

Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality

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Academic Audit

Summary Report

Otago Polytechnic
(September 2007)



INTRODUCTION:

There have been significant changes to the management structure of Otago Polytechnic since the last external audit in 2002. The Chief Executive resigned at the end of 2002 and was replaced in an acting capacity by the Deputy Chief Executive until June 2004, when a substantive appointment was made.

In 2003 a Business Recovery Plan (BRP) was implemented and this resulted in the restructuring of the Management Team (renamed the Leadership Team in 2006) and the disestablishment of three faculties. At this time there were a significant number of redundancies and early retirements which included six members of the Management Team. In 2004 a Kaitohutohu was appointed and included in the Management Team and in 2005, in order to provide greater representation from the Academic Schools, six Group Manager positions were created. These have subsequently been reduced to four with one Group Manager having responsibility for two “clusters”, and one group being absorbed into another.

Heads of Schools and Heads of Programmes (where these are independent of a school) report to a Group Manager and Programme Managers report to Heads of Schools.

In the Academic Quality Management Manual (AQMM) it is stated that the quality philosophy of Otago Polytechnic is “that all processes (and thereby outcomes) are continuously improved based on customer (internal and external) needs and guided by documented policies and procedures”.

Since 2001 the Polytechnic has grown from 3570 EFTSs to 3676 EFTSs in 2006.

In addition to the Dunedin Campus (which is spread over a number of city sites) there is a regional campus in Central Otago with specialised programmes delivered in Cromwell, Wanaka and Queenstown.

Adult and Community Education (ACE)

It is noted in the Otago Polytechnic Profile (Section 3.6) that the Polytechnic has evaluated their current ACE programmes in terms of NZQA’s five ACE priorities and that they will ensure that all future ACE programmes are approved in accordance with the ACE Goals and Objectives adopted by NZQA. ACE programmes are delivered on eight sites, including four in Central Otago. The most significant programme offered at this time is Computing 4 Free and the Polytechnic has no plans to develop new ACE programmes at this time. Polytechnic ACE programmes conform to the published ACE QA Arrangements and this is documented for the sample programme in the context of the ITPNZ standards which follow.

Foundation Learning

The recently established School of Foundation Learning has responsibility for the Certificates in Foundation Studies, Health, Skills for Employment, Spoken and Written English and Computer Training Assisted Technology; provides input into foundation/bridging programmes offered in other Schools, and follows up centrally administered diagnostic tests for all incoming students.

The Strategic Directions Paper: Foundation Studies (2004) ‘focuses attention on the development of Foundation Studies and foreshadows imminent decision making in this regard’. ‘Foundation’

programmes are defined as those which 'seek to raise core foundation skills and to prepare learners for tertiary study, either generally or for specific programmes of learning in particular disciplines/vocations or to enhance effectiveness in the workplace'. Generic skills identified include literacy, numeracy, computing, enquiry/research, study skills, information literacy, communication, personal effectiveness, and may include career skills, Te Reo and English language. This definition expands on, but is consistent with the Foundation Learning Quality Assurance (FLQA) guidelines, January 2007.

The paper also identifies three categories of foundation students and an overall approach of developing clear learning pathways through 'stair casing' of qualifications. Features of generic foundation programmes include flexible curriculum, open entry with multiple exit levels and a flexible structure. Guidelines related to student support are also included. Further developments, including the decision to create the School of Foundation Learning, have occurred since 2004, and are consistent with the strategic directions as set out in this paper and with Practice 1 (Planning and Design) of the FLQA requirements.

The Certificate in Health Level 4 was chosen for audit as an example of foundation study, with an emphasis on the Standards that relate particularly to the six FLQA Practices. **Of particular note are the following, which taken together constitute good practice across a range of standards:**

- the consultation undertaken when developing the programme, including detailed discussions with the Kaitohutohu in relation to delivery and student support, with secondary schools and relevant Otago Polytechnic staff and students
- the care with which students are informed about the programme, delivery methods (particularly the online components) and support available
- the initial assessment of students' goals and learning needs, including the self assessment of computer related skills students complete prior to the start of the course
- the careful design of the programme, including the two week face to face block in Semester 1 to introduce students to the use of independent packages
- the standardised framework used for the online course material
- the dedicated, positive staff and the high level of trust and confidence the students expressed in them and in the polytechnic
- the process being used for reviewing and updating this programme and the Certificate in Foundation Studies.

It was noted that the FLQA requirement related to staff qualifications has not yet been fully addressed and it is suggested that, in anticipation of the full implementation of the FLQA requirements in 2009, management initiates further discussion regarding the implications of Practice 3.3 of FLQA. Conformity with the published FLQA requirements is documented for the sample programme in the context of the ITPNZ standards which follow.

Central Otago

Staff and students at the Central Otago campus in Cromwell confirmed that the relevant services and support are accessible to them, on site or through the Dunedin campus. Practices are fully integrated with the overall QMS, and the video link is used effectively to ensure staff have the same opportunity for involvement as those in Dunedin. There are several examples of effective practices, including the way work experience is handled, staff involvement in research, strategies to overcome problems associated with students who live outside Cromwell and delivery methods

appropriate to the range of students. **Given the difficulties often associated with satellite sites, the management of the Central Otago campus is considered an example of good practice.**

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

On the basis of an audit of fourteen sample programmes against the twelve ITPNZ standards, it is recommended that Otago Polytechnic's Quality Assured Status be confirmed for a further period of four years. A number of good practices have been identified and no corrective actions are required. Eight recommendations have been made.

Since the implementation of a Business Recovery Plan in 2003 there has been a number of changes to the management structure at Otago Polytechnic including the restructuring of the Management Team (renamed as the "Leadership Team"), the appointment of a Kaitohutohu and the disestablishment of faculties. Representation from the academic staff on the Leadership Team has been strengthened by the creation of four Group Manager positions.

There has been modest growth in EFTSs from 3570 in 2001 to 3676 in 2006 with programmes delivered on a number of sites in Dunedin City, on a regional campus in Central Otago and at sites in Cromwell, Wanaka and Queenstown.

Major initiatives have been taken in the development of flexible programme delivery, the recognition of prior learning and the consolidation of management information and processes onto an electronic database (Polybase). The Polytechnic has given special attention to Foundation Studies and has developed clear learning pathways through 'stair casing' of qualifications. The ways in which Foundation Programmes are developed, delivered and reviewed demonstrates good practice across a range of standards.

The regional campus in Cromwell is well managed and has developed effective strategies to overcome problems associated with students who live outside Cromwell.

The formal Quality Management System is well summarised in an Academic Quality Management Manual and adequately addresses the requirements of the twelve ITPNZ Standards. The effectiveness of their application is evident in the audit findings documented for each standard.

Significant advances towards the meeting of Treaty obligations by Otago Polytechnic have been made since the last audit in 2002. Of particular importance has been the signing of a *Memorandum of Understanding* between Te Rūnanga o Moeraki, Kāti Huirapa Rūnaka ki Puketeraki, Te Rūnanga o Ōtākou, Hokonui Rūnanga Inc (kā Papatipu Rūnaka), and the Otago Polytechnic. This has recently been supported by the *Te Kura Matatini ki Otago Māori Strategic Framework 2007-2011* which identifies six priority areas and is recognised as an example of good practice.

One of the most significant advances resulting from the Strategic Framework has been the appointment of a Kaitohutohu, who is a member of the Leadership Team. A Kōmiti Kāwanataka has also been established with a membership which includes both Māori and Pākeha and this Kōmiti has supported the process of Treaty training. There is a requirement for new staff to attend a two day Treaty of Waitangi workshop as part of the induction programme and existing

staff are encouraged to participate in these workshops. However, the Audit Team noted variations across schools and departments as to the number of staff who had taken up this opportunity and this was reflected in the considerable variation in the extent to which teaching staff recognised the significance of Māori cultural differences in the development and delivery of programmes. There were, however, a number of examples of affirmative action in this respect.

Academic Board and Leadership Team approval to develop a new programme is based on sound business planning and is subject to demonstrating strategic fit, financial viability, market need and stakeholder consultation. Each programme area has a Permanent External Advisory Committee and programme documents contain clearly defined programme specifications, including aims and graduate outcomes. This strategic approach to programme planning and the appropriate utilisation of resources were evident at all levels and ensured that the educational functions of the Polytechnic were being conducted with due concern for the public interest.

A new process for the approval of short courses has recently been put in place which requires confirmation by the Academic Manager and the Group Manager that any Adult Community Education course meets the NZQA criteria and is within the funding cap. It is recommended that the form for ACE approvals be reviewed to support this practice.

Student evaluation occurs through surveys relating to First Impressions, Programme Satisfaction and Course Evaluation. In some cases it was noted that students had not been given any feedback following their completion of surveys and it is recommended that measures be put in place to ensure consistency of feedback to students.

Permanent External Advisory Committees are playing an active role in providing advice on the relevance of programmes to industry needs. Members are consulted on programme development, changes to programmes and courses, and programme reviews. It is apparent that the Polytechnic listens to the feedback given, and actions are taken where possible to accommodate industry needs.

In general staff and students were satisfied that there are adequate resources to support the delivery of programmes, although several programme-specific resource issues were noted in relation to two programmes.

There is an annual programme portfolio review of all programmes in terms of financial viability and strategic value, in which they are assessed in terms of educational quality, relevance and strategic fit. It was noted that the Otago Polytechnic system has been recognised by the Tertiary Education Commission as an example of good practice to be circulated to other tertiary providers.

Health and safety and risk management policies and procedures are being consistently implemented and a risk matrix has been developed for the Polytechnic as a basis for identifying risks, and assessing their likelihood and impact. Internal health and safety audits are being conducted across Schools and departments on an ongoing basis.

There are effective policies and procedures in place for the recruitment, development and appraisal of staff and it was confirmed that staff are appropriately qualified and experienced to

carry out their roles. Staff who are not already teacher trained are required to undertake training, normally by enrolment in the Graduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning.

Staff commented favourably on the resources available for their professional development and it was noted that there are clear and effective links between the Polytechnic's strategic directions and priorities, the resourcing of professional development activities, and the processes in place for professional development and performance review.

The prospectus is readable, accessible and contains all the relevant information, although the level at which Programmes are offered is not always included. Because of the importance of level to entry and stair casing, it is recommended that in future all programmes listings include the level. Students confirmed that they received effective information and guidance to assist with making informed decisions on their choice of programmes. The logging of student contacts and enquiries by all schools and staff and the diligence with which these are followed up is an example of good practice.

Students reported that the enrolment process was clear and simple, whether through the internet, by phone, or by 'dropping in'. In many cases staff made time to meet with applicants to talk to them about the course requirements and expectations and to discuss where the course might take them.

The Polytechnic has a very strong ethos for the acceptance and accreditation of prior learning including effective, appropriate and rigorously applied guidelines administered through the Centre for the Assessment of Prior Learning. Assessments are demanding and the assessment panels have credibility and standing both within and outside of the Polytechnic. It is recommended, however, that in the updated version of the RPL policy there should be a fuller definition of "Advanced Standing".

Initiatives overseen by the Student Support Services include the 'Drop In Before you Drop Out' pamphlet for students considering withdrawing. Support and pastoral care provided to international students is comprehensive, with a variety of services at individual, course and institutional level.

Health and safety considerations are being addressed appropriately, with information recorded in registers and potential physical and emotional risks being identified in each programme document, with an indication of how they will be handled.

Otago Polytechnic has established a positive learning environment where students are comfortable about making direct contact with staff if an issue arises. Information about the formal appeal and complaints procedures is readily available and understood by students. The recently introduced Diagnostic Testing of all entry level students enables them to receive individual feedback on their writing and mathematics skills specific to the requirements of their programme, with follow-up options offered.

Most students were positive about their programme and the quality of teaching, but Students in the Digital Media Imaging section of the Bachelor of Fine Arts would value a more structured approach to the Studio Practice module, with more supporting material. It was

therefore recommended that the teaching/learning environment in Digital Media Imaging be monitored closely by the Head of School to ensure that student learning needs are fully met.

There was also a mixed reaction from students to online delivery, with entry level students from the Bachelor of Midwifery and the Certificate in Health feeling unprepared for the amount of online delivery. It is therefore recommended that the Polytechnic arrange a centrally managed opportunity for students to provide feedback on current delivery methods. Students from the Postgraduate Diploma in Occupational Therapy, whose course is delivered fully online and supported by teleconferencing, were positive about the process. It is recommended that current online delivery be looked at more closely to ascertain whether all relevant implications have been considered and implemented in respect to the achievement of learning outcomes and the personal/technical skills needed by staff and students to succeed in the online environment.

Evaluation of work experience is handled particularly well in the National Certificate in Horticulture (Central Otago campus), and clear clinical processes are in place for the Bachelor of Midwifery. Roles and responsibilities of all parties are covered in workplace contracts and associated documentation. Assessment guidelines, marking criteria and responsibilities are clearly set out in the programmes audited, and other aspects of the relevant policies are being followed. Students are prepared for offsite work through different strategies such as the 'Site Safe' programme in the Diploma in Architectural Draughting and full briefings on risk management and health and safety issues in the Graduate Diploma in Physical Conditioning.

Assessment practices are rigorous and students in a number of programmes clearly appreciated the real-life relevance of the assessment tasks with assessments seen as contributing to the students' personal and professional development and directly relating to their work as well as to the learning outcomes. The Polytechnic is to be commended for the sensitive way in which it handles academic appeals and seeks to achieve a just and acceptable outcome for students.

Student results are stored electronically in the Student Management System (Jasper) and this information is used for the collation of final results. An internal audit has identified deficiencies in the system relating to the confirmation of the award of National Qualifications at the time of graduation and it is recommended that priority be given to the review of this part of the system.

The number of quality assured research outputs produced and the success in the recent Performance Based Research Fund round are manifestations of the effort which the Polytechnic has put into developing a research culture and staff research expertise. A particularly commendable initiative has been the production of two peer-reviewed journals: *Junctures* and *Scope* especially now that *Junctures* has been accepted by major publishing houses.

The policy framework put in place by the Polytechnic to support research development ensures adequate resources and support are available to meet the defined research objectives through interlocking components, including the appointment of professorial staff, the Individual Development Programme process and research grant availability. Schools are also required to have an explicit plan to encourage and enhance research activity.

The Polytechnic has a mature and well managed system of internal academic audit which includes the periodic survey of staff to ascertain how well the process is working. This has played a significant role in the maintenance of quality over recent years.

BOARD DECISION (25 September 2007)

That Otago Polytechnic be awarded Quality Assured status for a further four years, consistent with ITP Quality requirements.