** NZQA and the TEO will work together to confirm what will be evaluated in the EER, and how.
3. **Enquiry:** NZQA will collect or validate information on the performance and capability in self-assessment of the TEO. This may include spending time at the TEO or through online enquiry.
4. **Judgement:** NZQA will reach views on the quality of the TEO. These will take the form of findings, ratings and statements of confidence.
5. **Reporting:** NZQA will issue draft and final reports on the TEO. The reports will explain the reasons for NZQA's judgement, and the TEO is invited to provide feedback on the draft report.
6. **Closure:** all final EER reports are published on the NZQA website.

7. **Categories:** once an EER report is published, a TEO category will be assigned. The category derives from the two statements of confidence. Every category bestows incentives or sanctions on the TEO.

EER timelines

Timelines should be reasonable, follow due process, and be responsive to the principle of natural justice.

For indicative timelines, and more details on the step-by-step process of an EER, see Section 8.

2. How does EER begin?

This section covers the way EERs are scheduled, and the people who make up the EER team.

2.1 Scheduling an EER

Standard EERs

Once a TEO enters the system, it must participate in EER. The first EER will usually be scheduled one year after the 'validation visit'. Subsequent EERs occur no later than four years apart.

The frequency of subsequent evaluation visits depends on the category assigned to each TEO following an EER.

Category	**Next EER**
Category 1 or 2	Usually within 3-4 years
Category 3 or 4	Must be within 6-24 months

NZQA publishes its annual EER schedule on the NZQA website well in advance. In principle, NZQA expects every TEO to be ready to participate in EER at any time.

NZQA-requested EERs

If NZQA has serious concerns about a TEO, it may call an early EER. When this happens, NZQA will state in writing what these concerns are. A TEO will be given a minimum of four weeks' notice to prepare for such an EER.

TEO-requested EER

A TEO can ask NZQA to carry out an early EER at any time. Common reasons include:

- Change of ownership
- Significant changes in programmes.
- The TEO's belief that it is performing much better than at the date of its last EER.

NZQA will always try to accommodate such requests within its schedule, depending on available resources.

In deciding to request an early EER, TEOs are strongly advised to exercise due diligence. If an EER is undertaken before key evidence of improvements has become fully available, then the EER outcome may prove disappointing.

Deferring an EER

In exceptional circumstances, a TEO can request that a scheduled EER be deferred. Relevant factors include:

- Acts of God (earthquake, floods, death)
- Relocation of premises
- No learners available over the enquiry period.

NZQA does not consider 'ordinary' complications (e.g. absence of the owner on a marketing trip) to be grounds for deferral.

If a TEO is due for an EER but not currently delivering any approved programmes or training schemes, then it should contact NZQA immediately.

Deferral requests should be sent to eer@nzqa.govt.nz. NZQA will promptly reply, explaining our reasons for granting or declining the TEO's request.

2.2 EER teams

The mixed model

EER team members are drawn from NZQA staff, independent evaluators and subject specialists.

All EER evaluators are fully trained in EER policies and practices. Their performance is regularly monitored. Every EER has a minimum of two evaluators. More are added for larger EERs.

Before an evaluator is assigned to an EER, they are required to confirm that no unmanaged conflict of interest is involved.

If a TEO believes that there is still an unmanaged conflict of interest on the part of any evaluator, the TEO should contact eer@nzqa.govt.nz. If NZQA agrees with your concern, the evaluator will be replaced. As a rule, this is the only grounds for removing an evaluator from an EER.

Observers

For professional development reasons, NZQA will sometimes assign an observer to an EER team. In such cases, the TEO will always be notified in advance.

An observer is there to study the process, not to participate in the EER. They may take notes, but these do not affect the EER ratings or statements of confidence. Any notes taken are considered commercially sensitive and are not shared with third parties.

A TEO may choose to ask any of its stakeholders to observe the EER. NZQA expects to be notified in advance whenever this occurs, as a courtesy.

Quality controls

All EER team members are required to abide by NZQA's standards of professional conduct.

If a TEO has concerns about the conduct of a team member, the matter should be raised directly with the Lead Evaluator. Usually, the concerns can be quickly resolved.

If a TEO has concerns with the Lead Evaluator, the matter should be raised directly with the Manager, Evaluation. Again, problems will most often be satisfactorily resolved through prompt discussion.

If a TEO has followed these steps, but remains unsatisfied with the outcome, it may choose to lodge a written complaint. The TEO should contact the Manager, Evaluation who will provide guidance on NZQA's formal complaint process.

Whenever a formal complaint is being investigated, NZQA will ensure that the TEO's rights are protected. For example, if the complaint relates to the conduct of an evaluator, they will be stood down from the case until the investigation has been completed.

3 How are EERs planned?

The planning process for EERs begins with scoping. This determines which aspects of a TEO's performance will be given primary attention during the EER.

3.1 The scoping process

NZQA must first assess the size, complexity and nature of the TEO under review. This assessment is guided by reviewing:

- information held on NZQA databases
- information made available by other Crown agencies and standard-setting bodies
- the TEO's own self-assessment.

Of these three sources, the TEO's self-assessment is the most important. The TEO knows its own business more fully than any outsider could. Through its self-assessment, the TEO should be able to demonstrate 'what matters most' to its learners and other stakeholders.

The TEO's scoping submission will always include, as a minimum:

- a self-assessment summary
- primary evidence
- a TEO Details form
- an updated Improvement Plan (for Category 3 and 4 TEOs)
- a Code self-assessment
- self-analysis of performance and outcomes.

After receipt of the TEO's self-assessment material, the Lead Evaluator will discuss the scoping options with the TEO. The discussions will concentrate on what should be covered, when and how, and with what resources.

If NZQA has any significant concerns about the TEO, these will be disclosed before the scope is set.

Discussions on scope may proceed by email or phone contact, or by face-to-face or online meetings, as seems most reasonable and practicable.

Confirming the scope

In addition to the submissions from the TEO, NZQA will also review information held internally or received from third parties. Such information can:

- supplement or correct TEO data
- offer an interpretation of the TEO's performance that is different from the TEO's
- identify new areas of priority or risk.

Once all key information has been collected and analysed, NZQA will proceed to set the scope. In this context, 'scope' covers three linked decisions:

- What NZQA's enquiry will concentrate on (i.e. the focus areas)
- What resource will be required (the team, and the cost)
- How the enquiry process will be managed (agenda and plan of enquiry).

All scopes are put through rigorous review to ensure they are accurate, correctly sized and consistent with recent EERs of similar TEOs.

If the selection of focus areas differs from those discussed with the TEO, NZQA will explain its final choice to the TEO.

Mandatory focus areas

Occasionally, NZQA will set mandatory focus areas. These apply for limited periods across all TEOs and within specific sectors, as NZQA deems best. NZQA will advise TEOs of upcoming mandatory focus areas before they are set in any given EER.

The confirmation letter

The completion of the scoping phase is marked by the release of a confirmation letter. This document includes a list of the focus areas and gives an overall estimated cost for the EER. A draft agenda is also attached.

Focus areas can be either 'horizontal' or 'vertical'. If horizontal, a focus area runs across much or all of a TEO's operations. 'Pastoral care of second-chance learners' would be an example of a horizontal focus area. If vertical, a focus area looks in depth at a programme, field or faculty. 'Diploma in Accounting' would be an example of a vertical focus area.

Cost is a by-product of resource. That is, based on our previous experience of similar cases, NZQA will determine how much time is likely to be required to complete the EER. NZQA will also ensure that appropriate people are allocated to the case.

Agendas are developed for all EERs. They anticipate who will be required, when, where and why, throughout the period of on-site enquiry.

Most agendas are prepared in collaboration with the TEO. If there are any unanticipated problems in the agenda, the TEO should bring them to NZQA's attention as soon as possible.

Other planning outputs

NZQA is committed to carrying out all its EERs in an open and direct manner. NZQA will always advise the TEO of any significant concerns as they come to our attention.

For this reason, the scoping phase of an EER will often include other communications from NZQA to the TEO, either by phone or email (or both). For example, NZQA scoping emails may:

- summarise any current data gaps
- declare any emerging NZQA concerns
- identify stakeholders whom NZQA will need to contact (and who are 'outside' the agenda)
- list follow-up questions which NZQA proposes to ask during the enquiry phase.

Throughout its scoping, NZQA aims to provide the TEO with clear guidelines on what information the EER team still needs to gather, and how it proposes to do so.

If a TEO is uncertain as to what NZQA is proposing to do or why during the enquiry phase, it should promptly seek an explanation – which the EER team will be happy to give.

3.2 The scoping guidelines

TEO self-assessment

TEO self-assessment practices must be comprehensive, reliable and embedded. In theory, only a TEO can fully understand its own operations; hence, NZQA cannot prescribe how a TEO should carry out its self-assessment. However, NZQA provides guidance on the common characteristics of high-quality self-assessment on the NZQA website.

Sustainable success is enabled by high-quality internal review. Unless a TEO knows, systematically and comprehensively, how effectively it is managing its business, it cannot guarantee future success. Without robust self-assessment, strong current performance may be accidental (or not even attributable to the TEO).

In preparing for an EER, a TEO should remember that NZQA will be looking for evidence of:

- valued outcomes enabled by the TEO
- supporting processes that have made these possible
- ongoing, effective self-review.

TEOs must therefore provide sufficient analysis, with supporting evidence, for NZQA to be able to answer each of the key evaluation questions and arrive at organisational statements of confidence in both educational performance and organisational capability in self-assessment.

A TEO's self-assessment summary itself should be relatively brief. It should present an analysis of what matters most to the TEO at the current moment.

An effective self-assessment summary should include information on the following:

- The TEO's context, kaupapa and priorities.
- What has changed since the last EER, and why these changes matter.
- How effective current TEO performance is, and how the TEO knows.
- What have been the key findings of the TEO's ongoing self-assessment, and how the TEO has responded to these in order to strengthen performance.

Supporting evidence

Some kinds of evidence are considered 'primary'. Primary evidence must always be provided at the beginning of the scoping phase, and for every EER.

Other kinds of evidence are considered 'secondary'. NZQA will request secondary evidence on an as-needs basis, at any point of the EER process. Evidence of this kind will often be context-specific or will provide NZQA with further substantiating detail on TEO quality.

Whenever NZQA requests specific information or documents, it will always explain why and indicate how this data will be used in the EER.

Primary evidence (mandatory)	Secondary evidence (examples)
Cohort information (the number of learners, actual and EFTS (equivalent full-time students), disaggregated by domestic and international, Māori and Pasifika, and other)	Programme information (conditions of approval for all programmes selected as focus areas)
Progression results, such as labour market outcomes and further study or training (if relevant)	Organisational documents (e.g. the QMS (quality management system), staff qualifications, internal meeting records)
Achievement results (e.g. completion rates), with Tertiary Education Commission investment plan and target details (if relevant)	Learner results (disaggregated data on learner achievement for all programmes or fields selected as focus areas. For example, information on the relative performance of Māori within a particular programme)
Māori and Pasifika outcomes	

A list of key compliance accountabilities (e.g. a subcontract with another TEO)	Compliance documents (e.g. attestations of compliance, subcontracts, external moderation results)

Provide an evidential checklist

Whenever a TEO provides primary or secondary evidence to NZQA, the TEO should include a supporting checklist which:

- identifies the evidential source (e.g. meeting minutes held in TEO archives)
- provides date, version and status (e.g. draft internal audit report, 23 September 2018)
- states its significance.

Where possible, all performance data will be jointly confirmed as complete and accurate *before* the enquiry phase begins.

Setting the scope

In setting the scope, NZQA aims to gain a typical sample of the TEO's overall provision of education, training and supporting services.

This sample must be comprehensive enough for NZQA to draw reasonable conclusions about the quality of the TEO overall.

For example, a TEO offers 12 programmes, of which three are chosen as focus areas in an EER. In making that decision, NZQA will assure itself that these three programmes are likely to throw light on the performance of the TEO as a whole.

This assurance is strengthened by the use of the key evaluation questions, which run 'across' a TEO, implicitly covering programmes outside those designated as focus areas.

'Typical' scope

In arriving at a view of what would be a 'typical' selection, NZQA, in discussion with the TEO, will consider factors including:

- **The size of the TEO:** as a rule, the smaller the TEO, the more straightforward the scoping exercise will be. For example, a 'niche' PTE that delivers a single training scheme will probably have that training scheme as its sole focus area.
- **The TEO's own priorities:** what changes, challenges or improvements has the TEO itself identified?
- **National priorities:** are there any pressing strategic themes which the EER might explore? For example: postgraduate programmes in business.
- **Diversity of programmes:** how can the EER encompass the TEO's range of programme levels, fields and delivery sites?
- **Learner concentration:** where (in programmes, fields or sites) are the majority of the students or trainees to be found?

- **Performance variation:** which of the TEO programmes have been the highest performing? Which (if any) have had quality problems? Are there new programmes with limited evidence of learner achievement?
- **Risks:** for example, are any programmes under statutory conditions? Have any programmes been the subject of recent learner complaints?

Selection of focus areas

As an example of the way focus areas are selected, 'Acme College' runs multiple programmes in several industry fields, and from levels 1-7; enrols domestic and international students; and had a poor result in its previous EER. The scope for the current EER of Acme College will probably therefore select focus areas that cover:

- a cross-section of levels
- programmes with international as well as domestic students
- any improvements undertaken since the last EER
- the largest programme (in terms of EFTS or funding).

Usually, NZQA and the TEO will discuss and agree on the scope of an EER. In a few instances, this may not be possible, and in these cases NZQA will set the scope.

In setting an EER scope, NZQA will do all it reasonably can to explain its decision-making to the TEO. If a TEO has any remaining questions or concerns about the rationale of the set scope, these should be addressed as soon as possible to the assigned Lead Evaluator.

Other scoping assumptions

Focus areas act as 'windows' into the quality of the TEO. The selection of focus areas should be seen as enabling, rather than limiting, NZQA's enquiry.

Thus, over the course of an EER, NZQA may look in detail at *any* aspect of a TEO's performance, including programmes not selected as focus areas, if it believes this kind of additional scrutiny is necessary to provide a balanced view of the TEO. Any changes of scope this entails will be discussed with the TEO.

Every EER covers all TEO activity from the previous EER to the present moment. In preparing for an EER, a TEO will therefore need to consider everything that is known, or knowable, about its performance over the preceding period.

Accurate information is vital

TEO failure to provide relevant and reliable information during the scoping phase may impact on the final EER ratings and statements of confidence, in so far as it indicates weaknesses in organisational self-assessment. Likewise, the provision of data that has not been accurately analysed and understood may limit the degree of confidence that NZQA can express in the TEO overall.

In extreme cases, gaps in TEO data or self-assessment identified during the scoping phase may delay (or extend) the timing of NZQA's enquiry. If this situation arises, NZQA will advise the TEO of the action it will be taking, and any consequences arising.

TEOs should always bear in mind that scoping is an essential step in the overall EER process. NZQA will already be forming working hypotheses of TEO quality during the scoping phase. Any limitations on TEO self-assessment which arise at this stage may be noted as material.

If a TEO is in any doubt about what it needs to do or produce during the scope, it should contact the Lead Evaluator directly.

3.3 Time and cost

Estimating the cost

All evaluation time expended on a job by NZQA staff and contractors is on-charged to the TEO at a standard hourly rate.

Incidental costs incurred (e.g. travel or accommodation) are not on-charged. Nor is time spent by NZQA on administration or management of the work.

When the scope has been set, NZQA will estimate the likely amount of chargeable work needed to complete the EER.

Our estimates are by band, with an upper and lower figure. The bands are based on our experience of the time involved in EERs of similar size and complexity.

NZQA will advise you of the estimated cost by confirmation letter, in advance of the enquiry phase.

Managing the cost

Our estimates assume that the TEO will participate promptly in each EER stage and with a reasonable degree of efficiency.

If there are delays or information gaps at the TEO's end, costs may increase. But if the TEO provides NZQA with comprehensive material, costs may decrease.

In some instances, EERs will involve more work than first expected, because of difficulties that arise during or after the enquiry phase.

Whenever NZQA becomes aware that the estimate may be significantly exceeded, we will alert the TEO to the possibility.

Billing

A TEO will receive two invoices for its EER.

The first will be sent after completion of the enquiry phase. This invoice will be for 50 per cent of the upper end of the estimated cost.

The second will be sent after completion. This invoice will be for the total actual costs, minus any payment made on the first invoice.

The second invoice groups all time spent into three fields: preparation and planning, enquiry, and reporting. The first and third fields encompass all time spent before and after the enquiry phase.

Before sending invoices to TEOs, NZQA carefully checks that the invoices are accurate, complete and reasonable. If the estimated costs have been exceeded, NZQA will check that the TEO has been advised.

If a TEO wishes to query either of its invoices, it should write to qaadmin@nzqa.govt.nz.

4. How does EER enquiry occur?

EER enquiry involves a number of processes for collecting and analysing information about a TEO's performance.

4.1 The enquiry process

Purpose

During the enquiry phase, the evaluators complete the evidential file. They aim to:

- validate data received during the scoping phase
- find (then validate) new and relevant data
- interpret all data correctly.

Enquiry can take one or more of three forms: desk review, on-site enquiry, or virtual enquiry. Time spent on each of these is on-charged to the TEO at the same rate.

The enquiry phase is completed when, in NZQA's view, all necessary information has been gathered to reach judgements about the current quality of the TEO's performance and its capability in self-assessment.

Desk review

A desk review involves the collection, validation and analysis of documents received from the TEO and other parties.

Desk reviews may be supplemented by discussion with the TEO by email, phone or videoconference.

For small TEOs, especially those engaged in on-job training, NZQA will sometimes conduct a desk review only, without ever directly visiting the TEO premises.

This decision will only be made, however, if NZQA is convinced that a desk review alone will provide sufficient evidence to reach judgements about the TEO under review.

On-site enquiry[2]

On-site enquiry involves a visit by the EER team to the TEO's head office, or to one or more of the TEO's delivery sites.

Time spent on site ranges from one day to two weeks, depending on the scale and complexity of the EER.

Time and resources required on site will be laid out in the agenda, which is sent to the TEO in advance. In allocating meetings on site, NZQA will make every reasonable effort to minimise disruption to the daily operations of the TEO, especially with respect to its learners.

Information will be gathered or confirmed on site by a range of processes, such as interviews, presentations, document review and discussions.

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[2] On-site enquiry is sometimes referred to as 'the EER'. This is not so: it is but one phase in the larger EER process. Further, though most EERs do include on-site enquiry, it is not mandatory or necessarily the most important phase.

Virtual enquiry

Some or all of the enquiry phase may be conducted online, or by phone. The decision to engage in virtual (rather than face-to-face) enquiry will be made at the scooping stage. In making this decision, NZQA will weigh up the benefits and limitations of this type of engagement. For example, it may be easier (and less costly) to conduct the EER of a very small TEO online.

Other common types of virtual enquiry include contact made with stakeholders not based at the TEO itself. Examples would be at-home students, graduates, industry advisory groups, standard-setting bodies and other Crown agencies.

Gathering the evidence

Though NZQA expects that a TEO will already have identified its most important data during the scoping phase, on-site (or virtual enquiry) allows the TEO a further opportunity to clarify any claims relating to that data.

Whenever student interviews are carried out, NZQA selects who will participate in consultation with the TEO. To ensure open dialogue, all students in an EER interview will be guaranteed anonymity. Interview notes will, therefore, not record student names but will summarise key comments made.

As a rule, NZQA does not engage in controlled observations (i.e. watching a tutor or trainer in the classroom), because we believe that such activities are of limited value.

On the other hand, evidence gathered by the team through ad hoc observation can be of real value. If an EER team notices anything of particular significance first-hand, this will be recorded in the evidential file and considered as an input to the evaluation.

During the enquiry phase, any TEO can include a support or advisory person, without needing to seek permission from NZQA.

4.2 *The enquiry guidelines*

What is 'data'?

Data refers to all information on the performance or quality of a TEO.

Data can be 'soft' (e.g. student testimony of improved well-being), or 'hard' (e.g. qualification completion rates).

For most TEOs, both hard and soft data sources will be relevant indicators of performance. The guidelines to the Tertiary Evaluation Indicators refer to a wide range of data sources that can be drawn on for self-assessment (and EER) purposes.

EERs are generally not interested in data in isolation, but in how the data has been used by the TEO under review to understand and improve performance.

For this reason, the primary data guiding every EER should be whatever has been identified by the TEO, and confirmed by NZQA, as significant.

In the course of its enquiry, the EER team will always check that data is relevant, accurate and complete. It will also confirm how the data has been used, and why.

Wherever possible, a TEO should present NZQA with 'processed' (rather than 'raw') data. That is, any data submitted should *already* have been collected, interpreted and analysed by the TEO as part of its organisational self-assessment.

For example, if you state that 'our completion rates are 80 per cent', you should also indicate how you know this claim is correct *and* why you believe this is a good (or modest or excellent) outcome.

If the evaluation team is forced to explain or 'correct' the TEO's own data, this in itself points to a serious performance or self-assessment weakness in the TEO.

Sampling

As already noted, all EERs are based on sampling, that is, by a series of selections – and exclusions.

Thus, some programmes will be selected as focus areas for review, some stakeholders will be interviewed, and some documents will be examined. Conversely, *other* types of potentially relevant evidence (other programmes, stakeholders, documents) will not be considered, or at least not considered in as much detail.

Well-done sampling should provide some degree of insight into the quality of the TEO as a whole. Though the information accessed through an EER will always be partial, NZQA should still be able to draw reasonable larger inferences from it.

Sampling

During the enquiry phase, sampling will be targeted or random (or both). For example: the EER team might decide to meet directly with a group of students who had previously complained to NZQA about the quality of a programme; this would be an example of targeted enquiry. Alternatively, the EER team might choose to speak with every tenth student listed on the TEO's roll; this would be an example of random enquiry.

Limitations of time and resource can still mean that some important information gets overlooked, or less important information over-emphasised. For example, it is possible that the sampled data, while accurate, is unfairly weighted towards 'outlier' results.

Gaining assurance

Despite these important caveats, the EER process as a whole has several inbuilt controls to mitigate sample error during the enquiry phase. These are:

- well-informed scoping decisions, including any emergent view by the EER team on the quality (hence, the reliability) of the TEO's self-assessment
- the ongoing opportunity afforded the TEO to provide information missed during the enquiry phase
- third-party hard data sources (e.g. NZQA moderation results) to supplement or correct TEO information claims
- the in-house quality assurance carried out by NZQA before it confirms any judgements or issues any reports.

Issues of scale

As a rule, the smaller the TEO, or the less complex the EER, the more weight can usually be placed on the reliability of the sampled data. By the same token, the larger the TEO, or the more complex the EER, the more cautious are the conclusions that can reasonably be drawn from limited sample sizes.

Triangulation

The enquiry phase first identifies data, then checks its accuracy. While some data can be taken as a given (e.g. the contact details for a TEO), other data claims need to be verified, either to confirm a fact or to assess how reliably the data has been interpreted.

The most common term for this verification process is 'triangulation'. Triangulation aims to mitigate the possibility of unintentional bias and the limitations of relying on single source material.

As the word indicates, triangulation involves looking for three (or more) confirming points of evidence. This can occur in various ways. For example:

- Three examples of the same thing
- Three types of sources
- Data gathered over three points in time
- Data looked at in three different ways
- Three observers.

Triangulation cannot guarantee that every data claim made in a report will be accurate, but it much reduces the likelihood of error.

EER records will always indicate on what basis a factual claim has been made. If this claim relies on triangulation to any degree, the evidence (of methods, samples, sources, etc) will be stated.

5 How are EER judgements made?

Making judgements of TEO performance and quality is a step-by-step process involving several stages.

5.1 The judgement process

Wrapping up enquiry

The enquiry phase ends when all relevant information has been received and considered. The evaluation team will at this point have formed a complete evidential file. This includes the key information required or formally notes the source of that material.

In some cases, crucial material may still be missing at this late stage. NZQA will advise the TEO of any resulting delay to the judgement phase and indicate next steps and timelines.

If, while completing the enquiry phase, NZQA determines that some information received by the TEO is deficient in any respect, the TEO will be advised. Depending on the circumstances, the TEO might be given the opportunity to provide further information.

Alternatively, NZQA might decide that the information gap or weakness is itself evidence, and close off the evidential file.

Synthesis

Once the evidential file has been completed, the evaluators begin the judgement phase, or synthesis. Synthesis aims to make sense of a wide range of information in order to reach a set of value judgements about the TEO.

The evaluation team will set aside sufficient time to consider all the relevant evidence and arrive at defensible judgements that form the basis for the EER report.

In many instances, this discussion will occur on the TEO's premises after the conclusion of the enquiry phase. For more complex EERs, however, or when key information arrives later than expected, NZQA will schedule a separate synthesis meeting in its own offices.

The meeting falls into two parts:

- Identifying and interpreting key evidence.
- Reaching judgement.

Free and frank discussion

Synthesis meetings are conducted in the spirit of free and frank discussion. Usually, only those on the assigned evaluation team will be allowed to participate.

The evaluation team will note its emerging findings in a document, or set of documents, which will be added to the evidential file.

This record will note the ratings assigned and the key factors leading to those ratings. Any important points of internal disagreement as to findings or ratings will be noted.

The synthesis is an essential formative output for the EER process overall. It does not, however, bind the Lead Evaluator to the judgements arrived at during the team meeting. In the course of writing the report, the Lead Evaluator may revise one or more of the ratings.

Whenever significant changes of this kind are proposed, the Lead Evaluator will re-consult with fellow team members and consider their feedback before finalising the draft.

Consensus is not always reached or required. The final decision rests with the Lead Evaluator, who presents the resulting report as a recommendation to the Manager, Evaluation.

Steps to judgement

First, the evaluators review the range of evidence collected on the case to date. Since this information will directly affect the judgements, every effort is made to ensure that this evidence is complete and is being correctly interpreted.

Next, the evaluators will discuss the emerging findings. What are the most important things we know about the performance of the organisation?

Two kinds of judgements

Judgements will then be drafted. In every EER, these take two forms: ratings (which are attached to focus areas and key evaluation questions) and assessments of the overall quality of the TEO (i.e. statements of confidence).

For the ratings, the scale runs from Excellent to Poor. For the statements of confidence, the scale runs from Highly Confident to Not Confident.

In most EERs, decisions on ratings will precede those on statements of confidence, because the latter are dependent on the former.

That is, statements of confidence indicate what NZQA considers the most important aspects of a TEO's performance and its capability in self-assessment. As such, in reaching statements of confidence, evaluators will carefully select from the overall findings and ratings, highlighting some aspects and remaining silent on others.

By its nature, EER judgement is complex and responsive to the context of the TEO under review. The evaluative sequence indicated above may be varied or revised as circumstances require.

5.2 *The judgement guidelines*

Evaluating the range of information

During the judgement phase, the evaluators will look at the full range of information surfaced by their enquiry and consider its value.

The information considered can be a single fact, a set of related facts, or anything else that relates to the performance of the TEO, either in part or in its entirety.

Once EER information has been considered, grouped and valued, it becomes a *finding*.

To make a finding, the evaluators will ask themselves three main questions:

- What is its materiality?
- How representative is it?
- How should it be weighted (and rated)?

Final judgements are reserved until all the relevant facts are known, properly understood and correctly valued.

Materiality

Materiality refers to the relative importance or significance of a finding.

Decisions on materiality depend on several factors. These commonly include:

- the TEO context (kaupapa, sector, industry, programmes, stakeholders)
- the size and impact of the finding
- how effectively the TEO has identified, analysed and managed the finding.

For example: the materiality of high programme completion rates. We know that high programme completion rates often tell us something about the quality of a TEO. But what do they tell us? That depends. What is significant for one TEO or programme may not be true for another.

Materiality 1 – completion rates

In a two-day first aid skills course, a completion rate of over 90 per cent is common. Evidence that a first aid skills provider regularly reports 90 per cent completion rates suggests only that, in this respect, the provider is in line with industry norms. The materiality, i.e. the relative significance of this data set, may therefore be slight.

In contrast, a 90 per cent completion rate in a degree programme would be very differently considered. International research indicates that the higher the level of a programme, the greater the non-completion rate tends to be. The materiality therefore of an outlier result like this will be much more significant.

For the degree programme, NZQA would need to seek further explanation. Ideally, this explanation would come from the TEO itself, through its self-assessment. The high completion rate could be attributable to a range of causes, such as:

- exceptional teaching and management (which would reflect well on the TEO)
- lax assessment practices (which would reflect poorly on the TEO)
- an unusually high-performing cohort (which might not reflect at all on the TEO).

Materiality 2 – breach of the Code

A large provider of international education has committed a breach of the Code. The breach itself relates to missing evidence on a single student file and may be a one-off error. On the other hand, some of the students at the provider are under the age of 18.

The materiality in this case is not immediately clear. The evaluators will need to balance the size of the problem against its possible impact on 'vulnerable learners'. And they will need to determine how well the TEO has self-managed the problem.

Representativeness

Representativeness refers to the relative 'normality' of a finding. That is, how much does a particular finding tell us about the TEO as a whole?

If the finding is very similar to other findings made in the same EER about the same TEO, then it can be considered highly representative. At the other extreme, the finding may be a complete outlier.

If most findings in an EER are representative, you can more easily generalise from them. A cluster of closely related findings will very often lead to a single, consistent EER outcome.

Findings not representative

If some findings are not representative, then it becomes more likely that the overall EER results will be mixed.

For example, if a large TEO has a high-performing programme, NZQA will look to see what inferences can reasonably be drawn. Can the same qualities be seen in other programmes within the same TEO? If so, why? If not, why not?

A second (negative) example: a TEO runs five programmes, three in hospitality, two in information technology (IT). Two of the hospitality programmes, and one of the IT, are selected as focus areas. All the programmes in scope reveal significant weaknesses in internal moderation. From this, NZQA might reasonably infer that moderation is a systemic problem across the TEO. This finding is therefore representative.

Alternatively, if *only* the hospitality programmes show moderation failings, then it would be unreasonable to assume the presence of moderation weaknesses in the IT programme that was *not* in scope. In this instance, the finding of moderation flaws might be considered as representative of the hospitality programmes – but not of the TEO as a whole.

Weighting

When the evaluators have confirmed the findings, they can begin the ratings process.

At this point, the evaluators will already have reached preliminary views on:

- the key findings
- the materiality of these findings
- the representativeness of these findings.

As an intermediate step, before ratings are assigned, the evaluators will consider how the findings will be 'weighted'.

In most EERs, some of the findings will be more significant than others, because of their size, reach, impact, risk or value.

Whenever weighting occurs in an EER judgement, it will be made clear from the wording (and ratings) of the EER report.

Weightier finding, more impact

In the course of their discussion, evaluators will identify which findings should carry the most weight. The more weighted the finding, the greater the impact on the ratings (and statements of confidence).

For example: a medium-sized PTE offers five programmes. Four are highly performing, one is poorly performing. Trainees are distributed equally across the programmes. In terms of overall numbers, then, the TEO would seem to be doing well.

However, there have been several (upheld) complaints from trainees in the 'poor' programme. Moderation results for that programme have been consistently bad for the past three years. The Tertiary Education Commission has reduced funding to this programme for a breach of the Investment Rules.

In this (imaginary) scenario, NZQA might reasonably place a disproportionate weight on this single programme's under-performance in the overall EER outcome.

The act of judgement

EER looks for the best fit between the findings and the rating rubrics. Each rating comes with a descriptor, which indicate the kind of features usually to be found in a rating at that level. Taken together, the rating descriptors guide the evaluators towards choosing one 'level' of quality rather than another.

The text of the relevant section of the report should always give the reader a common-sense explanation of why a rating of Good (rather than, say, Marginal) has been assigned.

Testing emergent ratings

When ratings are first formed, they are considered emergent. They need to be checked and tested.

To do so, NZQA evaluators will ask themselves questions such as:

- Is there any other evidence which might confirm/disconfirm these findings?
- (If a process or outcome) is it reproducible/sustainable?
- (If a flaw or gap) is this a systemic weakness or an occasional error?
- (If a flaw or gap) has this been self-identified/self-managed by the TEO?

Until the EER report is finalised for publication, NZQA remains open to changing any of its ratings. New evidence may come to light. Or an inadvertent error of fact or interpretation may have occurred.

NZQA encourages TEOs to question the ratings whenever they seem unclear or unwarranted. The feedback process is described later in this guide.

Statements of confidence

NZQA expresses statements of confidence about every TEO: for educational performance and for capability in self-assessment.

At some level, the statements are interdependent. NZQA assumes that every well-performing TEO is underpinned by authentic, ongoing self-assessment. A TEO maintains its quality of delivery through strong internal processes. Without strong performance outcomes, self-assessment is meaningless; without strong self-assessment, performance cannot be sustained.

Yet within our reports, the two statements are separated. Each carries a specific meaning.

For example: a PTE has poor course completion results two years in a row. The result in the second year is, however, noticeably better than in the first, because an internal review between the moderation rounds improved the TEO's assessment practices.

In this instance, NZQA might decide to rate capability in self-assessment higher than performance. Performance is still delivering weak results, but the TEO's self-assessment has shown its resilience through proactive engagement and some evidence of process improvement.

How ratings and statements of confidence differ

Ratings evaluate the TEO's performance and its capability in self-assessment from the time of the previous EER to the present. They tend to be weighted towards more recent evidence (though, as always, context matters). Ratings are based on the present moment, looking back.

Statements of confidence summarise the most significant findings in the report. They reach a comprehensive judgement on the quality of the performance and capability in self-assessment of the TEO as a whole. They conclude by estimating the probable future quality of the TEO. As such, they are not an executive summary, but a consolidated view of 'what matters most' in the TEO as a whole. Statements of confidence are based on the present moment, looking forward.

NZQA is reluctant to invest a high degree of confidence in a TEO without compelling, comprehensive evidence of:

- high-quality processes and resources
- a track record of excellence
- a sustainable operating model.

6. How are findings reported?

The EER report provides a public record of the most important and relevant outcomes of the evaluation process.

6.1 The reporting process

Enquiry briefings

Every enquiry phase of an EER begins with a meeting between NZQA and the TEO. NZQA will formally confirm the process and timelines that it intends to follow on site. The TEO should inform NZQA of basic 'housekeeping' arrangements (e.g. civil emergency procedures).

If the TEO is uncertain on any points of process or timelines, or wishes to revise the arrangements, it should declare them as soon as possible.

NZQA aims to be flexible and will try to minimise any disruption to the TEO's educational delivery caused by its enquiry activities.

Keeping the TEO updated

If NZQA's enquiry phase lasts more than a day, NZQA will offer periodic updates to the TEO, usually at the close of each working day. These will identify any information gaps, any serious concerns (by exception), and confirm the process for the following day.

At the close of the enquiry phase, NZQA will hold a formal meeting with the TEO. This meeting will be recorded and the audio file will be made available to the TEO.

The primary aims of the closing meeting are to:

- summarise NZQA's formative findings (this does not include the formative ratings, which are released in the draft report)
- state any serious concerns (by exception)
- note any remaining information gaps, and invite further TEO submissions
- confirm the next steps in the EER reporting process
- invite a brief TEO response, including any follow-up questions.

On occasion, information gaps identified at this stage may be so significant that the EER team cannot yet begin to draft a report. For example, key moderation data may only become available in two weeks' time.

Whenever a situation of this kind arises, NZQA will notify the TEO of the likely delay and explain why it is necessary and important to receive the 'missing' information.

Drafting the EER report

After receiving and considering all necessary information, and completing a synthesis, NZQA will proceed to draft the EER report.

In the act of drafting an EER report, NZQA will sometimes change its initial findings, ratings and statements of confidence in the light of further reflection and newly received information.

When the EER report has been drafted, it undergoes peer review to ensure that its conclusions are fully supported by the evidential file, and an editing check.

The draft report is then circulated across the other relevant knowledge-holders within NZQA to confirm its accuracy.

The last step is management review. The Manager, Evaluation holds delegation for EER reports. Hence, the Manager, Evaluation makes the final decision on the content and findings of all draft EER reports.

Once it has been authorised by the Manager Evaluation, the draft EER report will be sent to the TEO and any relevant Crown agencies for review and comment. Any third parties identified in a report focus will be invited to comment on those sections of the report that relate to them.

Draft EER reports present NZQA's provisional views. The findings, ratings and statements will only be confirmed in the final report after NZQA has considered all stakeholder submissions.

The TEO response

NZQA strongly encourages TEOs to provide full and considered feedback on draft EER reports.

Though a TEO may provide its feedback in any form, a TEO submission should always aim to meet the following standards:

- The TEO response should never be longer than the original report.
- All references to the report should include section and page numbers.
- Any errors of fact in the report should be noted, with supporting evidence.
- Any errors of interpretation in the report should be noted, with supporting evidence.
- Any significant omissions in the report should be noted, and a clear rationale supplied as to why they should be included, with supporting evidence.
- Any disagreements on matters of judgement should be noted, and a clear rationale given, with supporting evidence.
- Any complaints about NZQA conduct should be separately addressed.
- The tone of the response should be professional and courteous.

NZQA will carefully consider any TEO response to a draft EER report on its merits. Ratings may change depending on the merits of the TEO response.

Finalising the EER report

During the course of an EER, a TEO will sometimes take corrective action in relation to one or more instances of non-compliance.

If the action taken is significant, NZQA will note this fact within the EER report. In every such instance, the report will indicate if the correction:

- is a plan only, or a completed action

- addresses a problem that the TEO itself had identified
- addresses a problem that is the result of human error, or more systemic failure
- is major or minor in its impact.

Depending on the nature of the correction, as indicated above, NZQA may change one or more of the associated ratings. Please note that this possibility relates to correcting compliance matters (not filling long-term performance gaps).

In finalising an EER report, NZQA will always consider the quality of all submissions received, including those from third parties (e.g. Immigration New Zealand). If NZQA concludes that the evidence warrants it, contents from these submissions may be included in the final report.

Impact of new information

Between the completion of the draft and final reports, NZQA may receive significant new information about the TEO that has a potential impact on the findings of the report. If so, NZQA will advise the TEO of the new information and invite comment.

Once comment has been received, NZQA will consider whether new information needs to be included in the final version of the EER report, and any impact on findings.

If significant changes are made to an EER report between its draft and final version, NZQA will undertake a second peer review before the report progresses to management review. In this context, NZQA deems 'significant changes' to be:

- the inclusion of any new information that has a major impact on the overall findings
- changes to one or more ratings
- changes to one or more of the statements of confidence.

Final report

The final version of the EER report, when released, represents NZQA's summative view of the quality of a TEO's performance and its capability in self-assessment, as these have been determined by a quality-assured process and signed off by the Manager, Evaluation.

Finalised EER reports include a separate document or letter summarising the reasons that NZQA has made or not made changes in response to the TEO's feedback.

Next steps

In a few instances, TEOs will still disagree with the accuracy or fairness of the final report. A TEO may also have unanswered questions about the findings or the process that led to them.

There are four main options for addressing concerns about accuracy or fairness:

- Query.
- Correction.
- Debrief.
- Reconsideration.

If a TEO has some queries about the process or outcomes of the EER, one easy solution is to contact the Manager, Evaluation, directly. The Manager or one of the evaluation team will try to answer your concerns fully, either by phone or in writing. Please note that this option is for clarification purposes only.

If a TEO believes that some errors of fact remain in the final report, it should write immediately to the Manager, Evaluation, providing supporting evidence. If the Manager agrees that these are in fact errors, they will be corrected in the final report at no on-charged cost to the TEO.

If a TEO believes that its staff could benefit, it may ask NZQA to provide a full verbal debrief on the findings made in the final report. Depending on the size of the TEO, this debrief will be done by phone, videoconference or direct visit. Please note that this option is for capability-building purposes only.

Finally, a TEO may seek a reconsideration of one or both of the statements of confidence in an EER report. The guidelines for lodging a reconsideration application and the indicative process followed are given on the NZQA website.

In deciding whether or not to seek a reconsideration, the TEO should remember that time spent on a reconsideration is outside the original estimated cost. As a rule, reconsiderations add an additional 30-40 per cent to the overall EER costs. They are on-charged in full to the TEO unless the reconsideration leads to a change to one or both of the statements of confidence (in which case the additional costs are waived).

6.2 The reporting guidelines

NZQA never gives ratings or statements of confidence during the enquiry phase. The reason is simple: the ratings and statements of confidence are still 'under development'.

Instead, NZQA will share information on any emergent findings. As indicated earlier, 'findings' are important processed information that contribute directly to the judgements the team will eventually make.

The primary source of the EER team's judgement is the report intended for publication. Any additional comment from NZQA aims only to clarify the intent of the report – not to supplement or replace its findings.

By the same token, while a TEO can provide feedback on a draft report in any form it chooses, NZQA will only classify a TEO response as formal if it:

- is received within a timeline set by NZQA
- is authorised by the TEO's chief executive or delegated authority
- relates to the content of the report or the process which led to its production.

Report: structure and style

EER reports are a summary only. That is, they are based on a larger evidential file, and select which findings should be given most weight and explanation in a defensible, public document.

The readership of any EER report varies widely. A reader could be a student, a staff member at a TEO, an industry representative, a government official or someone else. For that reason, NZQA aims to produce reports that are directly and simply written.

Whoever reads an EER report will find essential information on:

- the context of the TEO
- the scope of the EER
- NZQA's view on the relative quality of the TEO (as expressed though the statements of confidence and ratings)
- why NZQA arrived at these views (i.e. the main supporting evidence)
- what further actions, if any, the TEO might or must undertake, as a result of this report.

To that end, NZQA uses a standardised reporting format which describes the background of the TEO, then provides the evaluative judgements made in the course of the EER.

TEO details

This preliminary section of the report sets the context. It briefly describes what makes the TEO distinctive (for example, 'Academy X is a small flight school in Gisborne') and provides basic information on its operations.

This basic information covers:

- the status of the TEO (e.g. PTE, Signatory to the Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021 – the 'Code')
- the TEO's address and delivery sites
- staff and student numbers
- recent significant changes at the TEO (e.g. started a new hairdressing programme last year).

Student numbers are usually disaggregated by:

- EFTS and actual (current) students

- domestic and international provenance
- Māori and Pasifika and other high priority learners.

This section also notes the confidence statements made in the previous EER report, and the scope of the current EER. Where the scope includes programmes as focus areas the report specifies:

- whether they are NZQA-approved programmes, NZQA-approved training schemes, or TEO-managed programmes
- their formal NZQA programme title and number (where relevant)
- the qualification to which they lead (where relevant).

The only information included in this section of the report is confirmed matters of fact. No evaluative conclusions or judgements can be drawn from this section.

Summary of Results

This section of the report outlines the two statements of confidence. It includes an overarching summary of the key findings which led to these statements, then provides more detail by way of a series of bullet points.

If NZQA believes that a finding is significant enough to influence a statement of confidence, that finding will be noted in this section. On the other hand, if NZQA does not consider that a finding carries quite that degree of weight, the finding in question will only be mentioned in the main body of the report.

This distinction is important. The statements of confidence cover the most important matters as determined by NZQA. If a finding has been relegated to another part of the report, then NZQA certainly considers it relevant and important within that part of the report – but not in isolation as directly impacting on either of the statements of confidence.

The Summary of Results should always present an evidenced case. It should be clear to an impartial reader, for example, why NZQA is expressing itself Highly Confident rather than Confident in the performance of a TEO.

Key evaluation questions (general)

The main body of most EER reports covers the six key evaluation questions (KEQs). Each KEQ carries two ratings (one for performance, the other for capability in self-assessment) and explanatory text.

The KEQs themselves fall into two main groups: those relating to outcomes (KEQs 1 and 2) and those relating to the TEO's supporting processes, systems and resources (KEQs 3-6).

There is no inbuilt 'hierarchy' of KEQs. No KEQ has intrinsically more importance than another. If in the course of an EER the evaluators place special weight on one or more of the KEQs, the report will explain this decision.

The six key evaluation questions used in EER:

1. How well do students achieve?
2. What is the value of the outcomes for key stakeholders, including students?
3. How well do programme design and delivery, including learning and assessment activities, match the needs of students and other relevant stakeholders?
4. How effectively are students supported and involved in their learning?
5. How effective are governance and management in supporting educational achievement?
6. How effectively are important compliance accountabilities managed?

The content of KEQs

The structure of each KEQ section is the same: the two ratings are stated, followed by the findings and supporting evidence, then a summarising conclusion is drawn. This conclusion should be understandable and clear in isolation (as well as congruent with the assigned ratings).

How evidence is cited

Some Tertiary Evaluation Indicators are more commonly associated with some KEQs than with others. For example, one indicator of educational success is learner completion of programmes. Many answers to KEQ1 take this indicator (among others) into account.

The ratings for each KEQ are determined with reference to:

- the relevant evidence gathered in the course of the EER
- the relevant findings made
- the relevant Tertiary Evaluation Indicators
- the relevant rubrics.

Likewise, different kinds of evidence tend to cluster around this or that KEQ, for common-sense reasons. For example, answers to KEQ3, which looks at the effectiveness of programme design and delivery, will often note the relevance of TEO programme review documents or processes. It is less likely that this kind of evidence will also be cited under KEQ4 (which considers how well learners are supported).

Repetition of findings

In some instances, however, the same evidence, findings or indicators will be cited in different KEQs within the same report. This is not 'double jeopardy'. Rather, in NZQA's opinion, some information is relevant in more than one context, in order to adequately answer multiple KEQs.

For example, a TEO may have a poor moderation track record for one of the programmes in scope. Depending on the details of the case, this fact may be considered in answering:

- **KEQ1:** because poor moderation potentially undermines the validity of reported learner completion results
- **KEQ3:** because poor moderation may indicate failures in the training or skills of the TEO's academic staff
- **KEQ3:** because the poor moderation in this instance is not a one-off lapse but an ongoing pattern, which reflects on the oversight of the academic management
- **KEQ6:** because acceptable moderation results and processes are compliance requirements.

In itself, this repetition may – or may not – have a serious effect on the overall outcomes of the EER. As always, NZQA will consider the specific materiality, representativeness and weighting before passing judgement.

As with the Summary of Results, each KEQ answer should always present an evidenced case. It should be clear to an impartial reader, for example, why NZQA is rating the performance of a particular KEQ Marginal rather than Good.

TEO management of compliance

NZQA expects all TEOs to comply with regulatory requirements. These include New Zealand legislation, NZQA Rules, other Crown agency regulations, and standards set by industry bodies.

Under KEQ6, NZQA considers how effectively a TEO is managing these responsibilities. The evaluators examine the TEO's relevant processes, actions and outcomes, and review a selection of evidence (e.g. student enrolment records). Based on this information, a rating is assigned by the same evaluative process used to answer all the other KEQs. Because of limitations of time, sample size and the wording of KEQ6, EER reports never affirm that a TEO is 'fully compliant'. But they note whenever serious problems have been identified and decide, on the evidence available, whether the TEO has reliable internal processes for identifying and mitigating non-compliances.[3]

Evaluating TEO compliance management

An EER enquiry might reveal that two international students entered the organisation without proper insurance. This would be considered a breach of the Code.

For the NZQA evaluators, this would of course be an important fact. But it would not in itself determine the KEQ rating. To reach an evaluative judgement under KEQ6, the evaluators would ask themselves how important this breach was in the larger context. Were these two students sampled from a cohort of four – or of 400? Was the problem identified by the TEO itself and properly managed? Was the failure systemic, or an isolated example of human error?

[3] Other Crown mechanisms, such as risk monitoring, provide the public with more detailed ongoing assurance that no 'unmanaged' breaches are occurring in the TEO sector.

Focus Areas

All EER reports rate focus areas by the same methodology as used to rate KEQs and arrive at statements of confidence.

As a rule, separate text on focus areas will usually be found only in reports on large and complex entities (such as wānanga and Te Pūkenga).

For smaller and less complex EERs, where all the necessary contextual information has already been provided through the KEQs, a focus area will not include comment.

Requirements and Recommendations

Some EER reports include text under **Recommendations** and **Requirements**.

Recommendations are added whenever NZQA has found specific opportunities for improvement that it believes the TEO should consider.

Recommendations are optional. A TEO will be expected, however, to reflect on the merits of each recommendation as part of their ongoing self-assessment. The next EER of the TEO may therefore include follow-up questions such as: 'what (if anything) did you do about our recommendations? 'Why (or why not)?', 'How effective were the steps you took?'

Recommendations aim to provide guidance on *what* might change in a TEO, rather than directing *how* change should occur. Decisions on the 'how' rests with the TEO itself.

Requirements are mandatory. They are included whenever NZQA has identified a breach of an essential regulatory requirement (such as the NZQA Rules). A TEO must comply quickly and effectively with any report requirements. NZQA will check that requirements have been met either at the time of the next EER *or* sooner through one of its other monitoring activities.

7. What happens next?

Categories

When an EER report is published on the NZQA website, the TEO will be assigned a new category. The category is correlated with the two statements of confidence in the final EER report. Information on the assignment of categories can be found on the NZQA website.

- If a TEO is Category 1 or 2, another EER will be scheduled within the following four years. As a rule, no particular date for the next EER will be set at this stage.
- If a TEO is Category 3 or 4, NZQA will advise it promptly of the date for its next EER. For a Category 3 TEO, this date will occur 12 to 24 months after publication. For a Category 4 TEO, this date will occur six to 12 months after publication.

Impacts

Every TEO receives NZQA sanctions or incentives as a result of its category. For Category 1 and 2 TEOs there are incentives; for Category 3 and 4 TEOs there are sanctions.

In addition to any sanctions imposed, Category 3 and 4 TEOs will be asked to develop an improvement plan. This plan must be sent to NZQA.

NZQA does not usually approve the content of a TEO's Improvement Plan. NZQA will, however, often monitor progress against the plan whenever there are measurable process, resource or compliance gaps.

Some other Crown agencies use the TEO categories in their own decision-making. Immigration New Zealand, for example, will not issue student visas on behalf of a Category 4 TEO. TEOs should contact relevant agencies directly for current advice on the impact, if any, of their category status.

Feedback

NZQA is open to any constructive feedback on our performance as regulators.

When a TEO is sent the final draft of its EER report, the TEO is invited to complete a questionnaire on its experience of the EER process.

All questionnaires returned to NZQA will be reviewed by the Manager, Evaluation. All feedback will be shared with the relevant staff, unless the TEO has marked its comments as confidential.

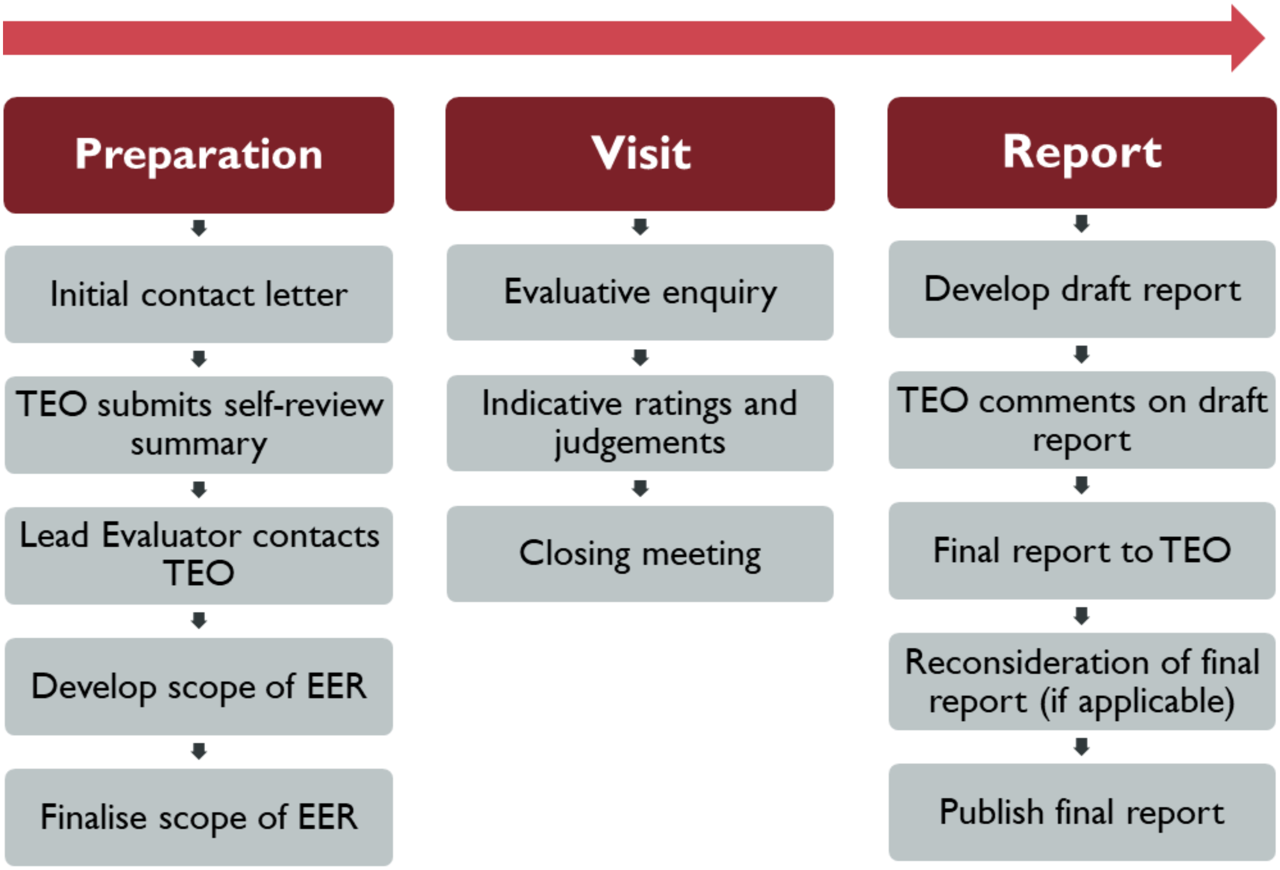
In addition, NZQA invites the ongoing thoughts of all stakeholders in the EER process. TEO concerns, questions and suggestions can be formally raised through peak bodies, which meet regularly with NZQA. Or a stakeholder may choose to approach the Manager, Evaluation directly, at any time.

Whichever route you choose, NZQA guarantees that your feedback will be respectfully received and carefully considered. Some of the best enhancements within EER have arisen from TEO advice. We trust this positive trend will continue.

8. Process of external evaluation and review

Below is a quick guide to the steps in the EER process. For the usual timeframes for each step of the process, see the table on the following page.

This timeline details the most common deadlines for a 'typical' EER. Timings can vary according to the circumstances of the individual TEO and NZQA's own requirements.



Activity	When?	What happens?
Send initial contact letter	12 months before EER	TEO notified of date of EER
TEO submits self-assessment summary	16 weeks before EER	TEO emails summary to NZQA
Lead Evaluator contacts TEO	10-12 weeks before EER	Lead Evaluator discusses TEO's self-assessment summary and possible pre-EER scoping meeting
Develop scope of EER	6-10 weeks before EER Up to 6 months for Te Pūkenga subsidiaries, wānanga, GTEs	Lead Evaluator develops scope and EER agenda
Finalise scope of EER	4-6 weeks before EER	Confirmation and draft agenda sent to TEO
Conduct EER	During scheduled week of EER visit	Evaluative enquiry carried out Evaluators to reach indicative ratings and judgements Closing meeting reports on strengths and weaknesses
Write draft EER report	Following EER visit	Peer and editorial review Feedback from other NZQA teams and government agencies
Draft report to TEO	Within 30 working days of EER	TEO provides feedback to Lead Evaluator (10 days)
Final report to TEO	10 days following feedback from TEO	Lead evaluator considers feedback; changes made to report if warranted
Reconsideration of final report	Following receipt of final report	At TEO request, report reviewed by independent party for process issues Waived by TEO if not required
Publish final report	10 working days after release of final report to TEO and no reconsideration request	Report published on NZQA website

External Evaluation and Review Rubrics

Rubric 1: Criteria for rating Educational Performance for Key Evaluation Questions and Focus Areas

Excellent	• Performance is exceptional • Highly effective contributing processes • Very few gaps or weaknesses • Any gaps or weaknesses have no significant impact and are managed very effectively
Good	• Performance is generally strong • Effective contributing processes • Few gaps or weaknesses • Gaps and weaknesses have some impact but are mostly managed effectively
Marginal	• Performance is variable • Inconsistent contributing processes • Some gaps or weaknesses have some impact, and are not managed effectively
Poor	• Performance is unacceptably weak • Ineffective contributing processes • Significant gaps or weaknesses have significant impact, and are not managed effectively • Does not meet minimum expectations or requirements

Rubric 2: Criteria for rating Capability in Self-Assessment for Key Evaluation Questions and Focus Areas

Excellent	• Self-assessment is exceptional and comprehensive • Strong evidence of improved outcomes brought about by self-assessment activities • Very few gaps or weaknesses • Any gaps and weaknesses have no significant impact and are managed very effectively
Good	• Self-assessment is generally strong and comprehensive • Evidence of improved outcomes brought about by self-assessment activities • Few gaps or weaknesses • Gaps or weaknesses have some impact but are mostly managed effectively
Marginal	• Self-assessment is inconsistent in quality and coverage • Limited evidence of improved outcomes brought about by self-assessment activities • Some gaps and weaknesses have some impact, and are not managed effectively
Poor	• Self-assessment is generally ineffective or weak • No or minimal evidence of improved outcomes brought about by self-assessment activities • Significant gaps or weaknesses have significant impact, and are not managed effectively • Does not meet minimum expectations or requirements

Rubric 3: Criteria for judgements about organisational-level Educational Performance

Highly Confident	• The most important needs of learners and all other stakeholders have been comprehensively met • Highly effective processes have contributed to valued outcomes • No significant gaps or weaknesses • Very strong evidence that performance will continue to be exceptional
Confident	• Many important needs of learners and most other stakeholders are being met • Effective processes contribute to valued outcomes • Gaps or areas of weakness are not serious and are effectively managed • Strong evidence that performance will continue to be consistent and sound
Not Yet Confident	• Some important needs of learners and other stakeholders are being met • Some inconsistency in processes that contribute to valued outcomes • Not all gaps or areas of weakness are effectively managed, or evidence of improvement is only partial • Limited evidence that future performance will be consistent and sound
Not Confident	• Several important needs of learners and other stakeholders are not being met, or are only partially met • Significant inconsistency in processes that contribute to valued outcomes • Key gaps or areas of weaknesses are ineffectively managed • Strong indications that future performance may fail to meet minimum expectations

Rubric 4: Criteria for judgements about Capability in Self-Assessment

Highly Confident	• Comprehensive, ongoing identification and review of all areas of priority need • Consistently high quality of self-assessment information and processes • Findings are used insightfully to make improvements and achieve valued outcomes • Very strong evidence that exceptional self-assessment will continue to guide and inform performance
Confident	• Effective identification and review of majority of areas of priority need • Generally high quality of self-assessment information and processes • Findings are used to make a range of improvements and achieve valued outcomes • Strong evidence that effective self-assessment will continue to guide and inform performance
Not Yet Confident	• Partially effective identification and review of some areas of priority need • Inconsistent quality of self-assessment information and processes • Findings are used to make some improvements and achieve some valued outcomes • Limited evidence that future self-assessment will be used to guide and inform performance
Not Confident	• Largely ineffective identification and review of areas of priority need • Significant weaknesses in the quality of self-assessment information and processes • Findings are not used to make improvements • Strong indications that future self-assessment may fail to meet minimum expectations

Tertiary Evaluation Indicators

Outcome indicators ← Process Indicators →

Achievement & Outcomes	Programmes match needs	Student engagement	Governance & Management	Compliance
These indicators are relevant to: **1. How well do students achieve?** **2. What is the value of the outcomes for key stakeholders, including students?**	**These indicators are relevant to:** **3. How well do programme design and delivery, including learning and assessment activities, match the needs of students and other relvant stakeholders?**	**These indicators are relevant to:** **4. How effectively are students supported in their learning?**	**These indicators are relevant to:** **5. How effective are governance and management at supporting educational achievement?**	**These indicators are relevant to:** **6. How effectively are important compliance accountabilities managed?**
Students acquire useful skills and knowledge and develop their cognitive abilities.	Programmes maintain relevance to stakeholders and communities.	Student learning goals are well understood.	Organisational purpose and direction is clear.	Policies and practices are legal and ethical.
Students complete courses and/or gain qualifications.	Programmes are regularly reviewed and updated to meet existing and emerging needs of students and stakeholders.	Comprehensive and timely study information and advice is provided to assist students pursue their chosen pathways.	Organisational academic leadership is effective.	The TEO has effective compliance management processes.
Students gain relevant employment and/or engage successfully with further study.	Learning environments are planned and structured for the benefit and needs of students.	Responses to the well-being needs of students are appropriate.	Sufficient resources are allocated to support learning, teaching and research.	Relevant legislation, rules and regulations are complied with.
Students apply new skills and knowledge and contribute positively to their local and wider communities.	Academic standards and integrity are maintained.	The learning environment is inclusive.	Data analysis is used effectively throughout the organisation.	
Students improve their well-being and enhance their abilities and attributes.	Learning activities and resources are effective in engaging students.	Policies and procedures minimise barriers to learning.	Recruitment and development of staff is effective.	
Communities' and iwi bodies of knowledge are created, developed and advanced.	Key stakeholders, including students, are clearly identified and engagement is appropriate and ongoing.	Students have opportunities to apply knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts.	Staff are valued.	
	Assessment is fair, valid, consistent and appropriate.	Students are supported to establish effective social and academic support networks.	The education organisation anticipates and responds effectively to change.	
	Assessment provides students and teachers with useful feedback on progress.	Students are provided with useful and timely feedback on their progress.	Innovation, responsiveness and continuity are balanced.	
	Learning activities and assessment tasks are purposefully aligned with learning outcomes.		The TEO operates a sustainable business model, which is aligned to its educational purpose.	

Self-assessment is comprehensive and effective