

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

BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY TRAINING ORGANISATION

Self-assessment and **creating
fit-for-purpose learning**

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BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY TRAINING ORGANISATION

Self-assessment and creating fit-for-purpose learning

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

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

Self-assessment is fundamentally about being an effective organisation and reflecting on day-to-day processes and practices.

For workplace-based learning, this means creating training arrangements that encourage learners and employers to actively engage with education and assessment.

A culture of change is key: supporting staff throughout an organisation to see themselves as playing a part in learner success and think about how well they carry out that role.

Encouraging reflective practice contributes to making an organisation more effective and improves its reputation and relationships with its sector.

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 achieving outcomes relevant to identified stakeholders and its capability to use self-assessment to improve its performance. From September 2009 to September 2013, 22 ITOs participated in external evaluation and review.

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

ITO PERFORMANCE is the extent to which the training outcomes influenced by an ITO represent quality and value for employers, industry, trainees, and government. An evaluation of ITO performance involves answering questions focused primarily on the quality, relevance and value of training and how well the ITO meets the needs of these groups.

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

“I SAID TO THE [TRAINING ADVISORS] IT’S ABOUT ASKING, ‘HOW DID YOU THINK THAT WENT?’ TRADIES DO SELF-ASSESSMENT ALL THE TIME.”

BCITO is the industry training organisation (ITO) with responsibility for establishing standards and arranging training for the building and construction industries. It was founded in 1993 as one of the first ITOs following the creation of the Industry Training system.

In 2012, BCITO arranged training for 7,506 trainees (3,074 Standard Training Measures) in programmes ranging from levels 1-4, in addition to school-based programmes such as BConstructive and Gateway.

In its most recent external evaluation and review (2012) by NZQA, BCITO received statements of *Highly Confident* in self-assessment capability and *Highly Confident* in ITO performance.

BCITO’s approach to self-assessment has involved encouraging its staff to constantly reflect on what they do. BCITO began seriously thinking about self-assessment in the late 2000s, at around the same time as the concept began to be discussed within New Zealand’s quality assurance agencies. While some negative commentary in NZQA’s 2007 audit report of BCITO prompted immediate action, the ITO had itself identified the weaknesses seen by NZQA, and senior management had already begun to consider how these issues could be addressed.

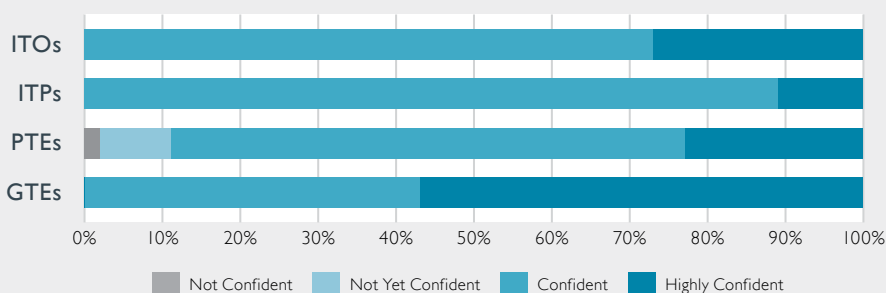
The ITO prefers to use the term ‘reflective practice’ or ‘being a learning organisation’ rather than ‘self-assessment’. For BCITO, this represents the heart of its approach to self-assessment, which is thinking of it not as a separate process or an event, but as a culture: a series of behaviours and practices that underpin how the whole organisation approaches its ultimate goal of creating positive learner outcomes. This involves emphasising reflective practice across the entire organisation, and encouraging all staff to think about how their activities support the goals of the organisation. Self-assessment ‘processes’ are simply the parts of the ITO’s policies and approach that facilitate this.

Organisationally, this has meant more systematic collection and analysis of data about learners, and a stronger emphasis on communication within the ITO. The most visible element of the new approach, however, has been in the changes BCITO has made to the way it assesses learners. As in most industry training, BCITO’s trainees undertake the majority of their learning within the workplace, with the ITO’s role being to arrange and assess that learning (rather than to *provide* education). This creates its own challenges, as the learning environment is more individualised than in other sectors, and training is continuous rather than structured by terms and class assessment dates. As one interviewee phrased it, where traditional providers generally have regular cohorts of learners who progress along a relatively similar path, BCITO “has thousands of cohorts of one person.”

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

CONFIDENT

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



† 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...

Improving organisational capability
OTAGO POLYTECHNIC

Developing sustainable programmes
PEOPLE POTENTIAL

Enhancing learning and teaching
TŪRANGA ARARAU

Pursuing effective change
EASTERN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

APPROACHING SELF-ASSESSMENT

“ SELF-ASSESSMENT IS
DECIDING WHAT YOU’RE
TRYING TO DO,
CONSIDER[ING] HOW YOU’RE GOING
TO DO THAT, AND THEN
PAUSING OCCASIONALLY
TO THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU’RE
DOING AND WHAT [YOU] COULD BE
DO[ING]
DIFFERENTLY”

KEY POINTS

For BCITO, self-assessment is about encouraging reflective practice on the part of everyone in the organisation, rather than putting in place a lot of new processes.

BCITO had already begun thinking about and changing its approach to assessing learners in a way that aligned with the self-assessment approach.

It also involved thinking about the role of the entire organisation in supporting learner outcomes – everyone contributes, not only the people directly interacting with trainees.

BCITO’s new workplace assessment model, and the journey of getting there, is an example of self-assessment in practice.

BCITO’s old workplace assessment model involved individual employers acting as assessors, using structured worksheets, while the ITO’s roving training advisors acted as moderators of individual assessment decisions.

This approach was identified by the ITO as having significant problems. Practically, it required significant paperwork on the part of the assessing employers, and the ITO had become concerned about consistency issues – particularly around the integration of theoretical and practical elements. In terms of assessment quality, the old model had led to an overly rigid system that focused on checking off individual standards. In BCITO’s view, what both learners and industry needed was a process that supported a more holistic approach to learning and which would create qualified professionals who could display overall competence rather than skill at individual tasks.

In 2009, the ITO therefore decided to move to a new model built around the notion of reflective practice by both staff and learners. This approach, which is described in depth in Vaughan *et al.* (2012)¹, involved several key elements:

- > Basing assessment on a ‘team’ model in the workplace: the trainee, the employer and the training advisor are all parts of that team, and all have active roles to play in the assessment process. The learner is responsible for collecting evidence (within a training plan developed by the team), the employer is responsible for verifying that evidence, and the training advisor is the professional assessor of competence.

- > Moving from a task-based ‘checklist’ approach, to a more holistic model (based on Professional Conversations) of engagement between all members of the team to establish competence. This emphasises the professional judgement of the assessor; whose assessment begins from the moment they set foot on the worksite.
- > A strong emphasis on creating a community of practice model among training advisors. The core of this is a National Moderation workshop where training advisors share experiences, practices and advice. However, it is also achieved through a greater emphasis on internal information sharing, such as training plans being openly available through the BCITO intranet.

The core of this new approach to assessment was ensuring that the assessment process was fit for purpose and able to cope with the complexity of different workplaces and the actual situations in which trainees find themselves. It represents the ITO as an organisation reflecting on what it is trying to achieve – skilled building and construction practitioners who can reflect on their own work – and how its model of assessment can best encourage that goal.

¹ Vaughan, K., Gardiner, B., & Eyre, J. (2012). *A Transformational System for On-Job Assessment in the Building and Construction Industries*. Wellington: Ako Aotearoa.

BENEFITS OF USING SELF-ASSESSMENT

“

DO [SELF-ASSESSMENT] BECAUSE IT'LL LEAD TO BETTER OUTCOMES FOR LEARNERS, YOUR EMPLOYERS AND THE INDUSTRY AS A WHOLE... REFLECTIVE PRACTICES OPEN UP A VIEW OF HOW SUCCESSFUL YOU'VE BEEN”

KEY POINTS

BCITO's new approach to assessment was intended to improve the quality and outcomes of its training; not only its already strong performance on the Educational Performance Indicators.

The ITO sees this as also having led to more productive relationships with industry partners, including conversations that focus on educational dimensions and the role that employers play in skills development, rather than simply the mechanics of service delivery.

BCITO strongly believes that taking a reflective approach has also enhanced relationships within the ITO, leading to staff at all levels who are more reflective about their own work and more committed to improving the business as a whole.

BCITO also believes that its approach strengthened its reputation for producing well-qualified and work-ready graduates; the ITO considers that they are seen as a key brand by their industry, with a reputation for high standards.

BCITO is a high-achieving ITO in relation to the standardised metrics used to monitor performance. In its 2012 Educational Performance Indicator results, for example, BCITO had credit and programme completion rates of 100 per cent. It would therefore have been easy for BCITO to take the view that there was little room to improve. The ITO does, however, believe that implementing a more reflective approach to arranging and assessing training has benefited learners. This has been validated through an external evaluation that – although emphasising that evidence for impact was in an emerging state – identified apparent gains, such as trainees making more purposeful progress and learning more 'deeply' in a way that better integrates theory and practice.

The interviewees expressed a view that the ITO now operates a more authentic model driven by a desire to ensure that the organisation is doing the best possible job for its learners and industry. This is the case not only with regard to assessing learners, but also with regard to the ITO's whole operation. One interviewee described the result of encouraging reflective practice by all staff as "education [being] in the air" – every role in the organisation is seen as contributing to the success of learners, and all staff are encouraged to think about how well they are doing at that task.

In turn, BCITO believes that the outcomes of self-assessment have enhanced its reputation and improved relationships with its industry stakeholders. This includes workplaces themselves becoming more involved as partners in the learning process. Although the team approach to assessment reduces the compliance burden on employers compared with the previous model, it also means that employers are explicitly encouraged to think about the role they play in supporting their apprentices' learning.

Internally, BCITO believes that this reflective approach has resulted in a much more efficient organisation. Interviewees felt that more systematic

use of data means that the organisation has a greater understanding of its own activities, the needs of learners, and the nature of demand. The ITO is now more able to effectively identify and respond to new challenges such as the requirements of the Christchurch rebuild. The ITO's new approach to self-assessment has dramatically reduced the required number of assessors (from 4,000-5,000 down to 75). Interviewees also felt that BCITO's emphasis on changing culture and business-as-usual practices, rather than creating specific self-assessment structures, has also made quality assurance an easier process for staff to engage in. As one noted, the ITO's experience of external evaluation and review in 2012 was far less stressful than the earlier NZQA audit as it largely involved the ITO "doing what we do regularly."

One of the strongest perceived benefits from moving to a more reflective approach has been in the overall working environment. Interviewees described higher levels of trust, openness and staff collegiality within the ITO, with examples such as training advisors being comfortable sharing training plans with each other to obtain professional feedback. One long-serving interviewee described the lack of 'fear' around organisational restructuring. In his view, staff are now more open to change and seem more ready to make those changes, since they trust that such changes are genuinely about improving the quality of the ITO's service to learners and employers. Several interviewees noted that as a result of all these characteristics, BCITO is seen by its industry as offering high-quality services and being a highly desirable place to work. Their key evidence for this is that the ITO consistently attracts very strong industry candidates for vacancies, and that ITO staff are themselves in high demand elsewhere in the building and construction sector.

“WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO DO IS NOT ALWAYS WHAT'S EASIEST TO ACHIEVE”

CHALLENGES FACED

KEY POINTS

The key challenge for BCITO was to fully engage staff. Since the BCITO's move to self-assessment was about culture change, it required staff to not just come to grips with new processes, but to change their way of thinking.

Strategies for addressing this include placing a strong emphasis on professional development as part of the new model, and using staff themselves to drive change.

The new approach is also resource-intensive, and requires acceptance from governance that this investment is necessary.

BCITO's implementation of self-assessment, or reflective practice, has been based on culture – trying to change the way that staff think about what they do. The single most substantial challenge the organisation faced in moving to this new approach was in moving staff away from an 'audit' mentality and into a new way of understanding their role. For example, although many training advisors (and many employers) had complaints about the previous approach to workplace assessment, one interviewee noted that people can take comfort in comparatively rigid systems. Asking them to move to a more holistic model that emphasises professional judgement can be disorienting.

Professional development has been a key strategy for addressing this issue, and one interviewee noted that for many staff the direct face of change has been BCITO's training and development team. The ITO has consciously worked to develop a human resources culture that supports reflective practice, for example by putting staff through leadership training. This emphasises that BCITO's self-assessment model was not framed as about complying with external processes, but about allowing the individual staff member (in any part of the organisation) to work more effectively and efficiently.

Another important aspect of overcoming this challenge was to try and drive self-assessment from many points in the organisation, rather than simply by decree 'from the top'. This involved emphasising communication throughout the organisation. For example, members of the Executive Leadership Team met with staff at all layers of the ITO to explain the process and the rationale behind it, and how it addressed dissatisfaction that staff had been expressing.

The ITO also identified champions within the organisation and provided support for them to lead change within their teams. Notably, the ITO did not prejudge where these champions might be located and supported them regardless of role or seniority.

The champions helped to create an environment that encouraged change, rather than simply being extensions of management.

Beyond this fundamental challenge, the resource-hungry nature of the change required full buy-in and ongoing support from the governance of the organisation. Several interviewees noted that moving to a model that genuinely supports reflective practice required significant investment in terms of both money and time: new trainee management systems and IT infrastructure, investing in training and travel for staff etc.

This involved an internally and externally directed 'sales job' by senior management – particularly from the Chief Executive. This focused not only on commercial benefits (one interviewee noted that in purely commercial terms the change would be hard to sell), but on the benefits for the industry and employers the ITO exists to serve. It was also valuable having the 'breathing room' provided by the economic downturn in 2008 and consequent decline in trainee numbers. This gave practitioners the time to fully engage with the scale of shift that was occurring.

OPPORTUNITIES AND FACTORS FOR SUCCESS



[SELF-ASSESSMENT] IS PART OF
DAY-TO-DAY BUSINESS
IT'S NOT A SEPARATE THING.

WHEN YOU GIVE PEOPLE THE
POWER TO MAKE CHANGE
AND TRUST THAT THEY WILL,
THEY'LL ENGAGE"

KEY POINTS

Key to making self-assessment work for BCITO is treating it as part of business as usual, and framing the shift to a new approach as being about improving existing practices.

Part of this has been emphasising trust and communication within the organisation.

Strong commitment on the part of leadership was key, but so was an emphasis on change coming up through the organisation rather than from the top down.

BCITO's engagement with self-assessment is based on a desire to make it part of business as usual. Interviewees consistently described moving away from seeing quality assurance as something that only happens at a particular point in time to a way of thinking about how the organisation works on a day-to-day basis. This is part of a shift within the organisation of moving to what one interviewee termed a "culture of performance" rather than being driven solely by compliance requirements.

This was one reason for the ITO's expressed preference for the term 'reflective practice'. Several interviewees noted the importance of viewing this approach to quality assurance as a series of ongoing behaviours and practices, and some felt that using the term 'self-assessment' encouraged people to think of it as a specific, time-bound event rather than an ongoing process that should inform everything the organisation does. One interviewee's key piece of advice for other organisations about self-assessment was, "don't write a manual" – self-assessment should involve thinking about how to make the organisation's operation truly fit-for-purpose, rather than applying of a separate set of procedures.

Critical to creating this culture change has been the emphasis placed on trust within the organisation. This is most obvious within the new workplace assessment model, which several interviewees described as moving away from a "policeman on the shoulder" approach to ensuring good quality assessment. This new approach is based on respecting the professional judgement and expertise of the training advisor, with consistency being the product of a strong community of practice among experts, rather than adherence to rigid checklists.

Developing effective ways of communicating is another core strand, particularly given the dispersed nature of the learning environment in ITOs; one interviewee described BCITO's philosophy as "quality assurance through good communication." As well as using systems such as a regularly updated

intranet, the ITO has consciously tried to develop structures that break down internal barriers and create a more integrated organisation. For example, rather than the executive leadership team taking control of strategic decision-making, there is now more emphasis on committees composed of ITO staff, and these include members drawn from across the divisions of the organisation. Similarly, the ITO's strategic plan is developed in a more 'bottom-up' manner, with staff involved in developing an initial plan that then goes to the Board for consideration (rather than staff simply being consulted on an existing document).

Underlying all this, however, was the sentiment that moving to this new model would not have worked without leadership from senior management. The executive leadership team actively engaged with the process and with staff, holding face-to-face meetings and articulating the nature of and need for the new model to staff throughout the organisation. For BCITO, this commitment was key to the practical redevelopment of processes and structures to fit the new model.

On a philosophical level, however, interviewees also felt that what some referred to as management's education perspective was important: a belief that the business of the ITO is creating good education outcomes, and that to achieve these effectively requires an organisation that is built on (and supports) people who reflect on their own practice. The external drivers that were the introduction of formalised self-assessment and external evaluation and review, along with the results of the 2007 NZQA audit, were key to generating buy-in for the new model. The consensus among interviewees, however, was that BCITO would have been pursuing these changes anyway as an inherent part of being an efficient and effective ITO.

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 does the ITO understand and meet the needs of industry, learners and government?

What is the value of the outcomes for employers and their trainees?

How well do trainees achieve?

How effective is the training arranged by the ITO?

What is the quality of the assessment being undertaken towards industry standards and qualifications?

How well does the ITO's governance and management support the ITO to meet its statutory functions?