



2017 Symposium Minutes

Wednesday 15th and Thursday 16th of November 2017, Auckland English Academy,
ICL Education Centre, 10 – 12 Lorne Street, Auckland, New Zealand

Attendees:

ACCET – Bill Larkin; British Council – Liz McLaren; English New Zealand – Wayne Dyer, Kim Renner, Ewen Mackenzie-Bowie, Darren Conway; Languages Canada – Julian Inglis; NEAS – Patrick Pheasant, Ana Bratkovic; Orion Assessment Services - David Hubel; New Zealand Ministry of Education – Erin Roxburgh; NZQA – Susan Smart (16th November).

Wayne Dyer, Chairman of English NZ, welcomed participants and introductions were made.

Acceptance of the 2016 Symposium minutes, Facilitator: Ewen Mackenzie-Bowie

The minutes were reviewed. Bill stated CEA are still keen to join QALen activities although membership has not been confirmed.

Vote: to accept the 2016 QALen Symposium minutes

Bill Larkin/Patrick Pheasant
Carried

Round Table Update, Facilitator: Julian Inglis

Brief reports were provided by each organisation regarding developments and innovations in the measurement of quality assurance and accreditation:

NEAS

NEAS quality assures ELCs across Australia, SE Asia and new centres in the Middle East. ASQA (Australian Skills Quality Authority) and TEQSA (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency) manage minimum standards and work closely with NEAS (voluntary standards) – NEAS provides higher aspirational QA.

One member has moved fully into online ELT so this has been a new development for NEAS QA, and they are happy to share their experience with QALen members.

The Government-adopted ELICOS standards have interesting new components e.g. benchmarking pathways into universities. TEQSA lobbied heavily for benchmarking but the onus is on the EL provider rather than the university. The original suggestion was a backwards step of benchmarking against an external test. The government took a middle of the road approach.

There is also a specific teacher to student ratio required of 1:18. Australia will soon see standards applied to Cert 4 (VET sector) where previously there have been a lot of students in each class – it will require a change of business model.

Symposium attendees discussed various benchmarking options.

ACCET

ACCET has three distinct constituencies and 2010 legislation requires all EL providers to get accreditation via ACCET and CEA.

The impact of government change is significant but different for each group. The new administration is more profit focused and ACCET is now accrediting an additional 104 sites.

EL student numbers decreased in 2016 and there will be further impact; Intensive EL is in crisis with the strong dollar, Brazil and Saudi scholarships drying up and the USA not perceived globally as a welcoming place.

Orion Assessment Services/Languages Canada

Orion accredits members of Languages Canada. They have recently done their first online learning accreditation of an innovative LC member teaching 3,000 students on a variety of platforms.

The increasing need for assessment of online learning may require amendments to the existing Standards. An Interpretation Committee can blend amendments into the Standards rather than having constant updates.

TESOL Canada TT programmes are on the verge of collapse. Languages Canada refers to TESOL Canada qualifications in their Standards so may now align with other QALEN members' Standards, enabling them to also cover the increasing number of teachers with international TESOL qualifications.

LC has been looking to separate accreditation and membership, but members are not currently in favour.

Student Visa changes happened without any consultation with the EL sector; highlighting QA and advocacy work are becoming increasingly important. 2017 stats are not in yet but there is likely to be an increase from students who had previously been US-bound e.g. Mexican.

English New Zealand

NZQA (New Zealand Qualifications Authority) is the regulatory body for all non-University tertiary, secondary and primary providers. EL schools need to be registered and have courses recognised to take student visa holders. NZQA does an EER (External Evaluation and Review) every four years which is a two-day evaluative process that is outcomes focused.

English NZ quality assures members using the English NZ Standards. The four-yearly audits and unannounced spot checks are not formally recognised by NZQA, but are acknowledged and the reports are used as evidence in support of the EER process.

Currently English NZ is trying to get recognition of a "Third Estate" where EL becomes a distinct sector (similar to Australia). English NZ would then do QA for EL providers but NZQA would still be responsible for registration and course approval.

The recent change in government (to a Labour-led coalition) could see potential changes to student visas, in part as a consequence of poor policy which loosened EL rules/entry requirements to encourage growth from the Indian market. There are potential changes to work rights (currently available for EL student visa holders studying for 14+ weeks) so advocacy work is a priority.

The Code of Practice for the Pastoral Care of International Students is being increasingly used as a compliance tool and includes monitoring of agents. There is a perception that students are at risk/being exploited so a lot of government money is also going into a wellbeing strategy.

British Council

Global government incompetence – they don't look at what is happening globally to prevent making mistakes.

The BC is independent of the sector body but globally recognised as EL delivery experts. Five years ago there were problems with vocational providers offering low quality courses and students not meeting EL/academic capabilities. This led to a subculture of working rather than studying and the knee-jerk reaction damaged the whole industry with no distinction made between ELT and other types of providers. The main effect was an increase in applications for accreditation (it had previously been voluntary).

BC accredits approx. 580 providers and 80% are in the private sector. T4 visas have the right to work attached and the government recently awarded the accreditation contract to a body that inspects boarding schools. One positive knock-on is that providers realised the quality of the evaluation process offered by the BC and the qual mark. However, there has been a period of adjustment and T4 visas are less important to many providers unless offering long-term/ EAP/FS courses.

There was a significant downturn in the EL market in 2016 which was a combination of the strong GBP, terrorism concerns, and negative rhetoric re poor providers and the clampdown on visas.

There was discussion around the table about provider closures and tuition fee protection schemes.

Brexit changes could result in changes for European students. Recent summer results are positive with some non-London centres benefiting from the safety concerns. In 2016 the junior market outnumbered the adult market for the first time.

Care of Minors Attending Short-term Language Programmes – Best Practice Principles - Ratification of communique, Facilitator: Ewen Mackenzie-Bowie

The communique, developed as a result of the 2016 Symposium, was reviewed and adopted. Attendees agreed that “adoption” means able to be used as a guideline rather than binding QALEN members to policies and procedures.

The document is published on the QALEN website and it was agreed that some narrative is required, and it should be a living document. Members should feedback to the next symposium if amendments are required.

World Events – the current impact on ELT globally, Facilitator: Bill Larkin

There has been a lot of change in the various countries represented in the group. Members discussed political and/or economic impacts for the ELT industry.

- Brexit has benefited some countries. Wealth to travel is increasing, but there’s an opposing force of anti-globalisation/national identity.
- There’s a growth in transnational provision and resultant need for QA. There are a lot of centres in Vietnam and many want a QA tick to differentiate).
- In-country provision is potentially a big threat and there are some big players in the ASEAN region. The language teaching methodology in some NESB countries is of very high quality and the impact is likely to be seen at lower levels, EL and undergraduate.
- Canadian secondary schools are attracting Chinese students but EL levels on completion aren’t high enough for tertiary. It’s taking students away from EL providers.
- Online/virtual learning is significant and could pull students away from accredited member schools.
- Apps/tools can give basic understanding so offshore provision is more about level and experience.
- Concept of the immersion in the culture is still benefiting us and students aren’t necessarily learning English only to communicate – an online holiday is hard to imagine.
- AI will have an impact. Duolingo has more than 200m users. It may be okay for some languages.
- We’re overestimating and underestimating the impact of these technologies. Students’ expectations of technology to support language learning will increase, but immersion is a very important part of what people want. It’s about interaction of culture and language that’s important. We need to figure out how to navigate this and adapt.
- Pearson have completed research into the speed people learn a language and progress is much quicker in an EL speaking country.
- The increase in available data can assist our marketing so we counteract change, but expectations of learners are continually changing.
- In NZ, the definition of full-time study is still 20 hours face-to-face (same as Australia). This helps protect but could also be a delay in innovation from government agencies.
- Interaction between cultures is also critical and needs more emphasis. Integrating with native EL speakers continues to be a problem for all.
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QALEN Website, Facilitator: Ana Bratkovic

The website was originally designed by a FELTOM connection and now NEAS has control of the site with registered domains. Attendees thanked NEAS for covering the costs.

It's not an active site and there have been no structural changes. Decisions made:

- Change "events" to "Annual Symposium"
- Show links to each member's Standards on the contact details
- Create a Dropbox for sharing documents rather than a members' area on the website
- Narrative is required around the Communique
- Update Symposium pictures/listings to include all – the Malta Symposium is missing

There was discussion about potential QALEN members. Anyone interested would need to address the membership statement before any further discussion by current members to assess eligibility.

There was consensus to limit participation in the Symposium to organisations directly relevant to the purpose of QALEN unless invited for a specific section, especially if the meeting coincides with other industry events.

Qualifications (continuation from 2016), Facilitator: Liz McLaren

Liz presented a table with details of qualifications accepted by QALEN members. Most have a similar process but there are a lot of different qualifications from all over the world to assess. A globally accepted list is aspirational but problematic. Shared guidance made available to those considering entering the ELT profession might be possible. It might also give ELT providers confidence in qualifications.

Native speaker competence was discussed. General education level (e.g. degree) may not be critical to the competence of the teacher.

Everyone is facing similar challenges, especially from enquirers re specifics of what should be included in a TESOL qualification. Changing needs and appropriate ELT quals for younger learners were discussed.

There is reasonable consistency in components/requirements of "Cert level ELT qual" across the group at least at a superficial level. NZ has "moderated" specified and validation is an important element.

Academic Manager requirements varied. Some within the group require Academic Managers to complete accreditation workshops/pre-inspection briefings, which are also PD opportunities.

Liz will maintain the document, update as required and share via the Dropbox. Members yet to provide information will be asked again.

The role of self-evaluation in the quality assurance process, Facilitator: Wayne Dyer

Models were compared.

British Council	Annual attestation and legal declaration. Self-evaluation will be compulsory from 2018 in preparation for inspection. Self-evaluation tool.
English NZ	Annual self-audit as part of the Standards, signed off by management. NZQA also uses evaluative QA framework on a 4-yearly basis with 6 key evaluation questions.
Languages Canada	No formal self-evaluation. Two-yearly maintenance review – similar in some ways. Standards needs to be changed by membership vote.
ACCET	Standards are reviewed every 5 years and changed via a membership vote. Changes to the policy and procedures don't require a vote. Self-evaluation is a significant part of what ACCET does with a large self-evaluation document the hallmark for granting 3 – 5 year accreditations.
NEAS	There is no formalised process for self-evaluation – there's a desk audit/site visit. The reach is getting broader so a self-evaluation tool will be necessary. Two-year cycle. Risk and governance are now to be included based on industry need. Any Standards changes are introduced via PD workshops and online.

Tracking improvement between inspections and the measurable success of accreditation programmes in raising standards, Facilitator: David Huebel

The aim is to have everyone take what has been learnt and use it for continuous improvement.

ACCET	1 year and 3-year business plan – keeps them focussed on the future. Look at three developments of significance since they received accreditation. Use student surveys.
NEAS	Continuous improvement is built into the Standards but could be more. Benchmark surveys – students, teachers, staff etc, benchmark against the Standards and others in the industry. Very valuable data and Patrick would be happy to share some of the reports.
Languages Canada/Orion	Within audits – space for recommendations and improvement – look at between audits. A committee sits between Orion and LC – accreditation advisory board (AAB) and reports stats from audits, trends emerging, issues that have come up etc. The annual members’ survey is becoming more involved and more useful every year. Orion slices and dices data by segments e.g. spot checks came out as a recommendation from AAB – recommendation made, go back to LC to see what they’ve done with it.
English NZ	Self-review process built into the Standards to show members have reviewed processes and procedures. Suggestions made are followed up at subsequent audits/spot checks. International Student Barometer used. Unplanned improvement from the fact independent auditors aren’t affordable – so utilising peer review system to share good practice. Some differences in approach/opinion, but NZQA’s overall evaluation framework has driven up quality forcing people to look outside their own situation – particularly those outside of English NZ.

Repeat offenders are dealt with in various ways. NZQA has significant powers and as a result of a review of L7 diploma courses/a traffic light approach, several private providers lost registration or had sanctions put in place. A natural justice approach is necessary. EER’s might be sooner than every four years if required. English NZ can call a spot audit at any time if necessary.

Orion looks at trends in the industry/need for improvement and British Council publishes reports and completes statistical analysis identifying trends.

Comparing data collected among QALEN members e.g. core questions we all ask members, might be feasible to develop basic benchmarking targeting best practice. Kim and Julian will follow up with input from Liz.

The relative importance of evaluating or inspecting inputs and outcomes, Facilitator: Darren Conway

There have been lively discussions between NZQA and English NZ due to slightly different views.

All of the QALEN members’ schemes focus at the process end of the scale, even the NEAS survey is subjective e.g. “Did you learn a lot?”. Benchmarking is an issue i.e. “How do you know you’re good?” – it requires a relative judgement.

What can we benchmark inside the systems? Members discussed completion rates, placement and completion of intended level/student progress. Progress benchmarking is really difficult for EL programmes, and easier with longer-term/pre-university students. It’s attractive to go to IELTS but it’s a blunt instrument – CEFR is better for measuring progress. A validated formula is lacking.

In NZ there’s moderation within schools but not much nationally. In Australia there isn’t much moderation across sectors – an ideal rate of progression for qualifications but not agreed for EL re best practice.

Flexibility and “fit for purpose” outcomes based on what is at stake is important. If the purpose is clearly identified, there is some possibility to benchmark but it’s still problematic. Study tours develop “confidence” – it’s stated but how do you benchmark? Have they developed confidence at a quick enough rate etc.

NZQA – Susan discussed Micro Credentialing – specialised units of learning not leading to a qualification e.g. Udacity (Silicon Valley – Nanodegree at Masters level over 9 months). NZQA has reviewed the Level 9 qualification but doesn't necessarily quality assure it, but it has credit value. Liz suggested CPD could be credentialed this way.

All members are focused on quality but most are focused on process. It's essential to ensure people are not forced into applying an output/outcome where it's not fit for purpose. ELCs need to be able to answer the question of "What do we do?" and demonstrate it, but overlaying a system that doesn't fit can encourage gaming e.g. forcing students into inappropriate exam/level to satisfy evidence of outcomes.

QALEN mapping exercise and online/distance/blended delivery of courses, Facilitator: Patrick Pheasant

Patrick displayed an internal document/mapping exercise which would be helpful to all. Members should send changes/corrections for accuracy.

There is significant reach within our organisation to schools, teachers, students etc., for any surveying. The document identifies some best practice we're doing collectively; many have shorter audit cycles, quals are very high, all focusing on wellbeing/welfare for under 18s etc.

QA for online is aspirational for many. How much further we want to go on benchmarking was discussed. If more scoping is required, Patrick is happy to take the lead.

It was agreed that there is a lot in the document that could inform future discussion, and it would be useful to fill in the gaps for things our organisations are not doing. It could include a list of aspirational things that each individual organisation could utilise as relevant. It also informs whether other organisations would or would not gain QALEN membership.

Orion detailed their audit of a strictly online provider of ESL training. Everything was virtual and coordinated from one local centre. Course, curriculum, quals, etc., were assessed by sitting in. Various things need to be adapted and might require changes in criteria in some areas.

ACCET don't accredit 100% online institutions but do accredit 100% online programmes. A certain % must be taught on the ground.

The difference between Interactive distance learning and e-learning was discussed.

NEAS quality assured one fully online provider this year. Documents and standards are the same for 'bricks and mortar' providers. One site was visited as a physical space is necessary e.g. for filming. The main difference was the IT infrastructure and the various aspects related to that. Ana can circulate a list of requirements the NEAS IT person provided for tendering processes. More providers are looking at using technology as a hook and some sort of blended approach that NEAS can endorse - it's a value add.

Tying this type of delivery to standards (albeit adapted) is very important to counteract the potential for low quality/greed motivated provision given overheads and delivery costs are so much lower. It's very important to drill down and scoping statements should be changed.

Outcomes, Facilitator: Ewen Mackenzie-Bowie

- 1) Sharing platform - Ana and Kim will discuss and set up a Dropbox
- 2) Qualifications grid - Liz will work on this as a reference document. All members should provide information and ensure it is up to date so the document can be shared.
- 3) Acceptable qualifications – develop a shared list of the ones we recognise (internal document) and date it. Liz and Kim will liaise.

- 4) Publication of information about choosing suitable qualifications - publish a statement of things to consider/what prospective teacher trainees could look at to ensure they have a transportable profile when seeking employment – Darren to lead and liaise with Liz.
- 5) Academic papers – possible starting point is the communique from this symposium. Could feature in PIE/ST etc., informing about what we do. IATEFL is 9 – 13 April in the UK. Liz will check if the call for papers is live. Producing an off the peg paper any member could use is an option as is a one-page version to add into a bespoke organisation PPT. There may be opportunities at ICEF or the Languages Canada annual conference. Any and all opportunities to raise awareness of QA are a positive step. Ewen will take the lead on this.
- 6) Communique on the 2018 Symposium – Kim will liaise with Wayne to produce a summary that could be distributed to various organisations e.g. EL Gazette. It should include the ratification of the communique on the care of minors.
- 7) The mission statement needs to be updated – Julian will circulate a draft and request feedback.
- 8) Website – Kim and Ana will coordinate: a link to standards on contact information, a menu tab for communiques, narrative around the communique on care of minors, and updated symposium information.
- 9) Benchmarking – Julian and Kim will talk about possible ISB benchmarking. Surveys should be simple and targeted at best practice. Patrick will take the lead on benchmarking organisational processes – highlighting similarities and gaps, and as a tool for members to speed up processes/ self-evaluation.

Next Symposium

Languages Canada would be happy to host in Ottawa but that often requires a second flight from Toronto. Julian will talk to Johannes to ask about dates that might make it possible for him to attend. Julian will circulate two dates for consideration.

Meeting closed 3.40 pm.