

Report on the Quality Control Visit to RELA (Rotorua English Language Academy)

Name of School: RELA
122 Pukuatua Street
Rotorua

www.rela.co.nz

Date joined QE: May 2005

Date of Visit: May 2009

Contact: Chris Leckie, Principal / Director

Introduction.....	1
Accreditation.....	2
Routine checks.....	3
References.....	4
Quality Report.....	5
Summary.....	6

Introduction

RELA was founded fifteen years ago by Chris Leckie and Elaine Brewster and was the only private language school in Rotorua, a destination that is popular with tourists and where there are plenty of activities for students to enjoy in their free time. The school is housed in modern low-rise buildings, is small and personal and has a comfortable family atmosphere. First impressions are just that – a warm, friendly place.

The school expanded steadily from its foundation, adding a new classroom block and student common room in 1997 and extra rooms in 2002. There are now 19 classrooms, and a computer centre that can be used for classes and for self-study. In addition, there is a very large student common room with a large number of computers for free e-mail access. The common room also contains a fully-equipped kitchen and free tea and coffee facilities. The school has a separate games room with pool and table tennis tables, and its own petanque court. Opposite the school there is a large sports field, and close to the school are a swimming pool, badminton hall and squash courts.

Courses: General English takes place in the mornings. In the afternoons there is a choice of speaking skills, study skills, grammar or examination classes (TOEIC, TOEFL, IELTS, FCE); English with activities; English for older students; High School preparation; English with Spa treatment; Mother and child programme; and finally Working Holiday programme.

Average class size is 8 and maximum is 11. The student numbers range from 40 - 50 during quiet periods to 150 – 180 at busy times.

Teachers: (here is an extract from the website):

“Our teachers are friendly, helpful and well-qualified. All regular tutors have internationally recognised qualifications and are skilled and experienced teachers. Our

staff comes from many different countries including New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain, USA and South Africa. Many of our staff have travelled extensively and have experience teaching in other countries. The staff are selected very carefully for their personal qualities. The directors ensure that the teachers are kind, friendly and helpful people who greatly enjoy working with international students. All tutors are regularly evaluated and a continuous training programme is in place in order to maintain the high standards of teaching for which RELA is well known.”

The visit and previous visits to the school have been occasions when this description of the staff has been seen to be very accurate.

Accommodation options: There is a strong homestay service run by Paddy Newton from a dedicated office. She is a local person and provides a very personal and caring service.

Marketing

Markets: on the day of the visit the largest nationality groups were Japan and Saudi Arabia, followed by Korea. There were 60 students in the school that day. Back in 2004 when QE first visited RELA, the school was about the same size (mid-sixties) and the nationalities were similar (Korean, Chinese and Japanese) but now there are Saudis as well who tend to be direct bookings.

RELA relies on EnglishNZ initiatives (as they used to on FIELS) – such as missions to S. E. Asia, but do not visit Europe. Otherwise students are recruited largely by word of mouth. The school has been taking part in the new ANZA fairs run by ICEF.

The school had suffered recently from a late cancellation from Hongkong; a 3 week group of 66.

On average 39% of students come through an agent and 49% through word of mouth.

Accreditation

A requirement of QE membership is that a school is accredited by the national accreditation body, in this case NZQA and the (new) English NZ audit. RELA (comfortably) passed both its most recent inspection in September 2006 (NZQA) and in October 2008 (English NZ); known as the ‘Academic Quality Review Report’.

It was Chris Leckie’s partner Elaine Brewster who had previously initiated the higher academic standards that have since been incorporated into the English NZ new and higher standards (Academic Quality Review Report).

In addition RELA has recently taken part in <http://www.i-graduate.org/>

It is known as the ‘language barometer’ and is mainly used by universities. It is designed to be an insight into the decision-making process and experience of students studying (in this case) at RELA. In New Zealand this project is supported by Education NZ and English NZ. The school scored very highly. For example, coming 5th out of the 24 schools that took part for its ‘arrival, learning, living and support services’. The school came first for ‘arrival rating’ and for ‘recommendation by Institution’.

Routine checks

One of the ways in which QE monitors quality is by visiting the schools regularly. In the "QE Licensee Selection, Recruitment and Quality Control" document it states that a Quality Control visit will take place at least every three years. An extract of this document is printed at the end of this report. The focus is on customer satisfaction, looking at student feedback in particular. This is the way that QE measures and monitors quality, and is therefore able to tell agents that this is what we do when promoting the QE brand as well as the individual school.

The school was first visited by QE in October 2004, again in 2005 after the school joined, then again in 2007 when some classroom observations took place. This was now the 'three year' quality check when most of the original checks are repeated. This school has enjoyed more visits than most.

QE carries out the following checks in order to establish that there is excellent student satisfaction in the school; by looking at the students' whole experience, the key staff with whom they come into contact, their written and verbal feedback and all systems and processes in place that ensure absolute satisfaction.

In addition QE is required to check that the school ownership and management complies with the "QE Licensee Selection, Recruitment and Quality Control" document, paragraph 1 (Eligibility Criteria).

Comment on these 'Routine' checks will be followed by a 'Quality' report in which observations made on the day are accompanied by a few suggestions or tips. QE has accumulated much experience through personal visits to over eighty schools round the world, many of them market leaders. This part of the report is intended to draw on this experience.

Check		Comment
Tour the school and see the facilities with, if possible, a student guide	✓	Taka from Japan showed me round the school. He had been there 5 months and loved it – and didn't want to return to Tokyo.
Meet a student focus group	✓	The group consisted of Japanese, Korean and Saudi Arabian. There were absolutely no negative comments about the school and every student managed to offer a positive comment ranging from: good teachers, family atmosphere, excellent social programme, good testing system. . .
See examples of student feedback from the last twelve months	✓	Student feedback is well organised. There is a questionnaire that coincides with the progress test (very 5 th week out of 6). Students comment on their class as well as accommodation and school life in general. There is a well organised system for checking, collating and recording the results. On leaving students complete a shorter questionnaire.
Read the complaints' record and review the action taken	✓	Two books are kept – one called 'Counselling' and the other called 'Complaints'. In the former issues with homestay or class placements (generally unhappy students perhaps reported by the homestays) recorded, and in the latter it is more about teachers and levels. Entries in these books are

		infrequent, demonstrating overall satisfaction with the school.
Speak to key members of staff, such as the director of studies, registrar, social organiser	✓	The DoS has left and will be replaced in a couple of months (July). Meanwhile the jobs are being shared out among the teachers. This is working well as it motivates teachers and plays to their strengths. It was once again a pleasure to meet the teachers at break and they generally seemed quite perky, and eager to hear about market trends outside of New Zealand. Accommodation manager – a conversation with Paddy was enough to realise that she runs a very thorough service.
Read the most recent accreditation report	✓	Both the NZQA and the EnglishNZ reports were read in detail, and strengths and weaknesses were noted. In addition a recent survey by iGraduate Language Barometer in which RELA does outstandingly well, was studied.
See the latest management structure including a list of senior personnel and duties	✓	Done
Check that the legal status, ownership and management of the school has not changed	✓	Not done

References

Before the visit RELA submitted the names of agents they currently work with for references. QE followed these up and the results were very positive. Here are some extracts:

NZ Life Tours Ltd (Gina & Partners)

RELA provides a very quick response to all our enquiries and enrolments.
Friendly school, excellent pastoral care, great homestays and fun activities
RELA is just a great school to deal. Highly recommended!

Intact, Czech Republic

Very efficient, no problems at all. My feeling is that they are very well organised and dedicated to students. * * *

INTER SUPPORT, Japan

Excellent staff members and friendly homestay family.
We usually do not have problem with RELA, but if there is something, they are reliable. * * *

Service Education BROCK, Nouvelle Calédonie

They enjoy their course, homestay and the choice of activities.
It's a great school with a really caring staff. * * *

Cultural Link Centre (HK) Limited

It is my pleasure to write about RELA. They have been one of our best work partners.
Quality Control Report for RELA
May 2009

Very helpful, and in fact, professional We refer students based on ex-students' comments on each school. RELA has enjoyed great comments from the students, which centre around the professionalism and the very caring atmosphere in school. Teachers are patient and friendly and the entire institute has given them unforgettable memories.

BROCK Education, Nouvelle Calédonie

They enjoy their course, homestay and the choice of activities

Quality Report

Under a range of headings are comments about the positive points noted during the visit followed in some cases by some suggestions.

1. Welcome and general 'atmosphere'

There is a very relaxed atmosphere in the school and as you arrive you know you are among friends. Students no doubt appreciate this. The induction is thorough.

Observations and Suggestions

- o none

2. Buildings, furnishings and décor

It was definitely quite cold!

Observations and Suggestions

- o I admit unfamiliarity with the climate but some rooms were warm and in other areas it was quite cold. I don't know how much the students complain about this?

3. Management systems

The school is owned and run by one of the founders Chris Leckie and she has very high standards in all areas of management. She is ably assisted by Jan Clarke who is the school manager. Almost everyone has a greater workload at the moment because the Director of Studies, Pauline Taylor, left recently and will be replaced in July.

Staff enjoy meetings at break every day when notices are given so there is ample opportunity to liaise, ask questions and keep in touch. There is more of a team feeling than is found in most schools as a result.

Observations and Suggestions

- o none

4. Academic

This is an 'inter-regnum' period for the academic department. The work of the DoS has been divided up between many of the teaching staff. Chris asked staff which areas they may like to take responsibility for (and consequently be paid for) while there was no overall academic management by one.



It seems that the teachers have risen to the occasion and those spoken to enjoy the extra interest and responsibility. The staff room definitely had a more upbeat feeling to it this time.

The computer suite and self-access centre with tapes and books available for individual use is well presented and is in greater use than noticed on previous visits.

Observations and Suggestions

- o I believe that there is further scope for expanding materials in the self-access centre and to encourage more individual use of the centre. 'Blended' learning is very much 'in mode' around the world – and New Zealand has always been a leader in this field.

5. Student welfare and social programme

The social programme is very comprehensive, there are a large number of interesting visits and activities in Rotorua and the school makes full use of them. (Agrodome, chairlift and luge, beach is only 1 hour away), usually between 3 and 5 pm. It is a very strong part of the school, and the family atmosphere is further promoted in the lively weekly newsletter and social programme (that is also sent home to families and listed on the website).

There is also a weekly 'assembly' where students perform and leaving certificates are given out.

Observations and Suggestions

- o none

6. QE Brand Marketing

It was good to see that the QE 'Thank you' fliers are being distributed to students on leaving. Chris Leckie is 'content' with the (bronze) membership of QE and it is the Brand that she considers an asset.

There is an excellent presentation of QE in the current brochure and on the website (top of the list!) under 'Quality'. All the QE schools are listed with their links and this conforms to the requirements.

Observations and Suggestions

- o none

Summary

RELA has succeeded in reaching a very high level of student satisfaction and this was evident from the positive comments expressed by the students interviewed and the agents who sent in feedback. There are very few suggestions made in 'Quality Report' section which reflects the degree to which the directors are constantly seeking improvements in the services the school offers. Over the years in which the school has been involved in QE there have been steady improvements, mainly in the academic area, and the school can be very proud of all its achievements.

Carolyn Blackmore
Oxford
June 21st 2009

Appendix

Extract from the "QE Licensee Selection, Recruitment and Quality Control" document, paragraph 3:

3. Quality Control

Quality control will be based on the following:

- 1.1. Reports from agents, solicited or unsolicited;
- 1.2. A reference requested from at least three current agents or corporate clients taken from the list of ten supplied to QE in the annual return;
- 1.3. Re-inspection reports from accreditation bodies which must be made available to the QE executive;
- 1.4. Completed post-course questionnaires returned by clients to QE (these will be sent on a spot-check basis);
- 1.5. A half-day visit by the QE chief executive to speak to students and to check the systems in place for feedback from clients at various stages of their course. The visit will take place at least every three years.