

## **How do our institutions encourage the scholarship of Teaching and Learning? What support do institutions give to teaching and learning “Champions”?**

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### **Introduction**

The authors present this as a joint contribution from New Zealand. We discuss in detail two of the seven questions given, which are those in which we feel best qualified to comment, and of most relevance to the discussion. Some other points will be addressed briefly as they arise.

### **Topic One: Encouraging Scholarship**

#### **1. Background**

New Zealand (NZ) has 8 universities, some of which have multi-city campuses. As well as these, the Government recognizes a larger number of other “Tertiary Institutes”, which would not be internationally recognized as “Universities”, but which offer academic, trade and cultural training at levels beyond secondary school. These are all funded on a similar basis to the Universities, and are also encouraged to participate in the Government’s promotion and recognition of teaching excellence.

The premier research university is the University of Auckland. This section concentrates principally on the situation at the University of Auckland, but includes details of the national scene where they are available. Encouragement of the scholarship of teaching is possible via central university policies and practices, via faculty and departmental practices and via direct encouragement from central government. This paper treats the topic in that sequence.

#### **2. Central University Initiatives**

In common with most NZ universities, the University of Auckland has policy documents on teaching and learning, assessment, examinations and on desired graduate profiles. These documents are prominently displayed on the university’s website, and copies are provided to new staff at compulsory induction courses. Input to these policy documents comes from a variety of sources, including those units within the university with specific responsibility for teaching and learning development. In consequence the policy documents are informed by best practice in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

The University has a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) unit. CPD has the responsibility for disseminating information on best practice in teaching and learning. Their staff are available for individual or group consultation, will conduct courses in departments and will work with departments to support teaching strategies and developments. CPD maintain a library with a collection policy related to best teaching and learning practice, run an extensive seminar programme and provide linked workshops on common themes. They organise an annual Teaching and Learning Showcase, which provides a forum for the dissemination of best practice and includes invited presentations by teaching and learning “champions”. In addition, CPD provide a university-wide service for course evaluations, including individually designed surveys.

All academic staff are required to attend an Annual Performance Review (APR), the preparation for which includes the completion of a substantial portfolio covering performance in the areas of teaching, research and service. This documentation has been designed in part with encouraging teaching best practice in mind. The section related to teaching requires inclusion of course evaluations and detailed reflection and identification of any professional development opportunities that would benefit the particular staff member's development.

To encourage teaching excellence, the University runs an annual Teaching Excellence Awards (TEA) activity. Applications are encouraged and the achievements of award winners are publicly celebrated at University and Faculty level. The award winning teaching portfolios are made available as exemplars of good practice and the award winners are subsequently involved in a range of CPD organised activities so their approach can be shared with their colleagues. Some of the portfolios of the local award winners are submitted by the university to compete for national awards. Those national award winners, in turn, are required to produce a summary of their teaching philosophy and practice for a New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) booklet. By way of circulation of this booklet, exemplars of excellent teaching are then made available to all interested lecturers.

A further university initiative to encourage teaching and learning excellence is the provision of Teaching Improvement Grants (TIG) which are allocated on a competitive basis. Selection criteria include merit of the proposal, track record of the applicants and university strategic goals.

The awards and grants available through the TEA and TIG mechanisms provide encouragement for excellence, and would often be awarded to relatively experienced staff. At the other end of the experience spectrum, the university runs induction courses for new academic staff, which include presentations on key university policies such as that related to teaching and learning. All new staff are required to attend a one day induction course on such matters. In addition voluntary attendance is possible at a three day "Introduction to Teaching and Learning" course run by CPD but involving as presenters various teaching "champions" from the University of Auckland and elsewhere.

A more sophisticated approach to teaching and learning development is provided through the university's Certificate of University Learning and Teaching (CULT). This voluntary two-year part-time programme for new academic staff formally introduces the participants to the scholarship of teaching and learning and the associated research literature. All participants are assigned a teaching and learning "champion" as a Teaching Associate. This teaching associate meets monthly with the person they are mentoring. They attend that person's lectures and provide a formative critique and then subsequently monitor progress. In turn, the new staff member may attend lectures given by their mentor leading to further dialogue on the reasons for the approach that their mentor adopts. The CULT participants also prepare a teaching portfolio as a capstone project. These are reviewed by at least two and sometimes three experienced academic staff. At present one of the reviewers is usually a local or national TEA winner, while another of the reviewers is usually a staff member from CPD.

### **3. Faculty Initiatives**

The governance structures of most faculties will usually include officers and committees with specific responsibility for encouraging teaching and learning excellence. It is less common to see structures which encourage the scholarship of teaching and learning. In the former case a common structure would be to have a faculty Teaching and Learning Plan with a faculty Teaching and Learning Quality (TLQ) committee charged with implementation of that plan. That committee would typically try to maintain the profile of teaching (lest it be submerged by the prevalent research culture) and put in place measures of teaching and learning quality. Common approaches include running regular faculty Teaching and Learning seminars, with teaching and learning "champions" involved as exemplars of good practice. Such a committee would also organise systematic faculty-wide course evaluations, provide an overview of faculty-wide programmes, routinely advise on proposals for curriculum changes and generally act as a source of expertise within the faculty to which difficult teaching problems could be referred.

#### **4. Department Initiatives**

The situation in most departments mirrors that in the faculty to which they belong. It is common to have a governance structure with officers and committees with specific responsibility for ensuring adequate teaching and learning quality. An example would be a Teaching, Learning and Examinations committee. Such a committee would usually include specific Programme Leaders as members and have significant common membership with the department's Curriculum and Programme committee. Through such a structure oversight and maintenance of teaching and learning quality is possible. Some of the more senior members of these committees would usually have specific responsibility for mentoring of new staff and for those for whom teaching and learning development has been identified as a priority.

It is in the departments however that the most change can be effected. Some commentators would argue that "it is HODs with foresight and interest in enhancing teaching who drive things forward. Many staff refuse to acknowledge that we must respond to student needs and the changing student population. Change happens often as a result of crisis." Regrettably, this change often has to be initiated by departments with little support by Deans at faculty level or within the highest levels of the university.

#### **5. Teaching and Learning Champions**

The University of Auckland is not particularly good at supporting its teaching and learning champions. There is little evidence that such achievements receive recognition in the promotion rounds. However, the University of Auckland is quite adept at organising for its teaching and learning champions to share their expertise and experience with their colleagues. National award winners produce summaries of their teaching philosophy and practice for a NZQA booklet of exemplars of excellent teaching which is then made available by the university to staff applying for similar awards. The university encourages applications for university, national and international awards and publicly celebrates the achievements of the winners. Winning portfolios are placed on the university's web-site as an exemplar of good practice. Teaching and learning champions are involved in CPD courses, including workshops and teaching showcases. The teaching and learning champions are also involved in the CULT programme, both as portfolio reviewers and as teaching associates. At faculty & departmental level, it is common to involve teaching and learning champions in Teaching & Learning Committees, in Teaching & Learning Seminars and as mentors for new staff.

The only evidence for the effectiveness of these measures is anecdotal feedback received by teaching and learning champions following such dialogue. In this author's experience such feedback has been universally appreciative but tinged with cynicism arising from the perceived double standards of the promotion system and the lack of consideration teaching and learning seems to receive by promotion committees.

#### **6. Measures of Effectiveness**

At the national level all NZ university programmes are audited regularly by Academic Auditors acting on behalf of the NZ Vice-Chancellors Committee. Such audits tend to look principally at process and to check how aware chalk-face staff are of the university's policies, for instance on teaching and learning or on assessment. Professional schools will additionally undergo regular (usually 5 yearly) accreditation exercises by the relevant professional body. These accreditation exercises usually examine how the university assesses whether their graduates have achieved the desired learning outcomes and graduate profile, and whether those learning outcomes match the graduate profile required for membership of that professional body.

At university level it would be common to hold a Graduating Year Review (GYR) for new programmes. Such a GYR would include a (post-completion) satisfaction survey of the graduating class and a survey of employers of such graduates. For all programmes, it would be common for a university committee (e.g. Education Committee) to monitor failure rates, grade distributions and retention rates. It is not unreasonable to assume that teaching and learning developments might lead to improvements in course evaluations and learning outcomes. However, there seems to be little research to show that

teaching and learning development initiatives actually enhance student learning outcomes. Within the University of Auckland the Quality Office is now routinely reviewing the effectiveness of CPD programmes to try to remedy this deficiency. Participants in CPD courses are now being followed up to gather evidence for the effectiveness of the teaching and learning programmes.

## 7. Problems

One of the greatest threats to the widespread adoption of a scholarly approach to teaching and learning is a perception of double standards occurring in the application of the promotion criteria. While these criteria outwardly encourage and reward excellence in research, teaching and service the reality seems to be that only research excellence is rewarded.

A second threat relates to the reality that poor teaching is rarely dealt with, especially if the academic in question has a good research output. It is no coincidence that those sections of the APR which require reflection on teaching are rarely filled in.

The final, and most significant threat to attempts to encourage the scholarship of teaching and learning is the recent introduction in NZ of a Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF). This system was initiated by central government to ensure that taxpayer funds for research would be distributed to those institutions best able to undertake high quality research. Unlike some other systems, the PBRF required individual assessment of academics' research output. This has had a palpable effect within many departments. Specifically a more selfish, less collegial approach is evident. More worryingly, there is a clear negative effect on commitment to teaching and learning. PBRF seemed to totally ignore the importance of disciplinary based pedagogical publications.

## 8. The Future

Limited possibilities seem to exist for change within institutions. Over time "subversive" action by those dedicated to improving teaching will gradually cause change. Organisations such as CPD may be able to influence the teaching assessment criteria component of the promotion criteria. However, it is likely that relatively little change will occur without political intervention. In NZ, there are several moves afoot which may indicate that central government is interested in promoting change. A Performance Based Teaching Fund has been proposed to complement the PBRF. However whereas PBRF required assessment to the level of an individual academic, PBTf requires compilation of institution level teaching performance statistics such as completion rates. Further, PBTf seems to be designed only to identify the worst performing institutions (on a relative, not absolute, basis) and force change by way of financial incentives. Most commentators see it as a crude instrument which is likely to achieve little. More encouragingly, central government has recently formed a Teaching Matters Forum, with education sector wide membership. This Teaching Matters Forum is to advise on the establishment of a National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence and to engage with the tertiary sector on options for supporting effective Teaching and Learning.

### Topic Two: Institutional Support to "Champions"

#### 1. Background

Support varies with institutions, and support structures are still evolving. Here are some reasons:

Firstly, the formal recognition of "Champions" is very recent. Historically, little attention was paid to the encouragement of excellence in Tertiary teaching. However, about 10 years ago the Government of the day dismantled the existing centralized "Education Department", and replaced it with the "New Zealand Qualifications Authority" (NZQA). In 2001 the NZQA established *National Tertiary Teaching Awards*, about 9 - 10 of which are now awarded yearly. The NZQA clearly wanted to make a strong statement to Tertiary Institutes in establishing these, because they specified that each award would carry \$20,000 prize money, with a top award "The Prime Minister's Supreme Prize", carrying \$30,000 – with the proviso that the prize money must be spent to "Enhance teaching practice". This is an unusually large

sum for any such award in New Zealand, and this, with the accompanying proviso, and the publicity the Government arranges at every award ceremony, was clearly meant to underscore the importance the NZQA attaches to inducing Tertiary institutions to take excellence in teaching more seriously. (The awards are made at a State banquet in Parliament buildings, eulogies are given by the Prime Minister and senior parliamentarians, and the event is widely reported in the National Press. It is such award prize-money, in fact, that brings the authors to this conference.) Thus, only 3 rounds of awards have been made, Tertiary institutions are still coming to grips with their importance, and have yet to make much progress in formally recognizing the recipients.

Secondly, the NZQA also radically, and controversially, changed the way in which teaching and learning was to be undertaken in both schools and Universities. Old qualifications of “School Certificate”, “University Entrance” and “University Scholarship” (for very high achievement) which were awarded on the basis of performance in external, National examinations were replaced by a range of other qualifications, the most relevant of which to Universities is the “National Certificate of Educational Achievement”, or NCEA. There have been numerous problems implementing this – which led, for example, to the University of Auckland’s Engineering School deciding to offer places in its programs this year only after *personally interviewing approximately 20% of the applicants* – because NCEA results were deemed untrustworthy. Other University Departments across the country experienced similar problems. This has diverted them from considering how to enhance and recognize teaching performance, to the more immediate problem of deciding *who was teachable*.

Thirdly, the eight traditional New Zealand Universities are focused primarily on Research. Although Excellence in teaching is nominally a factor in promotion applications, in practice it has little effect on the outcome, and at the highest levels, particularly at Auckland, none. This has led to universal reluctance amongst teaching staff to put effort into enhancing their teaching, when they know that their career will advance only if they “publish more papers”. Both authors have encountered this attitude amongst their colleagues many times. There is evidence that some institutions, particularly the “non-University” providers, *do* take it more seriously, as they are less research-focused, and other “traditional” universities have made larger steps than Auckland. One University academic remarked that she thought that her recent promotion to Associate-Professor (the second-highest rank in New Zealand Universities) had been “substantially” helped by receiving this award, and another indicated that it appeared to have an influence on the success of a research grant. Others have said that informally, colleagues are now more prepared to seek their advice about teaching matters, and others again have been appointed to teaching-related committees. Examples: Joint awardees from a technological University stated

“We have both noticed that the prestige associated with the TTE award has had positive spinoffs in terms of the hearing you are given over any teaching or research proposals you might float. Past successes definitely seem to have an effect on how successful you are at lobbying for internal (or external) grant money, or initiating new programmes/papers/courses etc.”

“In terms of encouragement to share expertise and experiences with colleagues, this has happened to a limited extent through existing feedback channels such as staff development days (the award has simply increased our visibility on people's radar when they are looking for potential presenters), but no special system has been established to enable us to pass on teaching ideas or thoughts. Having said that, there are already reasonably numerous opportunities to pass on knowledge, including the aforementioned staff development days, smaller-scale staff meetings, and any number of conference opportunities. I am sure that receiving the award has made Debbie and me more pro-active in seeking out potential conference opportunities - confidence is a wonderful thing!”

But more positive moves are in progress. One recipient says:

*I've had some involvement with the current government's plans to establish a National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence.*

*Nothing has been firmed up yet, but shortly there'll be a round of regional forums at which tertiary teachers (all of them - right across the sector) will be invited to contribute*

*comments on the shape and functions of the Centre. (There'll be the mandatory website, too.) Whenever it gets off the ground, the thing will have a sector-wide and nation-wide brief - a bit like the Australian Carrick Institute. Amongst other things, it's likely that the Centre will also take over the administration of the National Teaching Awards from NZQA, and be tasked with improving the effectiveness of teaching across all tertiary institutions. Particulars have yet to be determined.*

Thus, matters may improve, albeit slowly. All Tertiary Institutes have some sort of teaching and learning Centre in place, which are (probably) slowly enhancing their credibility as organizations that can contribute positively to effectiveness.

### **Some General Comments**

One factor which works directly against acceptance of teaching improvement as a worthwhile endeavour is a perceived insensitivity and even arrogance on the part of those who write material disseminated to teaching staff. This is often unfortunately jargon-ridden, full of verbiage which is dismissed as ``edu-babble'', and gives the impression of ``talking down'' from ``those who know better''. For example, most staff at Auckland University simply refuse to fill in the sections in the APR form mentioned in part 1 which instruct them to ``reflect on their teaching performance'', and to state ``how they will improve in future''. These sections, of course, are well-meant, and are supposed to encourage teaching staff to reflect on ``how their teaching is going'', but there is a mismatch between those who write the document and those who receive it. In principle, Heads of Department are required to discuss these sections with the staff who complete the forms but in practice many, particularly older Heads, share the same view as their staff and simply ignore these sections. We need to be much more sensitive to this factor.

The recently appointed director of one University teaching and learning unit reinforces these comments:

``The unit is struggling. Previously it had had low credibility and was widely perceived as flaky. In fact, it was previously not valued at all, it was a cottage industry divorced from the reality of staff professional development actual needs - but there has never been a proper needs analysis. This needs to be resourced properly in most institutions. Offerings are supposed to be based on the section of the APR form dealing with Professional Development. But this is rarely filled in and never finds its way to us. Some institutions are better than others on this.''

``When I came, I had a lot of work to persuade the DVC (Academic) of the value of professional development. However, through my efforts working in departments, aligning our activities with institutional strategic objectives, our reputation shot up in the DVC's estimation. So we can ask, is it the people, is it leadership in the institution, institutional values re teaching and learning, or the academic credibility of the Director of educational development units that impact on how an institution supports teaching and learning centres? I now get a lot of support but my job is to turn around the negativity that built up over a period of years and of course do some *research!*''

``In my experience, NZ is far down the pecking order when it comes to actually understanding the scholarship of teaching. In NZ, the PBRF totally ignored the importance of disciplinary based pedagogical publications - but then in the UK we fought for ten years to have such publications recognised as having equitable value to traditional research papers.''

``The States are way ahead in this, the UK is catching up, NZ in general is struggling - but all educational developers believe strongly in the scholarship of teaching - so we fight a subversive battle.''

``I hate to bang on about my input but I *did* persuade the DVC Academic that the scholarship of teaching was a real and important activity. BUT - does the University *as a whole* consider it so?''

Lest these comments give the impression that the situation in New Zealand is all bad, we can report that despite these factors there are a surprising number of truly exceptional Tertiary teachers active in New Zealand. Despite heavy teaching loads, they have devised wonderful and often very innovative courses to cope with limited resources, and are respected and cherished by their students. They are “exceptional teachers” because they are “exceptional people”, and (from our experience in overseas institutions) would stand out wherever they taught.

Why is this? A factor put forward by one of us is that academics who *choose* to take up positions here do so partly because of lifestyle factors. New Zealand is isolated from mainstream research activity – it costs a lot to attend any overseas conference, and distinguished visitors do not “drop in” to give a seminar and interact with us “on their way to somewhere else”. On the other hand, we have a great climate, wonderful beaches, bush and mountains, an un-armed police force, are relatively free of corruption, and offer “a great environment in which to bring up children”. Academics who appreciate these factors *are* exceptional, and often make exceptional teachers.

New Zealanders often envy the teaching environments they find when visiting overseas institutions. Firstly, teaching activity is often more highly valued, and wonderful resources are available. One of the authors has taught at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. The Physics Department there has an immense basement storehouse adjacent to the main lecture theatres containing about a thousand lecture-room demonstrations, all carefully catalogued, maintained, and described on a web-site. Technical Staff will, on demand, set up demonstrations required, instruct lecturers in their use, and even attend to run the more complex demonstrations themselves. In New Zealand, teaching staff have to do all of this with little or no support.

## Conclusion

At present, New Zealand lags behind most countries in valuing and supporting teaching and learning. At the University of Auckland, the most effective tool for encouraging the scholarship of teaching and learning is the CULT program. The biggest obstacles are:

- A lack of evidence that teaching developments do improve learning.
- The fact that PBRF assessments appeared to ignore the importance of disciplinary based pedagogical publications.
- The perception that double standards are inherent in the application of the promotion criteria with research output being the only criteria that really counts.

The perception of some commentators here is that, “The UK and now Australia are much further forward than us on these issues, but it was *political drivers* that moved things forward, *not* a voluntary, rational view of teaching and learning and the need for enhancement coming from Vice Chancellors and Institution heads.”

To summarize, it seems that little further substantive change is likely without direct political pressure. The desire for accountability for public expenditure in the research arena led to introduction of the PBRF. Perhaps something similar might happen for teaching and learning. At present the most encouraging developments are the Teaching Matters Forum and the proposed National Centre for Teaching Excellence. The authors hope that these developments may ultimately lead to a compulsory teaching certificate such as CULT and the removal of double standards in the application of the promotion criteria.