

Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics Quality

Mana Kounga ä-Pütahi Hangarau, ä-Kuratini

Academic Audit

Summary Report

Universal College of Learning
(March 2008)



INTRODUCTION:

UCOL's Investment Plan 2008 – 2010 describes the institution's role as lead provider of vocational and applied education in three separate but adjoining catchment areas. "The nature and needs of these communities have continued to shape and strengthen UCOL's commitments to delivering a mix of core programmes that support generic community and industry needs, while also working to strengthen and support niche areas and regional strengths."

In 2006 UCOL achieved 4717 EFTS and is on track this year to exceed that total by a small number. UCOL's head office is in Palmerston North where the campus accommodates approximately 52% of the total student population with a further 20% in Wanganui, 8% in Masterton and a Nursing stream (89 students) at Tairāwhiti in Gisborne. The UCOL presence in Levin has been discontinued and likewise the Aokautere horticulture site and the Highbury Community Computing Centre in Palmerston North have been closed. Some 13% of UCOL students study fully online and an increasing number use blended learning options.

UCOL's commitment to meeting the needs of its regional communities is demonstrated by the current development of a collaborative learning centre on the new Whanganui campus. Further, its commitment to its regions is illustrated by the development of an international cuisine school in the Wairarapa to strengthen the region's growing reputation in hospitality and food, to attract people to the area, and to boost the local economy. UCOL has been directly included in the Major Regional Initiatives (MRIs) in both Wairarapa and Manawatu, and included advisory boards in two MRIs in Wanganui and Horowhenua.

UCOL has an extensive geographical spread incorporating several iwi groups, each with their own rohe. There are agreements with Taneuiarangi Manawatu Incorporated (TMI) who are the mandated iwi authority for Rangitaane O Manawatu, with iwi based around Wanganui (Te Atihaunui a Paparangi, Ngati Apa and Nga Rauru), and with Kahungunu and Rangitaane in Wairarapa. The Council membership includes two Maori members, one appointed by iwi (Rangitaane) and another appointed by the Minister representing the three Wanganui iwi. Te Atawhai Mataira was appointed to the position of Director Maori two years ago and he has developed a Maori Strategy for UCOL that currently awaits consideration by the Council. Participation by Maori in formally assessed courses was 1972 in 2005 and is increasing. UCOL continues to focus on facilitating progression to higher levels of learning for Maori students.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

UCOL is a multi-site institution with its principal location in Palmerston North. There are subsidiary sites in Masterton and Wanganui where, at the behest of Government, UCOL accepted responsibility for the Polytechnics located there in 2001 and 2002 respectively. UCOL also delivers the Bachelor of Nursing programme in Gisborne for about 90 students over the three years of the programme under an agreement with Tairāwhiti Polytechnic. The Audit Panel understands the historical and other related factors that have led to a number of different authority and reporting lines needing to operate within and between these sites and UCOL Palmerston North. However, notwithstanding this lack of uniformity, these arrangements are operating satisfactorily and good quality control of academic programmes and services is being maintained.

UCOL has advanced support for student learning and students needs as one of its key objectives and the Audit Panel saw this manifest in many ways such as the Personal Education Plan process and the quality of information provided for students. The students spoken to universally endorsed these observations.

The Faculty Boards of Studies hold significant delegations for the management of academic quality, and the Audit Panel was impressed with the thoroughness with which they discharge these duties and, likewise, the systematic way in which the Boards report to the Academic Board.

The Panel met with a sizeable cross-section of the Academic Board and examined at some length the ways in which the Board and its sub-committees operate. The Audit Panel is satisfied that the Board discharges its responsibility for maintaining and advancing the academic integrity of the institution and the well being of students very properly. Furthermore, the Board reports to the UCOL Council regularly and in a manner consistent with the delegations it holds from the Council and the duties for which the Council itself is legislatively responsible.

The Panel recognises the excellent upgrading work already completed in Human Resources and, in particular, the system for managing personnel records and the extensive use being made of quantitative performance and related measures.

The Audit Panel advised two corrective actions found necessary to ensure that the institution continues to operate within the policy and procedures of its own academic quality management system. These relate to the need for annual staff performance appraisals that were found to be lacking in some areas and the availability of passes with “Merit” in one particular programme. Both compliance failures are regarded at this time as being of low risk to student learning.

The Panel made twenty nine (29) recommendations, seven (7) of which are in relation to the Research Standard. The latter reflect the variable levels of understanding apparent among staff of UCOL’s research policies and procedures, the lack of performance indicators by which research outcomes can be monitored and, most significantly, the lack of a strong research culture across the institution .

Other recommendations are directed at such matters as Maori participation in programme development and approval, some aspects of health and safety and the need to limit the proliferation of grading systems within the institution.

UCOL continues to be well led and well managed, and the Audit Panel has recommended to the ITP Quality Board that it should extend UCOL’s Quality Assured Status for a further four (4) years when the agreed corrective actions have been satisfactorily completed and the related low-risk non-compliances eliminated.

BOARD DECISION (4 February 2008)

That Universal College of Learning be awarded Quality Assured status for a period of four years, consistent with ITP Quality requirements.