



Ako Aotearoa's strategic plan

Since the concept of a national centre of tertiary teaching excellence was first mooted in the Teaching Matters Forum consultations in 2005, discussions about the nature of the centre have continued. Building on and further developing this work, Ako Aotearoa's board approved the organisation's first strategic plan in December 2007.

A short-form version of this plan has now been published and is available in hard or electronic copy in either English or te reo Māori. If you would like copies, please contact us at akoaooteaora@massey.ac.nz.

ABOVE: Peter Coolbear's inaugural speech. A summary of Peter's speech was published in *Education Review*, 7 December 2007.

BELOW: Peter Coolbear with Ako Aotearoa Chairman Brian Gould (left) and Hon Dr Michael Cullen (former Minister for Tertiary Education) at the official launch of Ako Aotearoa in November 2007.



Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of Ako Aotearoa's newsletter. As the new National Centre of Tertiary Teaching Excellence is beginning to gain some momentum, I am delighted to launch this regular newsletter to keep you advised of what we are beginning to do, what we are thinking of doing, and the lessons we are learning from what we've done to date.

Ultimately, we are about fostering the best possible outcomes for learners in New Zealand's tertiary education sector. We are working from two fundamental premises: firstly, that there is no one model of best practice – there is no unique recipe for effective tertiary education and training even within a single discipline at a single level of study, and secondly, that there is a huge amount of good and excellent practice within our sector. Our job is to find it, celebrate it and promote it, often debate it, and support work to improve it still further. We cannot do this alone – we need to work in partnership with tertiary education organisations, practitioners, learners, and anyone else who is interested in the future of New Zealand.

We encourage your views and your feedback at this stage by email (akoaooteaora@massey.ac.nz) and soon through our new interactive website, which we expect to launch mid-year. In the meantime, you can visit our interim website at www.akoaooteaora.ac.nz.

I am excited not only about the projects we are engaged in to date from both the regional hubs and the national office but also about the staff we've engaged to do them. We are gradually building a small but strong team, very ably supported by some excellent contract staff on specific projects. You can find our profiles and contact details on our website.

Despite our small size, Ako Aotearoa is committed to working with a dispersed operational model. Our regional hubs are critical to our relationships across the breadth of the tertiary sector. The centre pages of this newsletter are therefore devoted to Ako Aotearoa news specific to your region. Many readers will have met staff at our regional hubs over the last few months. We expect to meet with many more of you as the year progresses.

With very best wishes

Dr Peter Coolbear

National Director, Ako Aotearoa

Tertiary Teaching Excellence Awards

Ako Aotearoa will assume responsibility for the tertiary teaching excellence awards (TTEAs) scheduled for 16 July of this year. The organisation has taken over the administration and management of the awards from the NZQA, which has been running the initiative since its inception in 2002.

The aim of the TTEAs is to recognise and encourage excellence in tertiary teaching while also providing an opportunity for teachers to further their careers and share their good practice with others. Furthermore, a key focus of the awards is to identify and reward teaching practices that are student-focused and committed to promoting effective learning. Ako Aotearoa's national director, Peter Coolbear, says, "We are delighted to have the opportunity to take over the management of these prestigious awards. Celebrating teaching excellence is part of our core business, and over the years these awards have gained considerable status: we look forward to developing them further. We are also delighted that Professor Graeme Fraser has agreed to chair the awards panel this year in order to ensure continuity of process."

Nominations for the 2008 round closed on Friday, 28 March 2008. The awards will be announced at a Beehive presentation on 16 July. Nine awardees will each receive \$20,000. The Prime Minister's Award, a supreme award of \$30,000, will be presented to the overall winner.

"Excellence" 2007

With taking over the management of the TTEAs in 2007, one of the first tasks for Ako Aotearoa was to publish a booklet profiling the ten 2007 award winners. It is a fitting tribute to the sustained excellence that those people have contributed to our education system. Copies of the booklet were sent to every tertiary education organisation in the country late last year. Additional copies are available for free from our national office.

Ako Aotearoa gives academy the green light

The board of Ako Aotearoa has approved the establishment of an academy for tertiary teaching excellence and is investing \$142,000 in its development under the centre's umbrella. With its membership comprising past winners of the tertiary teaching excellence awards (TTEAs), the academy will be a great resource of expertise to foster, promote, and advocate for the development of excellent tertiary teachers.

The academy's remit is to raise the profile of exemplary tertiary teaching, focusing on excellence in both the practice and research of tertiary teaching and learning. Supported by Ako Aotearoa's role as new managers of the excellence awards, the academy will draw on the experience of the 90 award winners to build an expert body of tertiary practitioners.

In late 2007, Ako Aotearoa conducted a series of six regional meetings to discuss the academy concept with past TTEA winners. From this discussion, a workshop of awardees held in early January 2008 developed a proposal. From this a core working group was identified to provide a continuing leadership role during the first stages of the academy's development. Group member Karl Dodds, a principal lecturer at Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology, comments, "I see the academy as offering a platform for professional development, mentoring, knowledge sharing, and collegiality across all institutions. Membership of any professional association always adds value to that profession. Such membership transcends institutional boundaries and promotes a focus on the professional activity itself. The academy will fill this current void in our tertiary sector."

Donna Buckingham, Associate Professor of the Faculty of Law at the University of Otago, is another member of the working group. Like Karl Dodds, she is excited about the future of the academy and how it will support both teachers and learners alike. Donna says, "Even though we are a very disparate group in terms of our teaching areas and styles, it is a great experience to work together towards the common goal of an academy. We hope the academy will allow all awardees to share their teaching stories with others and provide a focus for the continuing exploration of excellence in tertiary teaching."

There are already a number of plans for 2008 to kick-start the strategy of the academy. In April, a survey will be sent to all TTEA awardees. The replies to this survey will provide valuable information for the development of the academy's own database of teaching expertise. Operating within Ako Aotearoa's planned new site, a website presence will be developed to support this database. The format for the 2008 TTEAs, to be held at the Beehive in July, will be expanded to include the induction of this year's award winners into the academy. Plans are also under way for a symposium to be held in Wellington during October to which all tertiary teaching excellence awardees will be invited.



An Academy working group meeting in Christchurch recently, with guest speaker Ron Marken (3M National Teaching Fellowship): Standing left to right are Justin Sampson (Ako Aotearoa), Ron Marken, Lesley Procter (University of Otago), Pip Lynch (Neri), Sydney Shep (Victoria University of Wellington), Oriell Kelly (Manukau Institute of Technology); seated are Karl Dodds (Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology) and Helen Dobson (Ako Aotearoa Academy Project Manager).

New Website

Will harness and support tertiary teaching excellence

The Ako Aotearoa team is currently developing a website that will become the “one stop shop” for information on teaching and learning for New Zealand’s tertiary sector. The site is due to be launched mid-year.



Justin Sampson and Peter Coolbear of Ako Aotearoa with Catalyst director Mike O'Connor and project manager Meredith Henson.

Project leader Justin Sampson, Knowledge Manager for Ako Aotearoa, explains that the site will deliver an online environment where projects, research, current news, and ideas in tertiary teaching can be easily accessed, discussed, and developed. “Ako Aotearoa is very excited about the site. The current environment reflects a scattered range of information that is not easily accessed or even well known. Through this project, New Zealand tertiary educators will be able to obtain a wealth of information for the first time from one high-quality, lively, and user-friendly site,” he says.

The site will be a central coordinating environment that will encourage teachers and researchers across the diverse tertiary landscape to network, share information, collaborate, discuss the issues, and develop their teaching expertise. It will also stimulate the development of communities of interest in tertiary education, particularly through forums. Mr Sampson emphasises the site’s commitment to good functionality and support through building ongoing relationships that will help these communities to establish and grow.

Ako Aotearoa Director Peter Coolbear expects the site to further benefit the sector by keeping its stakeholders up to date with activities and new ideas and by providing links to other national and international sites. The project supports the centre’s mission to focus on enhancing the effectiveness of tertiary teaching and learning practices, thereby assisting educators and organisations to facilitate the best possible education outcomes for all learners.

Background planning for the website began in late 2007, followed by a robust and competitive tendering process to procure an IT company to develop the site. The contract was awarded in February 2008 to IT specialists Catalyst. A steering group from the tertiary sector has been advising on site development, and a user group has been canvassed for recommendations on functionality and content.

With the site launch on the horizon, Mr Sampson says he is looking towards a sustainable future for the website, one that involves not only drive and commitment from Ako Aotearoa but also collaboration and engagement with a growing number of communities across the tertiary sector.

Research and projects register to benefit the tertiary education sector

Ako Aotearoa has commissioned the development of a register of all research and applied projects on tertiary education currently being undertaken in New Zealand. We hope that this will become a valuable tool and a rich resource for the tertiary education sector to access.

The register, which will provide information for the benefit of the entire sector, is part of the foundation we are building for Ako Aotearoa’s research and project funding strategy. Over a million dollars is to be invested annually by the national centre in supporting use-inspired research and projects that will improve teaching and learning in New Zealand’s tertiary sector. Driving this aim is the organisation’s commitment to supporting strategic and sustainable improvement, building on and adding value to existing work wherever possible.

“Since coming into this role, I have been surprised at how fragmented the bodies of knowledge about tertiary education in New Zealand are,” says Ako Aotearoa director Peter Coolbear. “If we are to maximise our impact on improving teaching and learning, we need a better understanding of our existing knowledge base and the research and innovative capacity we have in different areas.”

The project will be led by Rosalind Churchman, who has a great deal of experience in academic management roles within both the polytechnic and university sector in New Zealand. She comments, “My work has focused on very original areas of research, and I am very pleased to be working with Ako Aotearoa in the development of a unique research database of this scale.”

Researchers and research organisations will have the opportunity to confirm their recent research outputs in due course.



Rosalind Churchman, project manager for the Ako Aotearoa Research and Projects Register.

Identifying adult and community education research and project priorities

Ako Aotearoa will soon be bringing together experienced researchers and practitioners from the adult and community education sector to participate in a one-day workshop.

This workshop will aim to identify priorities for strategic research and implementation projects that Ako Aotearoa might support in the future.

The objective of this workshop is to establish a strategic framework against which to evaluate project proposals. We are also concerned with limiting funding overlaps with other education bodies and ensuring that all research projects are adding value to the work that has already been undertaken.

Whole-of-organisation approaches to improving teaching and learning

In partnership with ITP New Zealand, TANZ, ASTE, and AUS, Ako Aotearoa hosted a series of regional seminars in April on the development of strategies to enhance the quality of teaching and learning in New Zealand's tertiary sector.

The aim of these seminars is to start a series of conversations on how tertiary education organisations can take greater ownership of their own quality enhancement processes in the context of the government's current reforms.

The impact of these reforms will depend on how they are implemented by both the quality assurance bodies and the institutions themselves. Ideally, they could provide significant opportunities for tertiary education organisations to enhance educational outcomes for their learners. With a trial of new processes planned shortly for institutes of technology and polytechnics, wānanga, and private education providers, this is the time for the sector as a whole to start thinking about these issues in a strategic context. More about this in our next issue.



LEFT: Participants at the Christchurch seminar. RIGHT: The panel at the Christchurch seminar: standing from left to right are Dr Marjorie Manthei (Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology) and Keith Tyler-Smith (TANZ); seated are Karen Te Puke (Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology), Shane Edwards (Te Wānanga o Aotearoa), and Karl Yates (Avonmore Tertiary Academy).

Ako Aotearoa conference sponsorship

Ako Aotearoa has already agreed to provide sponsorship for some key conferences on the tertiary education calendar for 2008.

We were delighted to sponsor the very successful (and filled to capacity!) ITF New Zealand Vocational Education and Training Research Forum in early March. (www.itf.org.nz/research-forum-2008)

Other conferences we are sponsoring include:

Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) Conference: Engaging Communities

1–4 July, Rotorua
conference.hersda.org.au/2008

Eastern Institute of Technology Teaching and Learning Conference: Student Success; A New Era in Ways of Learning

1–3 October, Hawke's Bay
www.eit.ac.nz/events/teaching_and_learning_conference.aspx

Symposium on Tertiary Assessment and Higher Education Student Outcomes: Policy, Practice, and Research

17–19 November, Wellington

A Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) project (funded by the Ministry of Education), led by Victoria University in collaboration with Manukau Institute of Technology, Massey University, and Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi
www.victoria.ac.nz/education/SYMPOSIUM/index.aspx



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