

## ON CAPABILITY-BUILDING FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: POSITIONING LEARNING AND TEACHING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT OTAGO POLYTECHNIC

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### ABSTRACT

As we seek to strengthen our leadership in the ITP sector as providers of an exemplary learner experience, we are tasked with ensuring that our community is informed and current in its practice for the core business of facilitating learning and teaching at Otago Polytechnic. If we wish to honour our commitment to realising the potential of our people, we need to provide accessible opportunities for professional development of staff. Here we propose a model for academic staff development which positions learning and teaching as a cross-institutional activity to foster collaboration for the enhancement and dissemination of good pedagogic practice. *Kia tu ki te tāhi* – our people make a better world.

Keywords: Otago Polytechnic, capability, potential, excellence, tertiary education, improvement

### INTRODUCTION

At the time of writing, Otago Polytechnic is recognised as a leader in the national tertiary sector (ITP) in the field of vocational education. In the face of imminent sector change, and the competing demands of the post-millennial employment landscape, the challenge we face is how we maintain our leadership and respond with agility in preparing the workforce of the future – including our own.

As we seek to deliver excellence by fulfilling our mission to build the capability and realise the potential of our learning and teaching community – our staff and students – we acknowledge that in order for us to reach our goal, we must set high expectations. Equally, we are mindful that in order to meet those requirements, we have a duty to ensure that we prepare our people for the endeavour. We believe the key to success lies in providing our colleagues and peers with opportunities to scope and inform individual needs for development by supporting continuous engagement with explicit professional pathways and by rewarding achievement, commitment and qualification which are integral to the development and progression of the individual.

### TO MATOU WHAKATAKA: BUILD CAPABILITY, REALISE POTENTIAL

With the publication of its Strategic Directions document in 2017, Otago Polytechnic set out its aspirations for the future, positioning the institution to support growth and achievement by enacting the underpinning values of accountability, caring, courage and empowerment (Otago Polytechnic, 2017). The Strategic Directions document identifies what we aim to do and how success will look. Our message is implicitly simple – here is what we want to achieve, this is what it will look like, and this is how it contributes to the success of our stakeholders.



## ACADEMIC STAFF AND THE FUTURE

Otago Polytechnic aspires to enable teachers to respond to and embody the profile of the future- focused teacher engaged with preparing learners for the ever-changing employment landscape (Deloitte, 2018). Tertiary education practitioners need to be adaptable, flexible and knowledgeable about and for the twenty-first century learning and teaching environments. Furthermore, in preparing for the future, and acknowledging the impact of natural attrition on a mature academic institution, we need to ensure that incoming staff will be attracted to the polytechnic precisely by the prospect of a meaningful career replete with opportunities for personal and professional growth and achievement.

## THE DUAL PROFESSIONAL

By seeking to engender integrated and informed applied practice in learning and teaching, we may also enable reflection on increasing expertise and growing experience by initiating a discourse with our staff regarding professional pathways. Such pathways need to acknowledge the layers of professional knowledge, activity and practice inherent in our roles; implicit in this notion is the concept of *dual professionalism*: pedagogic practice and discipline-led knowledge and skills.

Key feature (what)	Relationship (with what)	Nature (how)
<b>Aligned</b>	With the vision and mission of the HEI	Select/ Provide PD which speaks to core teaching approach  Focus on: experiential teaching models (inquiry / problem-based learning (PBL) / work-based learning (WBL))
<b>Valuable</b>	For the Individual and Institution	Brings professional accreditation and recognition  Bears national and international awards and credentials  Embeds portability into any offering
<b>Sustainable</b>	In terms of cost and provision	Draws on internal expertise first  Promotes and privileges scholarship  Grows internal capacity for PD facilitation and delivery  Engages with external expertise
<b>Triangulated</b>	To respond to internal drivers (policy; the Quality Enhancement Centre), external drivers (NZQA; TEC) and imperative for best practice in learning and teaching.	Forms part of an integrated model of development, recognition and reward  Draws on reflective developmental process linked to achievement  Enables conceptualisation of Professional Pathways

Figure 2. Proposed academic staff PD framework, adapted from  
 "Constructing a Professional Development framework for PBL at a Middle East HEI" (McGirr, 2013).

The provision of a consolidated offering of academic staff development and upskilling is a key driver in ensuring ongoing advancement in staff capability and satisfaction (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005). In engaging with an inclusive range of training and development opportunities for teaching staff at the polytechnic, we serve our internal stakeholders by enabling the growth of knowledge, improvement in practice, and a more confident and consolidated assertion of professional identity.

When conceptualising a proposed model for professional development, it is imperative that we address the challenges of growth and governance, the inherent considerations around practice and the global context in which we operate. Our intention is to establish a sustainable model of practice which will withstand the tensions inherent in a relatively young higher education institution experiencing sector change, and which will respond to fluctuations in staffing and equally tolerate increased pressure on resources as demands increase (McGirr, 2013).

An holistic strategic approach to learning and teaching brings rewards in terms of staff morale, individual perception of self-efficacy, engagement with institutional pedagogy and improved relationships across the community of learning and teaching practice (Lieberman & Miller, 2008; Kreber, 2002). In turn, a *transitional* (Kennedy, 2005) framework speaks to the need at Otago Polytechnic to work towards the desired transformation to high performance and practice. Such a model is rooted in best practice and anchors educational development in an accessible, globally benchmarked structure.

At a more granular level, an effective training and development portfolio for academic staff needs to be premised on an iterative, incremental and cyclical offering to ensure breadth of scope, depth of content and equality of access. Interventions may be multiple, multi-layered and multifarious to respond to the different needs of teaching and support staff. The underpinning features of an integrated transitional model are outlined in Figure 2.



Figure 3. Model of a community of professional practice for learning and teaching development at Otago Polytechnic – adapted from Kennedy (2005).

## THE HUB AND SPOKE MODEL

The hub and spoke (HuS) model (Glasgow Caledonian University, 2014) for a consolidated community of learning and teaching practice is informed by Wenger's conceptualisation of joint enterprise (Wenger, 1998). The HuS model draws on a shared repertoire of resources and is characterised by a central core (hub) with extended reach into specific centres (spokes) which radiate to and from (and have access to) the core. A bi-located HuS service supports academic staff to exchange experience, practice and knowledge of their craft through the establishment of relationships and a common language of practice. The identified culture of continuous improvement (Otago Polytechnic, 2018) may be further reified through a focus on validation and benchmarking of the established work to support the building of academic staff capability, embed portability in training, and ultimately assure the reputation of Otago Polytechnic as a leader in achieving excellent outcomes for learners.

By advocating a HuS model of practice, we may set ourselves the goal of striving for the eventual establishment of a so-called Centre of Excellence, which sits alongside the schools and colleges, draws on expertise and works to an institutional imperative to support teaching and learning across the polytechnic. This mirrors the tried and

tested model of international practice (Kennedy, 2005) while simultaneously favouring an incremental work stream with a focus on the accreditation of such a centre – aligning well with our desire to embed sustainability and create inherent stretch targets for Learning and Teaching Development as a self-reliant entity.

A single centre with reach to and across schools enables the drawing down of expertise, access to a ring-fenced budget and the potential to grow staffing within a directorate dedicated to advancing academic staff capability. Furthermore, disaggregating training and development prevents conflict of discipline vs. pedagogy, provides embedded flexibility (for the provision of formal and informal interventions), stimulates scholarship across disciplines and facilitates an institutional discourse around teaching and learning in a consolidated community of practice. A considered framework, which is predicated on informed requests with timely planning in place, can provide spaces and places for relationship building between peer groups, enhancing inclusivity and cross-institutional collaboration.

## STRATEGIC PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (PD)

In response to Otago Polytechnic's Strategic Plan (2017), we can identify clear indicators for practice which directly correlate with the institution's strategic goals:

**Goal 1: Achieve excellent outcomes for our learners:** To further support teaching and learning practice, the facilities of the polytechnic and the methods of teaching and learning delivery should reflect developments in the international education community – *there is a need for PD to ensure currency.*

**Goal 2: Lead the way in sustainable practice:** In order to ensure a well-prepared, pedagogically informed and practice-focused academic staff cohort, we have a duty to provide access to development and career pathways – *by providing flexible PD, we ensure this access and opportunity.*

**Goal 3: Be a responsible Treaty partner in meeting the educational aspirations of mana whenua:** As an education entity which operates in a multicultural setting of bicultural governance, we have a responsibility to provide thought leadership and a platform for dialogue and exchange with our Treaty partner – *by doing PD we facilitate this dialogue and knowledge construction.*

**Goal 4: Be a strong and agile organisation:** In order to compete in the global community of tertiary learning and teaching practice, we need to ensure that our staff are upskilled, able to meet their specific professional development needs, and have the capacity to model practice for learners: *A current and meaningful PD offering helps us to meet this need.*

**Goal 5: Attract and sustain exceptional staff who make a difference:** There is a need to ensure sustainable structures for employees, which support career pathways for professional practitioners of tertiary teaching and learning. *This can be achieved by offering a variety of continuing professional development (CPD) training opportunities.*

## CONCLUSION

In consolidating our learning and teaching development activity at Otago Polytechnic into a bi-located offering and service, we seek to recognise and value what we do, acknowledge and champion dual professionalism as the leading tenet of our professional practice, and enable reward and recognition as we strive for continued excellence.

## APPENDIX ONE

Detail of Work Strands and Streams for Learning and Teaching Development at Otago Polytechnic, 2016–present

1. Establishment of a shared professional development calendar of training for academic staff, informed by institutional needs and team requirements
2. Consultation and agreement of identified PD priorities which support the Strategic Goals.
3. The continuing development of a core suite of CPD series to support development of practice in teaching, research and scholarship, notably:
  - a. Training for education research, ethics and compliance: Accessing Funding and Research Support Training
  - b. HEA Fellowship Pilot
  - c. PBRF training and support
  - d. Establishment of research clusters (2017)
4. The review and refresh of the initial and inductive teacher training (Graduate Diploma in Tertiary Education) and scoping for accreditation (2017)

In development:

- a. Academic Staff Mentoring Programme
- b. The Teaching Observation Programme
- c. Facilitation Training Programme
- d. The All-Staff Capability Framework (December 2018)

## APPENDIX TWO

### Glossary of Terms for Staff Development

**Professional training** encompasses interventions which teachers may attend in person or remotely; they may be discipline- (domain) or practice- (pedagogy) focused. Typical training may be intensive, iterative and workshop- or seminar-based in support of a broader portfolio of development activity.

**Teacher education** and training provides the opportunity for enhancement and development of practice in the specific area of pedagogy, with an emphasis on reflection on and in practice. The conferment of awards assists in the recognition of achievement and excellence in pedagogic practice, which benefits the individual and the institution (Lieberman & Miller, 2008).

**Graduate Diploma in Tertiary Education for all staff led by the Learning and Teaching Development team and coordinated by the College of Community Development and Personal Wellbeing:** Inductive / incremental teacher training for all academic staff to support the transition to Otago Polytechnic teaching methodology and dual professionalism in situ.

**Research and scholarship** enables those who have benefited from some CPD to then share with members of the community, either within or outside departments. The focus of scholarship activity may be on the cascading skills and knowledge element of the PD, while research may promote the investigation of practice, capacity building of decision-making around practice (Burkbank, 2003), or evaluating the effectiveness of techniques and approaches (Pine, 2009). Practitioner research and enquiry may assist in the promotion of values and beliefs around teaching and learning, institutionally and empirically. The value of research and scholarship lies in passing on knowledge, expertise and enthusiasm to colleagues.

**Mentoring** supports teacher development professionally through the informal exchange of expertise from an experienced staff member to a less experienced staff member. It is compatible with the peer-coaching model also advocated through the Otago Polytechnic Teaching Observation Programme (in development).

**Professional recognition and accreditation** for in-service teachers enables commitment to developing as a professional and motivation to achieve success through badging and awards (Kennedy, 2014).

As deputy chief executive of Otago Polytechnic, **Oonagh McGirr** is the strategic lead for academic development. She leads a diverse portfolio of directorates: Learning and Teaching; Quality, Research and Postgraduate; Global Engagement; Employability; and the Otago Polytechnic Professoriate. Oonagh has worked in international higher education for over two decades in both the public and private sectors. She has established and led academic services units; developed education strategy for regional and national government bodies; devised and delivered staff development and upskilling programmes for higher education practice; and led on institutional Learning and Teaching accreditation and recognition. She has taught on foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in modern foreign languages, cultural studies, linguistics, teacher education and research in multidisciplinary settings at new and legacy Higher Education Institutes in Europe and the Middle East. Her research interests are teacher identity in practice in higher education and the development of sustainable CPD frameworks for HE practitioners. Oonagh is a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts.

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