



Ako Aotearoa research manager Kirsty Weir welcomes Nicholas Huntington to his new position with the organisation.

New senior project/research analyst appointed

Ako Aotearoa has much pleasure in announcing the appointment of Nicholas Huntington as our new senior project/research analyst. Nicholas will work alongside Kirsty Weir, our research manager, to assist with the monitoring, reviewing, and support of research and implementation projects commissioned by the National Office.

Nicholas will contribute to our ongoing activities around maximising leverage and impact of our funded projects. He will also assist with the development of syntheses of current knowledge and other resources for the benefit of practitioners in tertiary education.

Nicholas has a background in research and policy analysis, most recently as the senior analyst/researcher for the Industry Training Federation – the representative body for New Zealand's Industry Training Organisations (ITOs). Nicholas managed the federation's research activities, supported ITOs to undertake their own research, and worked to promote research into aspects of vocational education and training.

Nicholas has a particularly strong interest in the linkages between knowledge, research, and practice at both an organisational and individual practitioner level.

Welcome

Welcome to another issue of *Ako Aotearoa Alert*. As I write this, our selection panels are in the middle of making final decisions about our successful National Project Fund grants for 2010, so it is appropriate that the theme of this edition is very much about highlighting some of the diverse work we are already supporting across the tertiary sector. There is some exciting work here, and it is always a great pleasure to work with inspired and dedicated staff who are keen to improve their practice.

As always, our aim is to identify those projects that, in our and our panels' views, have the greatest potential to drive sustainable improvements in tertiary education. Determining priority areas where we might best make a difference and then making the evaluative judgements about which projects to support within those priorities are not easy tasks.

We continue to be surprised, both pleasantly and negatively. Some of our national projects just completed or nearing completion have exceeded our (already high) expectations. In some areas, though, we have been disappointed in the level of interest we have been able to attract to develop quality work in what we believe are important priority areas for the future.

We continue to learn as we go, particularly about how to get the best-possible leverage from some of the strong research that is coming through. In the next few months, we will begin to implement an impact-evaluation framework that is designed to follow up on the impact that projects have had on practice and whether such changes in practice are actually delivering benefits to learners. We are under no illusions: this is not an easy task, but because it is not easy, it is one from which we should not resile.

Dr Peter Coolbear
Director, Ako Aotearoa

Ako Aotearoa supports new Pacific Leadership Development Programme



Pictured above are the members of the inaugural Pacific Leadership Development Programme, which was jointly developed by the Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs and the Leadership Development Centre. The programme, designed to nurture and develop talented Pacific state-sector managers, includes participants from the health sector, tertiary education institutions, and the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC).

Ako Aotearoa is pleased to be a supporter of this programme, and has sponsored six tertiary-sector managers on the programme. They are (back row): Walter Fraser, The University of Auckland (second from left); Malia Talakai, Unitec (third from left); Louise Falepau, Whitireia Community Polytechnic (second from right); and Toleafoa Sina Aiono- Aiolupotea, Manukau Institute of Technology (far right). Middle row: Dr Malakai Koloamatangi, University of Canterbury (third from left). Seated: Dr Airini, The University of Auckland (third from right).

Also pictured are: Debbie Ryan (middle row, left), Pacific Perspectives, who has contributed to the development of the programme and supported Ako Aotearoa with the development of our Pacific people's caucus; Alan Woodside (seated, fourth from left), programme coordinator, Leadership Development Centre; and Dr Colin Tukuitonga (middle row, right), chief executive, Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs.

Image supplied by Janine Gray / Ministry of Pacific Island Affairs.

The Ako Aotearoa Pacific peoples' caucus work programme

The Pacific people's caucus is developing a strategic work programme to support Pacific staff and learners in tertiary education. This is not only designed to enhance Pacific achievement in tertiary education, but also recognises that, to make sustainable gains for Pacific people, there is an urgent need to support capability building and the establishment of a critical mass of leadership and research expertise amongst Pacific tertiary educators. Thus, there are, at present, three strands to this portfolio:

1. Enhancing Pacific leadership in the sector through our involvement with and support of the Pacific leadership development programme, highlighted above.
2. Identifying and sharing case studies in exemplary practice supporting Pacific-learner success in tertiary education. This project is planned to complement Janinka Greenwood and Lynne-Harata Te Aika's recent project, Hei Taurira, on exemplary practice for Māori. The work will be led by

Dr Cherie Chu (Victoria University of Wellington), in collaboration with the Association of Pacific Staff in Tertiary Education (APSTE).

3. Evaluating the impact of successive tertiary education strategies on Pacific achievement in tertiary education. We are currently in the process of evaluating the proposals we have received to undertake this work, and we plan to commission this in November.

Strategic elearning development at Unitec

Linda Keesing–Styles, dean of teaching and learning at Unitec New Zealand, describes how Ako Aotearoa's *Taking the Lead* resource assisted Unitec in developing their elearning strategy.



The Unitec elearning team (left to right): Robert Ayres, manager, Te Puna Ako Learning and Teaching Centre; Linda Keesing–Styles, dean of teaching and learning; and Thom Cochrane, elearning team leader.

Unitec made a decision in early 2009 to investigate and implement a plan to progress the effective utilisation of elearning. This is part of a new overarching strategic plan, one component of which is innovation in teaching and learning. As part of our Living Curriculum initiative, we are reframing learning as conversation, delivering programs that are integrated with the world and that are genuinely dynamic. The plan is to nurture resourcefulness and resilience in our students. We define the curriculum not as the information content (or syllabus) of the programme, but rather as the programme learning experience.

The elearning strategy is a central component of the Living Curriculum initiative. Ako Aotearoa's website offered valuable guidance, particularly *Taking the Lead: Strategic Management for e-Learning*. This resource provided a framework for early consideration of how to approach the development of an institutional strategy. Analysis of its strategic areas and case studies provided provocative considerations for us. These were featured in the following order:

- **Strategy** – Ensuring elearning solutions meet the strategic goals of your institution
- **Structure** – How to organise and manage for elearning
- **Resourcing** – Different approaches to funding elearning
- **Decision making** – Who decides which courses and programmes will make use of elearning
- **Collaborating and outsourcing** – Working with others to develop elearning activities
- **Selecting technologies** – Investing wisely in new technology

The case studies from a range of institutions allowed an opportunity for reflection on very different approaches taken by organisations in establishing an elearning strategy. At Unitec, ensuring coherence with institutional strategies and goals had already been established, but deciding which approach to take was aided by analysis of these case studies. The options were: establish a strategic direction at corporate level (Otago Polytechnic), nest a strategy within a teaching and learning plan within an institutional strategy (University of Otago), or

develop a teaching and learning plan alone (University of Canterbury).

A working party, drawn from key institutional and faculty staff, began by considering this issue and opted for closely linking the strategy to institutional strategic direction, but also creating a comprehensive, standalone elearning strategy. The working party then set about analysing and discussing the remainder of the strategic areas, purposefully focusing on the technologies only once the links to teaching and learning had been fully established. The elearning strategy is now embedded as a key component of the Living Curriculum initiative.

The strategy has been fully approved and funded, and is in the process of implementation. Key components of the strategy include:

- focusing the strategy on three key areas: staff capability, student capability and access, and infrastructure
- selecting, training (supported onsite by Etienne Wenger) and releasing staff in every department to act as elearning community coordinators to champion the establishment of elearning communities of practice and support the development of elearning capability
- appointing faculty-based support staff in elearning and academic literacies for a period of 18 months
- shifting towards the use of wireless mobile devices for staff and students to allow maximum flexibility and engagement and to progress the use of Web 2.0 technologies
- moving from Blackboard to Moodle as the institutional Learning Management System (LMS)
- embedding elearning capabilities into the position descriptions and performance and professional development expectations of academic staff.

We recommend *Taking the Lead* as a valuable source of information for institutions considering the development of an elearning strategy.

Taking the Lead: Strategic Management for e-Learning was researched and written by Dr Andrew Higgins (AUT University) and Emeritus Professor Tom Prebble (previously from Massey University). The project was originally sponsored by the Ministry of Education and the summary guide was published by Ako Aotearoa. Go to: www.ako.aotearoa.ac.nz/takingthelead for further information. Free print copies of the guide are available by emailing: J.Tanner-Lloyd@massey.ac.nz

BY IAN ROWE

News from the Central Hub

By the time you read this, you will be enjoying daylight saving and the unseasonably wet September will have faded from memory. You will also be near the end of another demanding, yet hopefully exciting, academic year and looking forward to a well-earned Christmas break. The work of the hub continues; we are as busy as ever. We have recently approved our 44th hub-funded project and there have been a large number of Ako Aotearoa-sponsored activities across the region.



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A display of artwork from one of Marcel Baaijens's students, Yaniv Janson, at an exhibition at ArtsPost in Hamilton.



Marcel Baaijens, distance delivery mentor for The Learning Connexion, explores creative potential in the intellectually impaired.

Art education for the intellectually impaired

Our latest approved regional hub project, *How can creative intelligence be developed into a pathway to inclusion within tertiary art education for people with intellectual impairments*, is led by Marcel Baaijens, distance delivery mentor for The Learning Connexion. The purpose of this work is to enable teachers to provide art education at a tertiary level for adults with intellectual impairments and to contribute to the development of a teacher-training programme that will provide educators with the awareness, skills, and resources to become excellent art educators for that student group.

The project focuses on researching literature and undertaking case studies of current art education practices for adults with intellectual impairments. The project aims to identify obstacles and critical success factors, thereby providing practical, action-orientated suggestions for the development of a tertiary art educational methodology and resources for teaching.

By examining what creative intelligence is and what already exists in art educational methodology and resources, Baaijens's work aims to challenge society's view of, attitude towards, and vision for the lives of students with intellectual impairments. That view has been strongly influenced by the medical definition of mental retardation, which is based on limitations rather than abilities or alternative forms of intelligence. The proposition is that these students can excel at and generate income from their creative and artistic outputs.

The survey will collect information in written, photographic, and video formats about existing examples of informal art education practices for adults with intellectual impairments in a variety of settings in New Zealand and worldwide. It will use a questionnaire about their methodology, belief systems, and attitudes towards students with intellectual impairments and their creative outputs.

Central Hub completed projects

We are pleased to profile two recently completed projects funded through the Regional Hub Project Fund in our region. Both of these project outputs can be downloaded from the Ako Aotearoa website. Use the search tool on the website homepage, or go to the Central Hub homepage and click on our list of project outputs.



Left to right: John Green and Dr Zlatko Kovacic (Open Polytechnic) discuss their completed student enrolment project with Ian Rowe, Ako Aotearoa Central Hub operations manager.

Predictive working tool for early identification of “at risk” students

Dr Zlatko Kovacic and John Green of Open Polytechnic have completed their project exploring the variables that may influence student persistence with or withdrawal from their courses of study. The research demonstrates how data captured by institutional enrolment forms can help to identify potential successful or unsuccessful students *before* the course begins. This information could help students by providing guidance on course choices and focusing additional support for those students statistically more likely to fail.

The researchers analysed Open Polytechnic enrolment data from 2006 to 2009, covering more than 19,400 enrolled students. The study identifies the most important factors affecting student success are, in order of importance: ethnicity, course level, secondary school qualification (highest level of achievement held from a secondary school), programme, and age.

ESL students find a voice

Finding a Voice is a proposed model to support English as a second language (ESL) students to develop effective communication skills for clinical placement. The report, prepared by Jan Eyre, literacy and numeracy advisor at the Universal College of Learning (UCOL), outlines findings from a project identifying the factors most likely to support effective communication in placements for undergraduate nursing students for whom English is a second language. The factors identified and examined in detail to analyse their contribution within clinical placements include: their individual proficiency with the English language, their use of learning skills, the quality of their preceptor (teacher or instructor), and the tone of the environment. These factors acted either to support or inhibit students’ participation in the placement community, including students’ mastery of effective communication skills.

The report notes that ESL students’ learning in clinical placements would be vastly enhanced if they were given specialised instruction into aspects of the communication skills required during clinical work. In addition, these students would benefit from advice about how to become more active learners and exert more control over their interactions with clinicians and patients.

There are also recommendations about training clinical preceptors and nursing tutors in how to provide instruction for and practice of the communication skills used in clinical

settings. For example, aspects of English could be developed jointly by ESL specialists and nursing faculties; a communication-for-placement programme with a focus on the “sociopragmatic”, or social conditions placed on language in use.

The report concludes with a series of practical recommendations for undergraduate nursing programmes and a proposed model to support ESL students to develop effective communication skills for success during clinical placements.

How flexible are you? Reflections on 21st-century teaching

Lorette Rayner, flexible learning facilitator at the Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki (WITT), reflects on a recent workshop by Peter Mellow, AUT University’s flexible learning advisor.

Enriching the learning experiences of our students is a topic on many agendas at the moment, and adding the use of appropriate technology into the mix is, as we know, no longer a “may do”, but a “need to do”. Many are teetering on the edge, waiting to dip their toes in and explore these new learning environments; if you needed any encouragement, this is exactly what Peter Mellow provided in his two days of workshops recently held at WITT.

Peter’s workshops provided insights into creating positive learning experiences and explored and demonstrated many opportunities for using Web 2.0 technologies, and notes about how to make the most of our physical learning environments. The presentations were varied and engaging, and the focus on tertiary teaching and learning provided plenty of opportunity for thought and reflection. There was something there for everyone.

One just cannot help being inspired by Peter’s presentations, and inspired we all were. His down-to-earth approach and his “can do” attitude has opened many doors, I’m sure, and has challenged us to push a few boundaries in the name of good teaching and learning.

Tertiary Research in Progress Colloquium 2010

Kirsty Weir, Ako Aotearoa research manager, provides an update on the National Project Fund project teams.



NPF and TLRI project teams, pictured here with Ako Aotearoa staff, meet for the second *Tertiary Research in Progress Colloquium*.

In July, we ran the second *Tertiary Research in Progress Colloquium* for the project teams that are supported through our National Project Fund. We have invested more than \$2m through this initiative on projects to improve tertiary teaching and learning for the benefit of learners. Our goals for the colloquium were to identify early synergies across projects and to enable funded researchers to network informally with like-minded colleagues. We were again delighted with the level and quality of discussions about each project, as well as the dialogue about broader issues relating to tertiary teaching and learning in New Zealand.

In addition to the National Project Fund teams, we invited recently funded teams from the Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) to present their work. Dr Linda Leach and Dr Nick Zepke represented the TLRI at the colloquium and provided an overview of the existing and completed TLRI tertiary projects. It was great to see a broader picture of the funded work for improving teaching and learning in the tertiary sector.

In all, 20 teams presented at the colloquium (including 2 doctoral students supported by Ako Aotearoa). The presentations showcased the range of exciting projects under way, some of which were research based and others that had significant implementation elements to the work. It reinforced for us the diversity of our portfolio of projects. There are various methodological approaches employed using strong sampling procedures. Project teams are also focusing on the nature of evidence needed to enhance teaching and learning practices.

There were many stimulating discussions over the two days. Of note was an emerging interest in tertiary teaching as a profession. Many tertiary teachers have dual roles, as both disciplinary experts and teaching and learning professionals. How to balance these roles and support good practice in teaching and learning is an ongoing interest for Ako Aotearoa.

There were also some very constructive conversations about how we can support project teams to get research in front of the decision makers of organisations. We see us having a key role in supporting the dissemination and application of the findings accumulating from the projects.

With many of the first round of funded projects nearing completion, we are very aware that conducting high-quality research on its own is not enough to affect change in practice. Careful attention must also be paid to how the implications of key findings are communicated to, for example, the research community, practitioners, and policy makers.

Practitioners and policy makers are faced with decisions about what interventions or approaches to employ, often within significant time and resource constraints. To have the

largest impact, research findings should be clearly and concisely communicated, have appropriate regard to context, and focus on the implications for policy and recommendations for practice. We see ourselves as brokers of this information and we are looking forward to sharing these findings with the sector.

The Ako Aotearoa *Tertiary Research in Progress* handbook features a one-page summary of each presentation. To access or download a copy of the handbook, link to the project presentations, or visit the project team spaces on our website, go to: <http://ako.aotearoa.ac.nz/ako-aotearoa/ako-aotearoa/resources/pages/ako-aotearoa-tertiary-research-progress-colloquium-2010>



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