

Learning Centre practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Preliminary report

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Abstract

Robust data on institutional structures, staffing and services in Tertiary Learning Centres is essential not only to inform research into effective practice, but also to provide professional support for Tertiary Learning Advisors (TLAs). The first full scale survey of Learning Centres in tertiary institutions in New Zealand was carried out in 2008 to provide baseline data on those institutions. In 2013, another survey was carried out to further explore the current environment and the changes which occurred in the intervening five years. While some of the areas examined in both surveys were similar, the 2013 survey expanded the focus to include areas highlighted in recent discussions amongst TLAs and in research publications.

The research addressed four areas: TLAs' professional status, TLAs' place in institutional structures, services TLAs provide for students, and significant changes that have occurred since 2008.

At the 2013 ATLAANZ conference, some of the initial findings of the project were highlighted. This report presents the preliminary analysis of the survey data, including some of the feedback received from colleagues at the conference, and indicates proposed further analysis and research.

Background

Tertiary learning advising is still a relatively new profession in New Zealand. Although Learning Advisors have been employed in our institutions since the mid-1980s, a professional organisation, the Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors in Aotearoa/New Zealand (ATLAANZ), was established only in 2000, and it was not

¹ Cameron, C., & Catt, C. (2014). Learning Centre practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Preliminary report. In H. Martin & M. Simkin (Eds.), *Hikina te manuka!: Learning connections in a changing environment: Proceedings of the 2013 Annual International Conference of the Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa/New Zealand (ATLAANZ)* (pp. 1-18). Napier, New Zealand: ATLAANZ.

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until 2012 that the Association officially adopted a professional practice document that encapsulated the principles and values, knowledge and skills, and roles and responsibilities of Tertiary Learning Advisors (TLAs) in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

As members of an emerging profession, TLAs face a number of challenges, including a precarious status within many – if not all – institutions (for example, see Chanock, 2007; Crozier, 2007; Laurs, 2010; Samuels, 2013; Strauss, 2013). In such an environment, research on tertiary learning practice is fundamental. In particular, we need robust data on institutional structures, staffing and services in Learning Centres, not only to inform research into effective practice, but also to provide professional support for TLAs by allowing them to draw on the collective experience of the contribution of Learning Advisors in tertiary institutions. Such data would also permit comparison with practice outside New Zealand (for instance, with Australia, where James & Maxwell, 2012, carried out a similar project).

In this project we surveyed Learning Centres in tertiary institutions in New Zealand in order to explore TLAs' qualifications and employment conditions, the institutional structures in which they work, and the diverse range of practice. The project replicated and extended a survey carried out in 2008 (Cameron & Catt, 2008). While there had been a survey of individual TLAs in 1997 (Hoffman, 2002), the 2008 project was the first full scale survey of Learning Centres in tertiary institutions in New Zealand. When the results of that project were presented at the annual ATLAANZ conference in November 2008, there was strong interest from conference attendees and encouragement to continue the research. Since then, consideration of “professionalism” and “practice” have continued to form a significant part of ATLAANZ conferences, both in presentations and informal discussions, indicating that there remains strong support amongst our colleagues for researching our practice.

In the current project, we used a revised version of the 2008 survey to gather data on the current environment and the changes occurring in the intervening five years. While some of the questions in both surveys were similar (for example, the physical location of Learning Centres, staffing numbers and services provided), the 2013 survey expanded the areas of focus. Feedback from ATLAANZ members, for instance, led us to examine in more detail TLA qualifications and remuneration, and recent research into TLA status within institutions (see, for example, Strauss, 2013) indicated the need to probe TLAs' involvement in research and their influence on teaching and learning within their institutions.

Four research questions were addressed in 2013:

1. What is the professional status of TLAs?
2. Where do TLAs fit in their institutional structures?
3. What services do TLAs provide for students?
4. What significant changes have occurred in Tertiary Learning Centres since 2008?

At the 2013 annual ATLAANZ conference, we highlighted some of the initial findings of the project and reflected on the changes evident since 2008. The purpose of this report is to present the preliminary analysis of the survey data, including some analysis not reported at the conference and feedback we received from colleagues, and indicate further analysis required.

Method

Survey design

The 2008 survey was revised to improve clarity and widen the range of topics. In particular, we reworded some questions that had yielded ambiguous responses in 2008; for example, distinguishing practising TLAs from those with managerial responsibility only. We also included questions on areas of interest identified in recent research and in ATLAANZ discussion fora; for example, the breadth and type of qualifications, pay and conditions, participation in research, and ability to influence teaching and learning in the institution.

The final questionnaire covered six key areas:

- Learning Centre organisation and place within the institution (name of institution and Learning Centre; respondent's role; title of learning advising staff; location; alignment with other institutional units; reporting lines; funding sources);
- staffing (staffing numbers; contract type; tenure; highest qualifications, teaching qualifications, and qualifications in progress; pay scales);
- users (demographics of students in institution and of users of Learning Centre);
- services for students (teaching programmes and other roles/services for students; modes of delivery; hours of operation);
- other roles in the institution (research activity and expectations; role of Learning Advisors in improving teaching and learning; role of Learning Advisors on academic/executive committees); and
- trends and changes since 2008 (in organisation, staffing, services, morale and job security).

The survey contained a mix of closed response and open-ended questions, with a further open-ended question at the end of each section to encourage respondents to provide additional explanatory information. The final survey was distributed on-line (using the *Qualtrix* programme) as well as on paper (PDF). (The full survey is available on request.)

Approval for the project was given by both the Lincoln University and CPIT Human Ethics Committees.

Data collection and analysis

All public tertiary institutions (universities, institutes of technology and polytechnics – ITPs – and wānanga), identified on the NZQA website (www.nzqa.govt.nz/providers/index.do), were included in the survey. Because of the proliferation of private providers, and their different funding structures, no attempt was made to include private providers in this project unless they were associated with ATLAANZ; on this basis, two private providers were invited to participate. Two fewer public tertiary institutions were approached than in 2008 (since Tairāwhiti Polytechnic and Eastern Institute of Technology have merged, and Telford Rural Polytechnic has merged with Lincoln University), and one more private provider affiliated with ATLAANZ (the Fire Service).

At each institution, we identified the manager (sometimes called head of Centre, team leader, co-ordinator, or director) of the Learning Centre(s). Many of the managers were personally known to the researchers through their membership of ATLAANZ. For those Centres with no prior association with ATLAANZ, or where there had been a change in the manager role, we identified the appropriate person to approach (i.e., the most immediate line manager of TLAs in the Centre) through the institution's website or by contacting the institution by email or telephone.

An invitation was emailed in July 2013 to the manager of each Centre, explaining the project and inviting him/her to complete an online or paper form of the questionnaire. Participants were asked to complete (and return, if in paper form) the survey within two weeks (2.5 weeks for paper form). Approximately three days before the end of that period, a follow-up email reminder was sent to all potential participants. In that email we also offered prospective respondents additional time to complete the survey if they so wished.

By the closing date, approximately 50% of respondents had completed the survey (fewer than in 2008, when the response rate after two weeks was approximately 75%). During the week after the advertised closing date, we telephoned those Centres that had not responded to ask if the manager would be able to complete the survey if more time were available. In 2008, we found the lack of response was most often related to some practical barrier (for example, in one case the manager had gone on annual leave; in others they had overlooked the survey email), rather than an unwillingness to participate, and the follow up phone call increased the response rate. This year our experience was similar and the response rate increased following the phone calls.

Surveys were submitted by 26 institutions (25 public; 1 private), representing all of the eight universities, 15 of the 19 ITPs, two of the three wānanga, and one private provider. This constituted an initial institutional response rate of 81% (slightly lower than the 84% response rate in 2008).

While not all respondents answered every question, responses were sufficient for the data to be usable and were included in the analysis, with one exception. One private provider contacted us after beginning the survey to explain that they could not

answer many questions as their institution's structure was very different from that of public institutions; the partial responses in that survey were unusable and those data have been excluded. The final usable response rate represented 78% of institutions (compared to the 81% usable response rate in 2008) approached.

Some limitations of the data need to be borne in mind:

- Although Telford Rural Polytechnic and Lincoln University are now one institution, for the purposes of this project Telford has been treated as a separate institution as the two partners are very different in structure and student composition.
- While all universities were represented, only one of the three autonomous Learning Centres at one university responded. This has not influenced data related to the institution as a whole – for example, contract types – but has meant some absolute numbers (for example, numbers of TLAs) may be under-reported.
- Some of the results related to wānanga need to be interpreted cautiously because of small numbers (two wānanga responded). For questions that were completed by only one wānanga, the data have been used in analysis of institutions overall, but we have not included a separate wānanga sector analysis.

Respondents

The background of respondents (i.e., those completing the survey on behalf of their institution) differed from that in 2008. Five years ago, we commented that some respondents were not TLAs (but, for example, overall managers of student services) and appeared not to have the depth of knowledge of some issues that we had assumed. This was even more pronounced in the current survey. In 2013, only 60% of respondents were ATLAANZ members (84% in 2008) and 68% had TLA experience (90% in 2008). This might reflect the considerable restructuring that has occurred in the past five years. Alternatively, it may simply be the result of a change in our method of seeking respondents: in 2008, if we did not already know the manager of the Centre, we asked ATLAANZ members at that institution to recommend whom to approach, while in 2013 we formally approached the institution.

Regardless of the reason for the change in respondent background, respondents in 2013 are likely to be more removed from day-to-day TLA activity than they were in 2008. While this will not affect objective data, it may influence some of the data which required a subjective response (for example, the influence of TLAs on teaching and learning, or the change in morale).

Nevertheless, the survey data represent the status and working conditions of a high proportion of ATLAANZ members: in September 2013, 25 public tertiary institutions employed ATLAANZ members and 23 of those institutions responded to the survey.

Results and discussion

In this section, we present briefly the interim findings, including some analysis we were unable to report on at the 2013 ATLAANZ conference, and feedback we received from colleagues during the conference.

TLA professional status

1.0 Contractual arrangements

1.1 Tenure and full time employment

Overall, 79% of TLAs were employed in tenured (continuing) positions: 72% of those in ITPs; 80% in universities, and 95% in wānanga were tenured/continuing. This is similar to the rate found in 2008.

Approximately 57% of TLAs were employed full time in that role, with a difference apparent amongst the sectors: 42% of TLAs in ITPs were full time, 57% in universities, and 100% in wānanga. In 2008, there was insufficient complete data to calculate accurately full time proportions, but at that time full timers appeared to be in a minority. Given that Hoffman (2002) found only 33% of TLAs were full time, it seems there has been a move towards greater employment of TLAs in full time positions.

1.2 Contract type

The type of contract currently offered to TLAs varied between ITPs and universities: a greater proportion of ITPs than universities employed TLAs on academic contracts, and a higher proportion of universities contained units with TLAs employed on a mix of academic and general contracts (Figure 1).

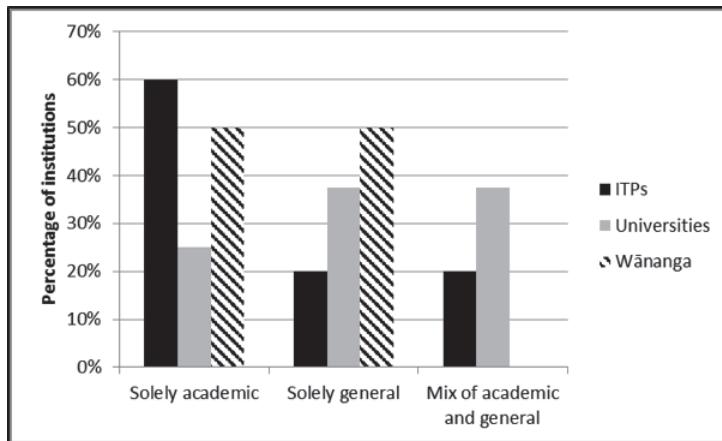


Figure 1. Contract type: 2013

Overall, in both ITPs and universities, the proportion of institutions employing TLAs solely on academic contracts has declined since 2008 and the proportion with TLAs on a mix of contracts increased (see Figure 2). In one institution, the difference reflected union and non-union membership, but mostly the change seems to reflect the increase in merged units within institutions over the past five years. Some respondents noted that the mix of contracts was a result of the amalgamation of Learning Centres with other similar student-focused units, such as libraries, in which staff were traditionally employed on general contracts; others noted that some TLAs' roles now included a mix of teaching and pastoral roles and their contracts had been changed accordingly. Mostly, the different contract types were being accommodated within these new structures, although one respondent noted that, following the merger of the Learning Centre and library, TLAs would no longer be offered academic contracts.

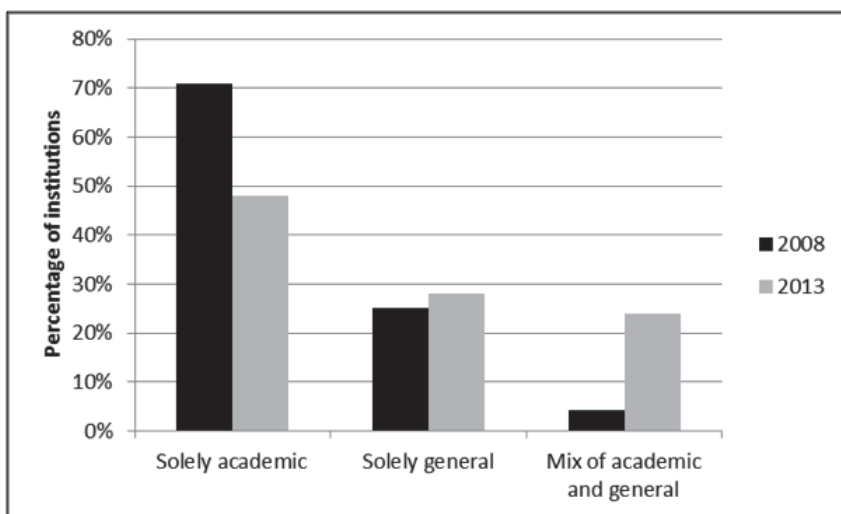


Figure 2. Contract type: 2008 and 2013

The majority of those institutions employing TLAs on general contracts provided a separate scale for TLAs (distinct from the administrator and librarian scales, for example). For those employing TLAs on academic contracts, the situation was less clear: while the majority of ITPs reported they employed TLAs on the same collective contract as teaching colleagues in the faculties or departments, it was not clear how many offered different conditions to TLAs. We propose looking at collective agreements in more depth to clarify this.

As in 2008, the issue of contract type was contentious and there was a range of opinions on whether one contract type is preferable or even whether the distinction

is relevant. Some, for instance, believed TLAs are less likely to be rewarded if they are on the academic scale because some of the criteria for promotion may not apply to TLA roles and expertise; others held the view that TLAs should be carrying out the full range of professional tasks required of their faculty (or department) colleagues

1.3 Remuneration

After the results of the 2008 survey were published, ATLAANZ members indicated they would like questions regarding salary to be included in any subsequent survey. Figure 3 outlines the salary ranges for the institutions that provided data in 2013, and notes the type of contract provided by each institution.

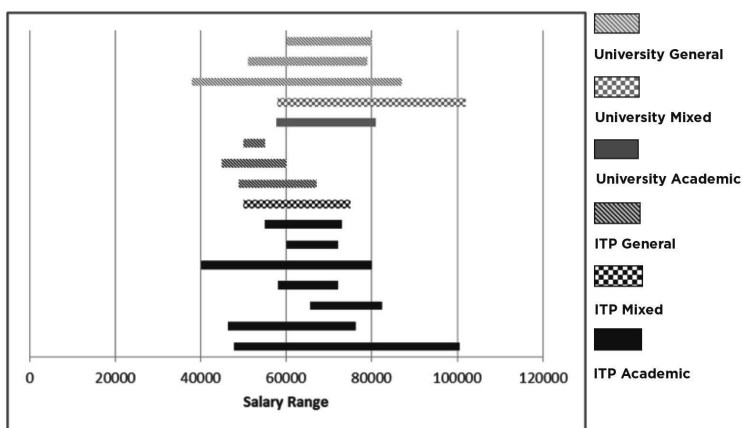


Figure 3. Ranges of salary scale at 15 institutions: 2013

It should be noted that the data gathered was limited: only 15 of the 25 institutions responded to this question, and few provided both types requested (range and midpoint). More importantly, information about salary scales and ranges is of limited value in assessing what individual TLAs are actually paid. Several respondents noted that no TLAs were paid at the highest level of the scale. On the other hand, one respondent noted that there was provision for bonus payments for those staff who consistently perform at a high level, so in some institutions the contract scales may under-represent actual pay. Because this survey was conducted at the institutional level, we were unable to ask about individual levels of pay, but we propose carrying out a survey of individual TLAs to explore in more detail salary, and its links to qualifications and experience, contract type and professional role.

2.0 Qualifications and experience

We gathered data from respondents on the level and breadth of qualifications of individual TLAs employed in each institution. Overall, qualifications were higher

in the universities than in ITPs (Figure 4).³ Teaching qualifications were common in all sectors (65% of all TLAs), with a particularly high rate amongst those employed in ITPs: 85% of TLAs in the ITPs surveyed had a teaching qualification (56% in universities, 40% in wānanga). We also found that 25% of TLAs were currently completing further qualifications, with a particularly high proportion (almost 50%) of TLAs employed by wānanga completing further qualifications.

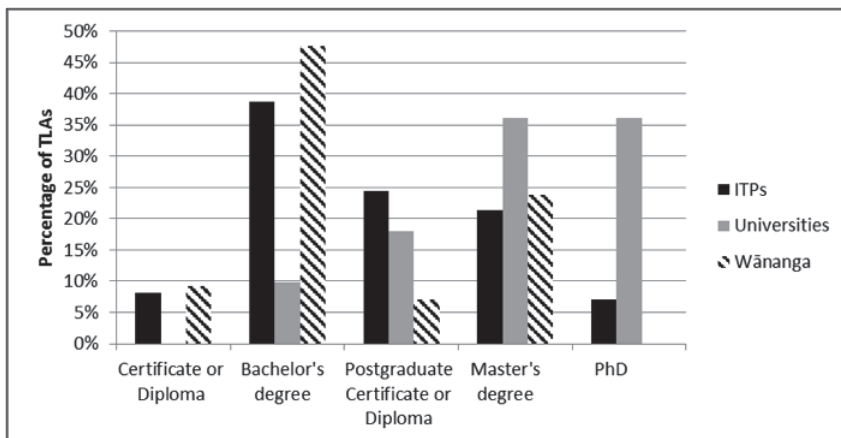


Figure 4. Highest TLA qualifications: 2013

The proportion of TLAs with Masters and PhD qualifications had increased since 2008 (Figure 5), particularly in the ITP sector. In 2008, 34% of TLAs employed in ITPs had a postgraduate qualification; in 2013 that had risen to 53%. Over the same period, there was little change in the proportion of university-employed TLAs with postgraduate qualifications (approximately 90% in both years). The greatest increase in qualifications in the university sector occurred prior to 2008 – in 2002, Hoffman reported 24% of TLAs in universities had “Masters and above”.

³ NB. Only 7 of the 8 universities supplied data on TLAs’ actual qualifications, but all universities responded to the question about minimum qualifications when employing new TLAs.

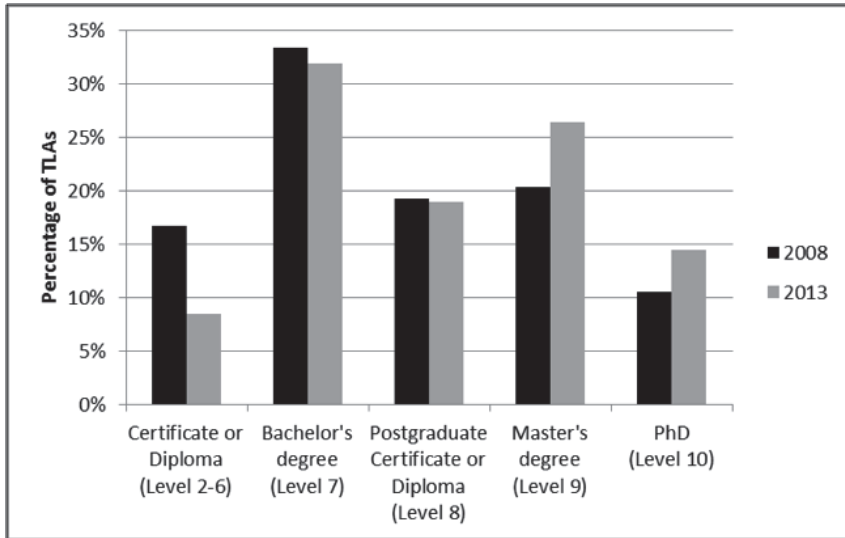


Figure 5. Highest TLA qualification: 2008 and 2013

We were also interested in institutions' requirements regarding qualifications and experience when employing new TLAs. In the university sector, all but one institution stated that a postgraduate qualification was a minimum requirement, so it is not surprising that 90% of TLAs covered by the survey had postgraduate qualifications. Both wānanga also required a completed or in-progress postgraduate qualification. In the ITP sector, though, actual qualifications were well in advance of the minimum expected: only one ITP (8%) expected TLAs to have a postgraduate qualification (or be working towards one), yet 53% of TLAs actually had that qualification. This may be a result of a particularly competitive employment market, institutions' unwillingness to pay for higher qualifications, a reflection of the lower overall qualification level of faculty tutors in ITPs, or simply that institutions are failing to recognise the professional expectations of the TLA role.

A similar disparity was obvious across the sectors regarding teaching qualifications. Only 20% of ITPs (25% of universities) required a teaching qualification but 85% of TLAs employed by ITPs (56% in universities) had such a qualification. Many institutions reported that teaching experience was an alternative to a teaching qualification (50% of ITPs and 80% universities expected a teaching qualification and/or teaching experience), but in this survey we did not ask about the proportion of TLAs who had prior teaching experience; that is an issue that we propose exploring in a survey of individual TLAs.

3.0 Research activity

In 80% of institutions, some or all TLAs were research active (Figure 6), an increase since 2008 when 55% reported that TLAs in their institution were research active. Being research active, however, was a requirement at only 28% of institutions and only 24% provided time allowance for research.

Research involvement was mostly focused on teaching and learning, although six of the universities reported that some TLAs were also involved in research in other areas. Several respondents commented on the importance of TLAs being involved in research, noting its value in ensuring evidence-based practice and enhancing credibility with faculty colleagues.

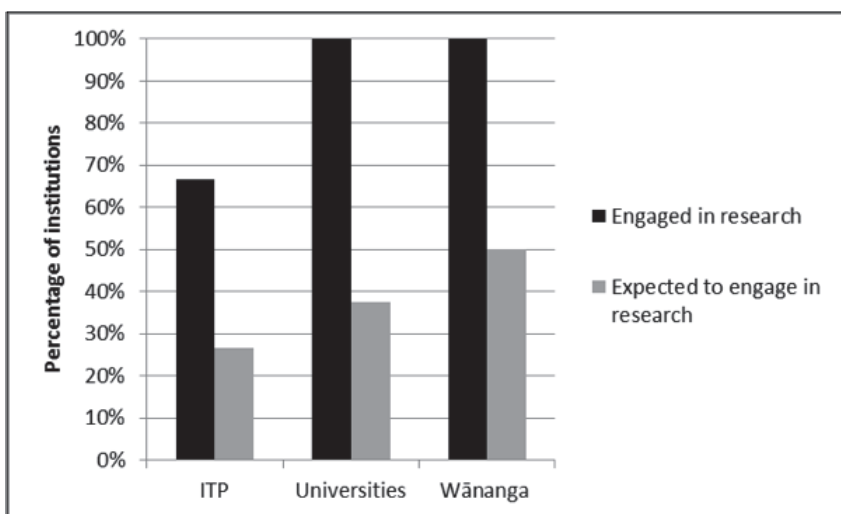


Figure 6. Research activity: 2013

TLA Place in Institutional Structure

1.0 Physical location and structural alignment

While several institutions reported a change in physical location since 2008, there had been little change since 2008 in the overall pattern of location. “Libraries” (48%), and “Hubs” or “Commons” (20%), were the most common locations. This physical location, however, did not necessarily indicate structural alignment: while 48% of Centres were housed in libraries, for example, fewer than 30% were structurally aligned with the library team (see Figure 7).

There had been considerable change in structural alignment since 2008, perhaps even greater than that apparent in Figure 7. Eight ITPs, five universities and one wānanga

reported being (or soon to be) amalgamated with other services within their institution in the last five years. The single most common element in these mergers appears to be alignment with the library. This change in itself is worthy of further research as anecdotal evidence suggests there are a number of particular challenges common in these mergers.

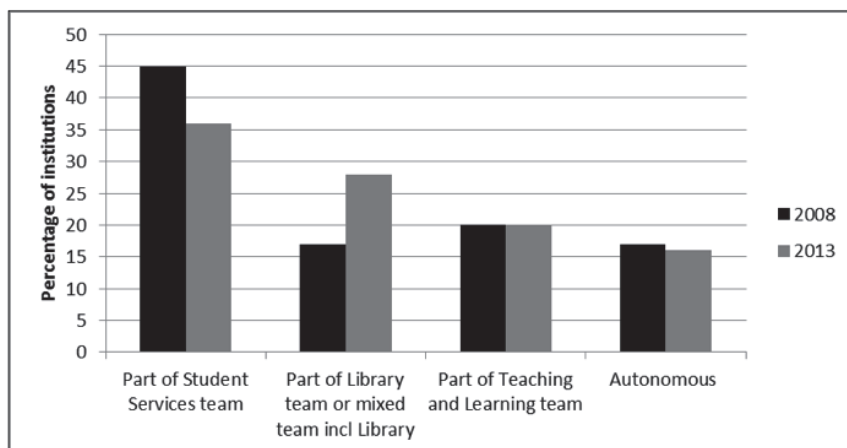


Figure 7. Research activity: 2013

We were interested also in the reporting lines of Centres, but because a wide range of terminology was used to describe reporting lines, these data need further analysis to clarify this aspect of structural alignment.

2.0 TLAs' influence within their institutions

We explored the type and extent of TLAs' influence within their institutions by gathering data on membership of institutional committees and working groups, and involvement in staff development. As well, we invited respondents to comment on the extent to which TLAs were able to influence institutional policy and practice, and teaching and learning.

In 18 of the 25 institutions (75%), TLAs were members of institutional committees (71% of ITPs, 88% of universities, 50% of wānanga). This is an increase since 2008, when 58% of institutions reported committee involvement. Respondents' comments indicate that TLAs were generally full members of the committee and that the committees covered a wide range of issues, including academic issues, research, pastoral support, and institutional concerns such as health and safety. In many institutional responses, though, it was not clear whether committee membership extended to several TLAs in a Centre or was largely limited to the manager; this is an area that would be worth exploring further.

In 19 institutions, some or all TLAs were involved in staff development (87% of ITPs, 75% of universities, 50% of wānanga), a similar rate to that reported in 2008.

Sixteen of the 25 institutions (12 ITPs, 3 universities, and 1 wānanga) reported that TLAs had an influence on improving teaching and learning in their institution; only one institution specifically said they had no influence on teaching and learning. Interestingly, we were reminded at the 2013 conference that several TLAs have been nominated for Teaching Excellence awards at their institutions, but no survey participants included this in their responses.

We have yet to fully analyse the qualitative data, but three themes are emerging regarding the influence and strategic role of TLAs within the institution:

- Input into the development/quality control of teaching and learning, including the promotion of capability building/ educative models;
- influence on policy; and
- a focus on “collaboration” with faculty colleagues, rather than “support”, when involved in direct teaching input through contextualised programmes.

TLA Services for Students

1.0 Types and modes of services

There had been little change since 2008 in the types of programmes and services provided for students by TLAs (Figure 8). The exception was ICT programmes, which were provided by 55% of institutions but only 30% in 2008.

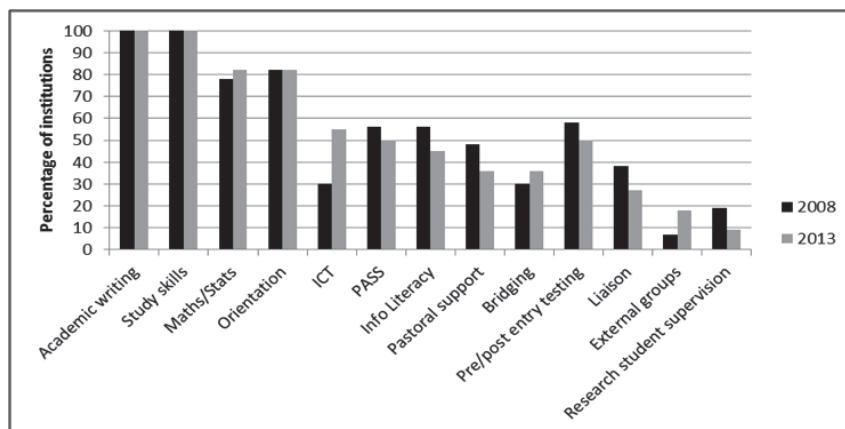


Figure 8. Services provided by Learning Centres: 2008 & 2013

While institutions still delivered programmes through a wide range of modes, there had been some change in emphasis (Figure 9): the number of Centres providing courses had declined (54% to approximately 30%), and the number providing embedded (integrated) workshops increased (77% to 95%). Unsurprisingly, the number providing on-line study material had also increased (70% to 96%).

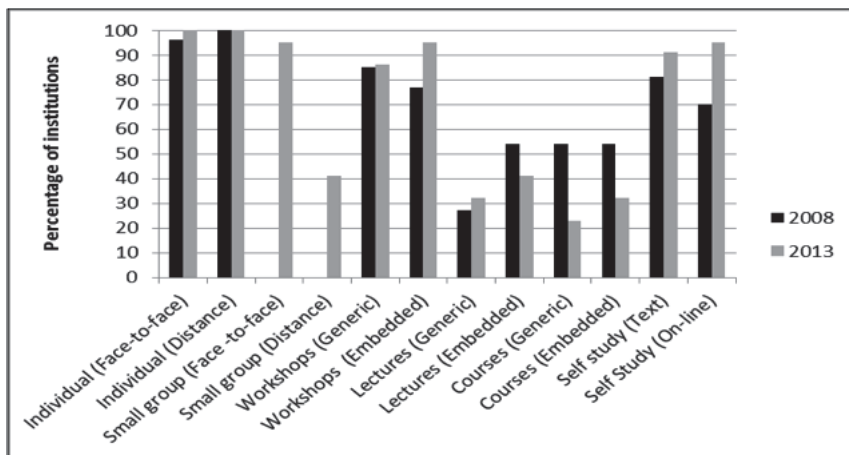


Figure 9. Modes of delivery: 2008 & 2013

Opening hours were virtually unchanged since 2008: only 10% - 20% of Centres (all ITPs) were routinely open outside “normal” week day hours, although several institutions noted that they offered evening and weekend classes on request.

2.0 Student user demographics

We included questions about the numbers and demographic profiles of students in the institution as a whole and of those using the Learning Centre to identify global measures of who uses Learning Centres and explore possible sector differences. Few respondents provided that data: only 30% (20%) provided some (all) of the demographic data sought about the students using the Learning Centre, the same level of response as in 2008.

Changes since 2008

We are still analysing the changes reported by respondents, but the three most common themes were:

- Institutional re-structuring;
- the increased need for “efficiency” in providing services; and
- changes in service delivery, with an increased emphasis on on-line delivery and embedded teaching of academic skills.

Finally, we sought respondents' views on morale compared to 2008. There was no clear trend in participants' responses (Figure 10). This is a finding that needs to be interpreted cautiously given that those responding were likely to be more removed from day-to-day TLA activity than they were in 2008. We propose exploring this further in a survey of individual TLAs.

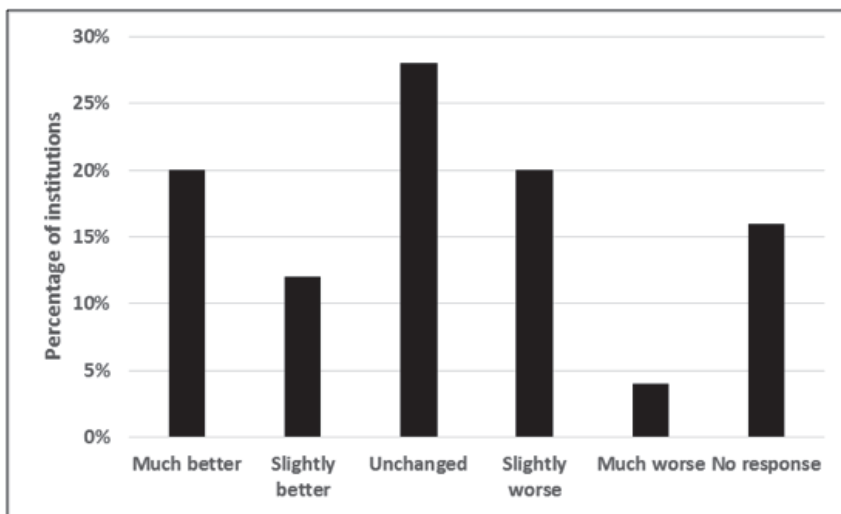


Figure 10. Morale compared to 2008

Conclusions

The aim of this project was to provide a “snapshot” of Learning Centres to inform future research into effective practice and provide professional support for TLAs. In particular, we were interested in examining the services TLAs provide for students, the professional status of TLAs and their place within institutional structures, and the significant changes that have occurred in these areas since 2008.

There is still further analysis to be completed, including an examination of staffing levels amongst institutions (i.e., TLA to student ratio), clarification of some of the institutional alignment characteristics, and a more in-depth analysis of the qualitative data relating to TLA influence and recent change. The first stage of the data analysis, however, has provided valuable empirical evidence on the provision of learning development in New Zealand institutions.

While there have been many changes since the first full scale survey of Learning Centres in tertiary institutions in New Zealand was carried out in 2008, the range of programmes Learning Centres provide for students has remained largely unchanged, the exception being the wider provision of ICT programmes than in 2008. More

change is apparent in the pattern of delivery, with an increased number of institutions reporting they offer embedded programmes and on-line delivery. This updated baseline data on Learning Centre services for students will allow TLAs (and institutions) to benchmark themselves against others.

The information on services has limitations, however, as the data are largely limited to the range of programmes and modes. While several institutions reported an increased emphasis on embedding and on-line delivery, for instance, it was not possible to identify the proportion of time allocated to various programme modes. It would be useful to have access to more detailed data on programmes, particularly given the often expressed concern that individual work with students is under threat. Similar limitations apply to the data on student usage. We were unable to draw any conclusions about the demographic profile of students using Learning Centres as so few respondents provided that data. Learning Centres do collect detailed information, but its nature varies so greatly that little meaningful comparison can be made. In a variety of fora over the past five years, there has been strong support for the notion that all Centres maintain a common set of detailed programme and usage data, but no progress has been made towards that goal. ATLAANZ may wish to take a lead in defining a set of core data that Centres could share, but it is important to acknowledge that institutions vary in their compliance requirements and many Centres may not have the resources to collect data over and above those required by their institution.

Other changes that have occurred in the last five years have implications for TLA identity and status, issues which loom large in the relatively new profession of tertiary learning advising. In a high proportion of institutions, Learning Centres have been merged with other services and there appear to be fewer Centre managers with learning advising experience. At the same time, Learning Centres have been subject to funding constraints (reflecting the financial pressures on tertiary institutions as a whole), with a resulting drive for “efficiencies”. These changes reinforce the need for TLAs to be able to clearly articulate their role, how their skills might differ from – and complement – the role of colleagues in newly merged groups, and the particular value TLAs provide to their institution.

As this study shows, Learning Advisors are highly skilled professionals and, arguably, there has been an increase in the level of professionalism since 2008. The proportion of full time Learning Advisors has increased in the past five years. More TLAs now hold a postgraduate qualification, and/or a teaching qualification, and a sizable proportion are enrolled in further qualifications. In 2008, when we reported our results to the annual ATLAANZ conference, there was considerable unease about publishing data on qualifications. No such unease was apparent in 2013, perhaps in itself a sign of growing professional confidence, or a reflection of the finding that actual qualifications were, in many cases, well above the minimum the institution expected.

Significantly, there has been a marked increase in the number of institutions reporting that their Learning Advisors are involved in research. This is particularly encouraging

given the need to be research-active has been a common theme in Learning Advisor fora over the past decade. There is also some evidence that TLAs might be “moving in from the margins” of their institutions and increasing in influence; they are more likely to be involved in institutional committees than they were five years ago, and managers were generally positive about the influence of the Learning Centre on improving teaching and learning in their institution. This may be linked to the finding that there is a far greater emphasis on embedded programmes than five years ago.

Taken together, these findings depict a group of highly qualified staff, active in research, and with influence on learning and teaching in their institution. The data, particularly that regarding research and institutional influence, provide a different perspective to the common perception in the literature that TLAs have a low status in their institutions. However, this is but one perspective. The increase in research activity, for instance, needs to be tempered by the fact that only a third of the institutions in which TLAs were research-active reported they provided a time allowance for research. Questions have also been raised about whether managers’ views of institutional influence match those of TLAs. Further, it is not clear whether salaries and contracts appropriately reflect the level of TLA professional skill and responsibility. In short, to what extent is this profile of a group of highly skilled professionals recognised by institutions?

We suggest this is explored further with individual Learning Advisors. Surveys at the Learning Centre level can provide only limited information about qualifications and experience, and their links to salary, conditions, and professional role; to delve deeper, we need to gather data from individual TLAs. Similarly, seeking individual TLA views on their status and influence within the institution (as Strauss, 2013, has done with TLAs working with postgraduate students) would provide more fine-grain information and may also clarify whether there are differences between practitioners’ and managers’ views. We propose to begin this follow-up research in 2014.

The focus of this project was to explore the current learning advising environment and the changes that have occurred since the first full-scale survey of Learning Centres in 2008. Robust information on institutional structures, staffing and services in Tertiary Learning Centres assists TLAs (and institutions) to benchmark themselves and informs research into effective practice. A comprehensive description of the TLA role, including the qualifications and skills that underpin it, also provides professional support for TLAs and is an essential precursor to any future accreditation of the role. While there is still further data analysis to be completed, the preliminary analysis has provided empirical evidence to support those objectives.

It is important that professional organisations maintain long-term data on professional practice. This survey, and that in 2008, has begun the establishment of such a database and we hope that similar surveys will be administered every three to five years to track our progress as a profession.

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