



Tertiary e-Learning reference Group Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry

Executive Summary

This submission has been prepared by non-government agency members of the Tertiary e-Learning Reference Group, an expert advisory group on digital learning jointly hosted by Ako Aotearoa and the Ministry of Education.

Technology is driving rapid change in both the way tertiary education is framed and the shape of society as a whole. There are both significant opportunities and risks for New Zealand's tertiary sector as it prepares for a sustainable, inclusive and effective medium term future.

Key enablers will be (1) strong strategic planning at both institutional and system levels and (2) implementation that is cognisant of both staff capability within the sector and diverse student preferences for the way they learn.

This submission highlights some good practice examples of capability building and the implementation of e-learning, both in New Zealand and overseas. It is argued that without building policy development capability in the sector, initiatives will continue to be fragmented, largely reactive and of questionable sustainability.

Introduction

The TeLRG

The Tertiary e-Learning Reference Group (TeLRG) was first established in 2005 by the Ministry of Education to support the action areas in the 2004 Interim Tertiary e-Learning Framework. The group was re-launched in 2010 to ensure a more focused approach: its main purpose is to be an expert group that provides advice on tertiary e-learning to its co-sponsors the Ministry of Education and Ako Aotearoa.

The group's objectives are:

1. To assess the current state of tertiary e-learning.
2. To assist with the development of New Zealand's future tertiary e-learning priorities.
3. To provide advice for central agencies/organisations and the sector on relevant work programmes/initiatives.

4. To provide advice on current and potential funding streams to support e-learning.
5. To assist agencies and the sector to take a coordinated approach to priority projects and where appropriate, co-develop these with the relevant parties.

The TeLRG is first and foremost an expert advisory group. Membership consists of people who have been nominated by e-learning or other appropriate professional associations and peak bodies, including HERDSA, DEANZ, ASCILITE, ACODE, ITENZ, the ITF and from Ako Aotearoa's Māori and Pacific Peoples' Caucuses.

Contributing members to this submission are listed in Appendix A. It should be noted that government agency members of the group (from MoE and NZQA) did not contribute to this submission.

Context of the submission

The TeLRG met with Professor Sally Davenport (Commissioner), Judy Kavanagh and Amy Russell (Commission secretariat) on 6 April and had a wide ranging and constructive discussion. The Commission were enthusiastic about TeLRG making a submission to them, commenting that they were looking for specific examples of successful approaches that might be scaled up across the sector. Accordingly, this submission focusses on highlighting examples of good practice.

General observations (taken from recent TeLRG discussions)

The need for well-informed strategic planning and building capability

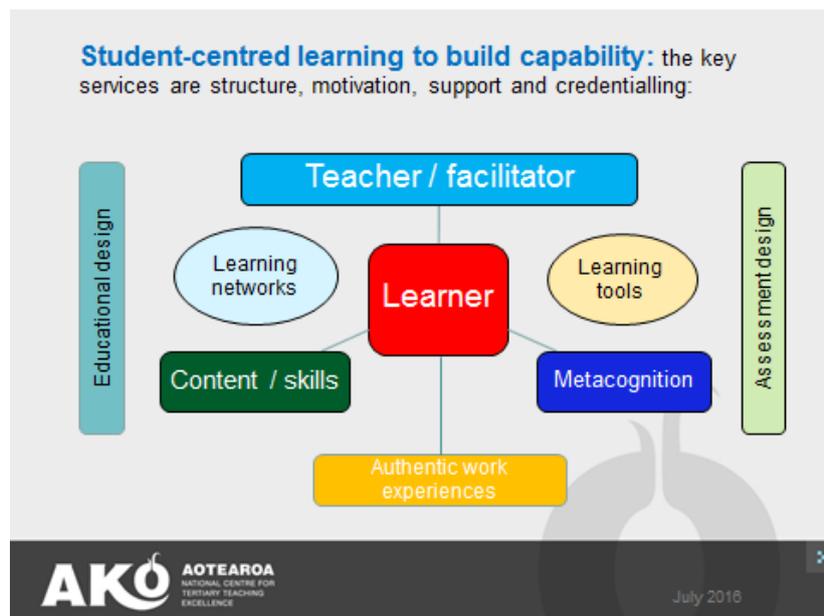
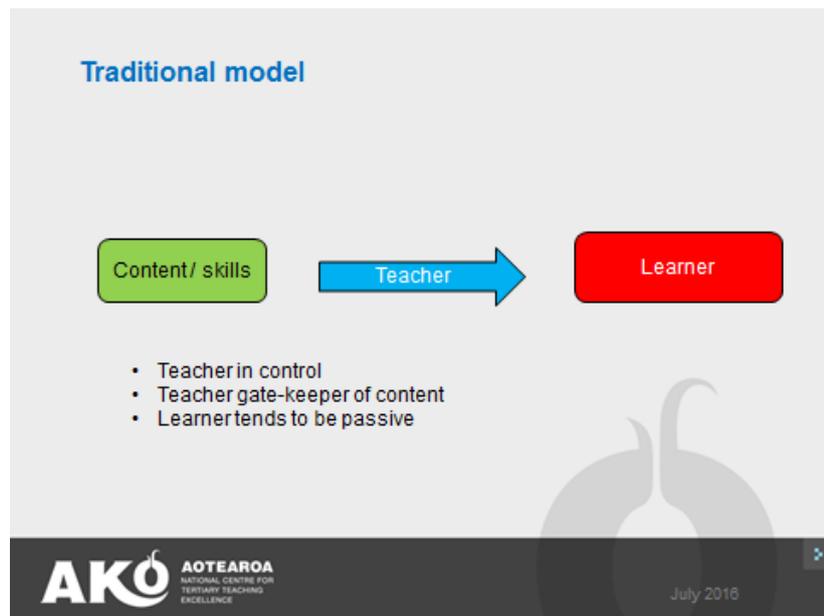
E-learning is difficult to define, but it is now generally accepted that most tertiary courses have (or are considering) a digital component. E-learning experiences may form the basis of extramural study or, increasingly, supplement on-site study. They afford opportunities for students to study more flexibly, and, by making content readily accessible, provide opportunities for changing the model of on-site study. On-site sessions can then be used to focus much more on the exploration of ideas and understanding rather than transmission of content. Digital platforms also provide opportunities to create communities of learning (see Figure 1).

Many tertiary education organisations (TEOs) are less strategic about the purchase, maintenance and implementation of learning management systems than they are about the purchase of administrative software. The most recent e-learning Maturity Model benchmarking exercise (Marshall, 2012) revealed an absence of strategic thinking in the university or ITP sectors. However, it may be timely to update this exercise, as recent advances in technology such as MOOCs have significantly raised senior managers' awareness of e-learning related issues.

Assumptions that the implementation of quality digital learning has the potential to save money are usually unfounded, unless considerable economies of scale can be achieved. On the other hand, some international MOOCs leading to formal qualifications may become serious competitive threats to local provision. Others may be usefully harnessed as

supplementary learning resources, while high quality MOOCs developed by New Zealand institutions have the potential to profile New Zealand as an international education provider.

Figure 1: Digital technologies have the potential to reframe teaching and learning from a traditional model, in which the teacher acts as the deliverer and gate-keeper of content, to one in which the teacher becomes a facilitator, co-ordinator and supporter of diverse learning activities specific to the needs of each learner (presentation by Peter Coolbear to the Higher Education Summit, Wellington, July 2016)



Student centred approaches are critical, but staff engagement with technology is equally important. Teachers often lack the skills and time to effectively integrate technology into their practice.

The language used in policy making and within institutions themselves often tends to position education as a neatly packaged product. This significantly underestimates how complex teaching is. In general, many teachers are able to articulate good practice, but often lack the capability or resources to implement it. In this context, while digital technologies may be an additional set of tools available to teachers, they do not of themselves facilitate change. Continuing professional development is critical in bridging these gaps between theory and practice (e.g. see Jeffrey *et al.*, 2012).

Apart from understanding staff capabilities and preferences, it is critical that TEOs also understand learners' capabilities and preferences. There is a belief that younger students are more 'tech-savvy' and therefore require an e-learning experience. However, there is significant evidence to challenge this view. Many educationally disadvantaged learners may not have good access to technology. Furthermore, being tech-savvy in a social context does not necessarily translate into being equipped for, or even preferring, an e-learning experience.

Despite the significant challenges in an e-learning context, there are also many opportunities. These opportunities are more likely to be realised if better use were made of key resources such as '*Taking the Lead*' (Higgins *et al.*, 2008), the '*e-learning Maturity Model*' (Marshall, 2012) and the '*e-Learning Guidelines*' (Coolbear *et al.*, 2014).

No government has had unqualified success in tertiary e-learning efforts despite differing levels of intervention and numbers of associated initiatives. An overarching vision and strategy would be useful, but only if it supported a diversity of approaches that reflects the current complexity and competing priorities.

Enablers and barriers

TeLRG members have identified the following as key enablers or barriers to the effective implementation of high quality e-learning:

Enablers	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overarching vision and strategy, ideally at both system and organizational levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of clear strategy and implementation based on untested assumptions (such as potential for cost savings, student preferences, <i>etc.</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Longer-term planning horizons allow for sustainable change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short-term initiatives that do not plan for sustainable change

Continued over/

Enablers	Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning includes staff capability building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No resourcing to build staff capability
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of co-ordination across the system, resulting in fragmented initiatives and lack of dissemination of good practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accreditation and quality agencies have a clear and realistic understanding of what constitutes quality e-learning provision in different contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of attention by QA and accreditation agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better cross-crediting initiatives allow better opportunities for learners to gain credit from a variety of on-line providers 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear policy settings to support opportunities provided by e-learning for life-long learning 	

Current examples of good practice

The following are examples of the implementation of e-learning that the TeLRG regard as interesting examples of good practice worth wider consideration. The TeLRG member contributing each example is identified in brackets and may be contacted directly (see contributors list, Appendix A). Other examples of recent work in New Zealand are reviewed in Marshall and Shepherd (2016).

Building capability

1. The FLLinNZ Programme [MN]

The eCDF (eLearning Collaborative Development Fund) from the Tertiary Education Commission initiated and funded a range of e-learning projects, of which the Flexible Learning Leaders in New Zealand (FLLinNZ) was one. This project was managed by the University of Waikato, and invited proposals from educators and developers in tertiary institutions to explore an area of interest.

There were three years of funding provided to FLLinNZ:

- 2004 provided 15 leaders with a research budget of \$20,000 each, with which they would travel and pursue a specific research project
- 2005 provided another 15 leaders with a reduced budget (\$12,000) each for a similar purpose

- 2006 allocated a much reduced fund that did not support any individual FLLinNZ member, but allowed for some ongoing support and administration of project completions and gathering and compiling reports

The FLLinNZ initiative provided a hugely valuable opportunity for 30 individuals to explore and grow their capability across a wide range of sectors and disciplines, many of whom have gone on to senior leadership positions in tertiary institutions and private consultancy. Ten years on from the completion of FLLinNZ, it might be very timely to reprise the concept and invest in more innovation, collaboration and international exposure and knowledge gathering. (Some FLLinNZ archive material is available at <http://archive.is/M4nmB>.)

2. *The CfLAT LATTE scheme at AUT.* [MN]

In 2010, AUT staff began ordering the latest mobile devices – iPads. The following year, the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CfLAT) contracted some capable undergraduate students to be available to work with individuals and groups of staff to help them understand the process of connecting and using these devices.

From these humble beginnings (iPad training) developed the LATTE scheme (Learning And Teaching Technology Enablers), which moved on to bigger and bolder things. The Centre recruited technologically capable and ambitious students from a range of courses to work on a range of digital projects. These students were paid an hourly rate, as contract staff, to work in teams with academic staff on projects that included app development, graphic design, video production and support, *etc.*

Over the next four years a significant group of students were given experiences and skills that prepared them well for their prospects following graduation. This was very much a win-win situation, as AUT got lower-cost resources, innovation and creativity, while the students gained experiences and entries for their curricula vitae that in some cases led to very valuable opportunities after university.

3. *LTDF – a project approach to professional development at AUT* [MN]

A change in the Directorship and therefore direction of the Centre for Learning and Teaching also brought a change in the way that academic staff and teaching teams are supported. AUT no longer scheduled series of workshops (which were becoming increasingly poorly attended), but offered a fund, the Learning and Teaching Development Fund (LTDF) accompanied by making staff resources and expertise available to supporting developmental projects.

Staff were invited to consult with CfLAT staff to develop proposals for support as part of the LTDF round. These proposals required support from Heads of Schools / Departments, largely to ensure that these Heads were aware of the plans and desires of their own staff. Actual dollars were very limited, and in general the intention was to fund small amounts of time release, but was also available for the purchase of such things as

mobile devices. All members of CfLAT staff (whether academic advisors, LMS support, media specialists, *etc.*) were encouraged to be involved with multiple projects as appropriate.

At the end of each year each project was required to report, and these reports were collated into large posters for display at a University event to celebrate achievements across a wide range of disciplines, technologies and pedagogies. The posters were also collated into A3 portfolios that were subsequently used as examples of professional development for our university academic audit.

Project numbers grew over three years to the point where the centre was inundated with work: 25 projects in 2012, 34 in 2013, 43 in 2014 and deliberately limited to 27 in 2015.

4. *e-learning community coordinators at Unitec* [KP]

In 2009, Unitec implemented an initiative called *e-learning community coordinators* for each department based on the notion of technology stewards. The coordinators were teachers rather than centralised advisors and they received a week of intensive professional development with Etienne Wenger and Bev Traynor before taking on their roles. The institution supported the initiative by funding time allowance for all the teachers in this role. In addition to driving capability development in each department, the role allowed staff from different departments to strengthen collaboration across Unitec and this encouraged more opportunities to share best practice.

During this time, significant progress occurred in many departments, particularly where the funded time allowance was actively supported by the Head of Department.

Some of the highlights included:

- Regular, well-attended mini symposia to share some of the new initiatives and collectively address challenges.
- Central assistance to support on-going development of key initiatives within the departments.
- Support for staff to be creative and implement new initiatives.
- Intensive capability development of staff in targeted departments.

5. *The Mind Lab at Unitec* [KP]

The Mind Lab (by Unitec) was introduced in 2014 and offers a postgraduate certificate in applied practice (digital and collaborative learning). This is largely based on innovative and modern methods of teaching and learning. The programme is facilitated off-campus and the participants are from all education sectors, from primary to tertiary level. Mind Lab provides access to leading experts in technology and educational innovation as part of the study programme.

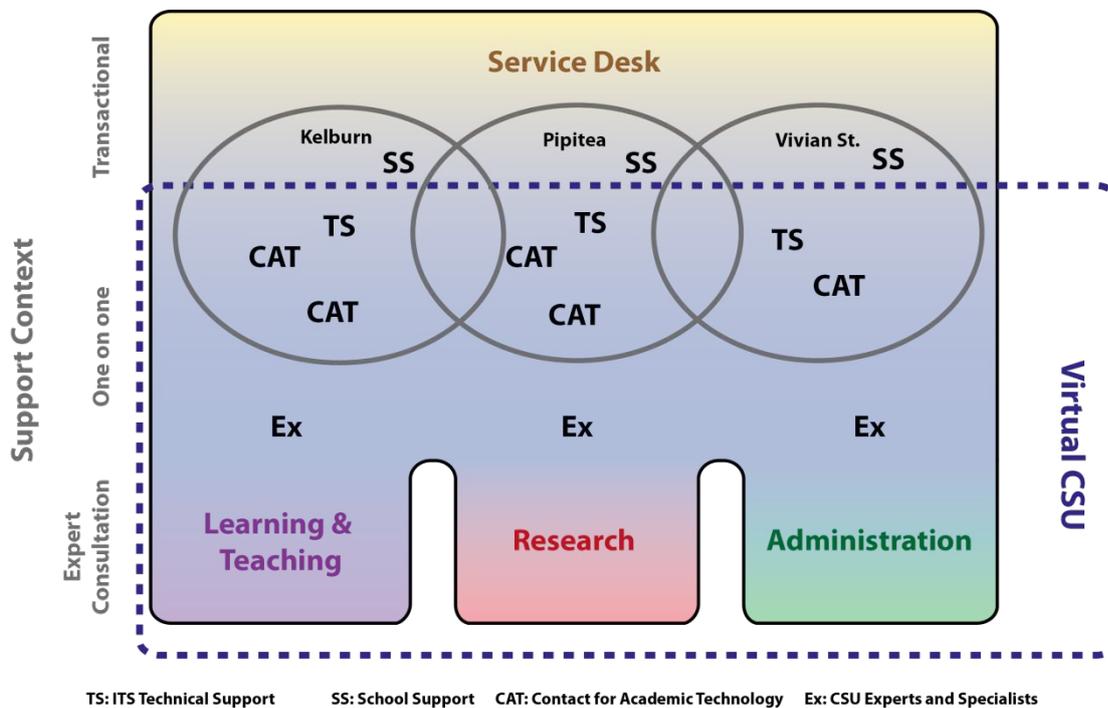
Many of the assessments are based on innovative projects that participants integrate into classroom lesson, targeting areas that could be improved. While undertaking the programme, TeLRG member Kumar Pati personally introduced gamification and new

forms of Augmented Reality into building and construction class rooms and worksite environments that continue to be used today.

6. *The virtual CSU as a model for organisational support and improvement [SM]*

The virtual Central Support Unit (CSU) is a model of organisational development and support created by Victoria University of Wellington in response to strategic drivers for change in the way Victoria engaged in administration, teaching and research (Figure 2). A collaborative approach encompassing professional support staff based in several different CSUs working on strategic and operational projects in virtual teams lies at the heart of this model.

Figure 2: The virtual CSU model at Victoria University Wellington



Driven by the Vision and Strategy for Digital Learning and Teaching at Victoria 2012 – 2017 goals for building staff capability, the Virtual CSU focuses on working across the organisation to develop cross-disciplinary skills, knowledge and opportunities. The support model is tiered and links transactional support, one-on-one support through to expert consultations, recognising the range of support contexts in a large organisation. One-on-one support is provided by a new role called the Contact for Academic Technology (CAT). This role was developed over four years, starting in 2012 with the employment of eight part-time CATs by the Centre for Academic Development. Over the last two years the CATs support model has transitioned from part time student roles to

embedded full time professional staff focused on increasing the digital capability of the University.

7. *New Zealand Tertiary College's (NZTC) commitment to positive commencement of technology enhanced learning and teaching starts with student and staff orientation [SF]*

To ensure all students (national and international – NZ-based and offshore) are well prepared for studying through *NZTC Online* prior to the first course in their program, they are required to undertake a non-credit bearing orientation course *A001 Learning with NZTC Online*. This course enables them to master basic IT competency skills and begin to establish their virtual presence by using the teaching and learning online tools in the *NZTC Online* learning environment. Students engage in “online orientation”, learning how to navigate the site, becoming noisy contributors in the forums, using personal and community building communication tools (eMessage, Discussions and Chat), and, since the course has a compulsory assessment task, submitting their work for assessment and retrieving their feedback on it. Over the years, NZTC has found these orientation activities essential to early, positive success. Thus it is critical at the commencement of their learning journey that students have the supported opportunity to explore, engage in the environment and practise required IT skills in a safe and supportive environment before their qualification based courses begin. *A001 Learning with NZTC Online* is designed to ensure first positive steps in their learning online and for them to realise from the very beginning that there is a community of learning and support awaiting them.

Likewise, during induction, all new NZTC team members engaged in student support, including academic staff, pastoral support and IT Help staff, are also required to complete this *A001 Learning with NZTC Online* so they are able to experience the student learning environment as a learner first. This makes a world of difference when it comes to these NZTC team members supporting students – they have walked the students' path, so can speak to support first-hand.

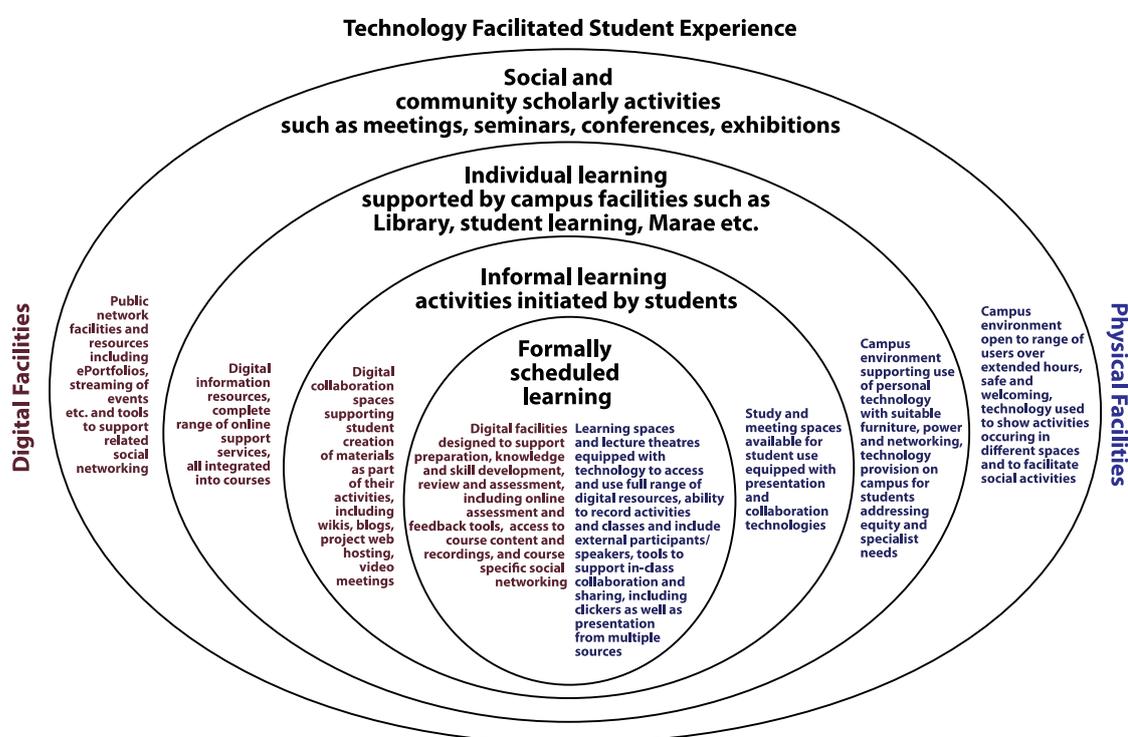
Following on from engaging in the *A001 Learning with NZTC Online* course new NZTC team members continue on to complete the NZTC course *A002 Teaching with NZTC Online*. Academic and student support team members learn to master *NZTC Online* from learning support, community building and teaching perspectives to support them in their roles. Although many teaching techniques transfer well into the online environment, the *A002* course provides resources which illustrate how to establish a welcoming online presence and the scaffolding techniques which underpin the building and enhancement of an interactive and effective learning community from physically separated learners. Such techniques are critical to learning and teaching relationships in this environment.

Examples of good practice in New Zealand

1. The Victoria University of Wellington Hub and Learning Space Model [SM]

The importance of space as an enabler of student engagement, motivation and learning outcomes is increasingly recognised. At Victoria, the Vision and Strategy for Digital Learning and Teaching specifically focuses on improving the way that various spaces improve the experience of learning (Figure 3).

Figure 3: The Victoria University of Wellington Hub and Learning Space Model



The figure shows ways that online technologies and physical technologies combine in different settings to provide a set of tools for staff and students to use formally and informally, individually and collaboratively to engage in effective learning experiences.

This model is reflected in the modern environments created at Victoria, such as the Kelburn Campus Hub (Figure 4), where a mix of formal and informal spaces blend together. From this central focus, students can easily transition to private study spaces, Library facilities, lecture theatres and other teaching spaces. New spaces such as the Gateway science and teaching building further expand upon and extend this model through the addition of a double-tiered lecture theatre that supports greater interaction than traditional designs.

Figure 4: The Kelburn Campus Hub at VUW



2. *Distance learning at the University of Otago [SS]*

Where distance learning is concerned, University of Otago (UO) is committed to small scale and high quality, making use of online and blended learning approaches and technologies. Unlike most institutions, the goal of UO distance learning is to focus specifically on postgraduate, professionally-oriented courses to support lifelong learning and relevance to professional practice in areas of particular institutional expertise.

The underlying philosophy of all courses is founded on distance education theories and principles with a focus on learning and learner experience rather than on any imperative to “move online”. “Online” and “e-Learning” are viewed as the mechanism or facilitator for creating engaging and meaningful learning environments. Examples of courses include Aviation Medicine, Master of Business Administration and Postgraduate Diploma in Ophthalmic Basic Sciences.

3. *Video linking of Victoria University of Wellington campuses with Zoom [SM]*

In 2016 Victoria University of Wellington established a small campus presence in the Auckland CBD in order to extend the reach of its programmes into New Zealand’s largest city. A number of graduate courses are being delivered to a distributed cohort of students with classes simultaneously occurring in Wellington and Auckland.

In this model, staff use a standard video-conferencing tool, Zoom.us, to link groups of students in two classes. The Zoom tool allows for multiple connections so staff can have classroom views for multiple sites (including individual students connecting online), shared views of tools and also control the experience using a tablet. Each site always

has an academic or tutor present, with the academic staff alternating between which of the two campuses they are physically present in.

The advantage of the resulting model is that staff can relatively easily transition to teaching in multiple sites and online without dramatic changes to their teaching approach or materials. Victoria is able to progressively expand the range of offerings in Auckland without having to invest in substantial facilities or appoint large numbers of new staff. This means that the strategic and operational risks of the new initiative can be carefully managed.

Video conferencing offers Victoria staff the opportunity to teach in multiple locations simultaneously. This simultaneous teaching helps to reduce costs, both financial, with less travel between locations, and time-related, by removing the need to duplicate the same lecture and by allowing the use of the same teaching materials and approaches as previous courses. In the future, this teaching model could be expanded to allow connection to more than one remote location, bringing the teaching to the students rather than the other way around. These tools and approaches can also allow resilient teaching, accommodating both small mishaps such as injuries and larger disasters such as earthquakes.

4. *e-Portfolio developments for students at AUT [MN]*

AUT was one of the very first institutions to use Mahara, the free and open source e-portfolio system developed as part of an eCFD funded project in 2005-06. As a first implementation, Mahara was used by the School of Education to showcase students' practicum placement experiences. Initial impressions were very mixed. However, as the tool itself matured, and also users' (both lecturers and students) understanding and familiarity with the purpose of an e-portfolio developed, it has now become widely utilised.

The e-portfolio is now a fundamental and essential part of the School of Education programme, and has been picked up as a learning and assessment tool for a number of other discipline areas, including Midwifery, Physiotherapy, Podiatry, Photography, Paramedicine, Event Management, Hospitality & Culinary Studies and Business Studies.

One of the clear expectations in the early days (in Education at least) was the desire to be able to use the e-portfolio following graduation. This required AUT to develop a process whereby students could continue to log in and access their e-portfolios after their university accounts were no longer valid. In a small number of cases, students have continued to make extensive use of their Mahara pages as professional portfolios or showcases, leading AUT to continue to support continued access. It seems to be an obvious continuing point of contact with the university for alumni purposes.

5. *Moodle to mark and manage assignments* [JM]

The Moodle learning management system has an assignment tool that has recently been enhanced with increased support for teachers when marking. These improvements include rubrics, marking guides, and functions to assist the marking and management of assignments. It took over ten years of research to develop these ideas on online marking and they have now been implemented into Moodle.

An essential element of the assignment tool design was the use of sound pedagogical approaches. This included having rubrics as the central part of the marking and ensuring that feedback was aligned to the rubric. Other factors were support for achieving marking consistency and reliability, and support for the teachers to reflect on their marking so they could improve the process. These pedagogical aspects were combined with efficient assignment marking techniques that save staff time on administration such as sorting students, downloading assignments, allocating markers, and identifying late submissions. This combination of pedagogy and practice helps staff provide well-targeted feedback that is fundamental to learning.

This research required a complex interaction with experienced academics, IT services, university management and funding over an extended period to develop a tool that makes a real difference to assessment and is now integrated into Moodle. Students throughout the world are now benefiting from these innovations.

This work was led by Associate Professor Eva Heinrich at Massey University and included a large number of researchers, software developers, educational technologists, teachers and students. The work was a collaboration between Massey University, UCOL, The Open Polytechnic of New Zealand, The University of Waikato, Victoria University of Wellington and The University of Otago.

Examples of international good practice

1. *The ACODE Benchmark Initiative* [SM]

The Australasian Council for Open Distance and E-Learning created the ACODE Benchmarks (http://Bit.Ly/ACODE_Benchmarks) as a tool to support collaborative benchmarking between universities wanting to improve their organisational systems for technology enhanced learning.

The purpose of benchmarking, and these benchmarks particularly, is to support continuous quality improvement in technology-enhanced learning. The approach reflects an enterprise perspective, integrating the key issue of pedagogy with institutional dimensions such as planning, staff and student development and infrastructure provision.

A key feature of the ACODE Benchmarking process is the facilitation of collaboration within and between institutions. The process starts with teams of staff drawn from a variety of roles across the university who collaborate in using the benchmarking tools to assess the current state. This is then confidentially shared as a part of a biannual workshop where many universities drawn from New Zealand, Australia, the Pacific and

elsewhere share their current states and challenges and gain insights into how to make ongoing improvements.

2. *Online Course Evaluation Guidelines - University of Wisconsin-La Crosse* [SS]

This Online Course Evaluation tool presents short but clear descriptors of key features of online courses for the use of course designers, teachers and reviewers. Alongside each feature descriptor is a purpose statement and examples and suggestions for inclusions in online courses. Part 2 of the guidelines is a checklist that can be used for reviewing and evaluating courses. UW-La Crosse uses the guidelines within a programme of long term professional development, course design and development. The guidelines also thus become useful as a quality enhancement/assurance mechanism.

The programme of staff development includes specialist one-to-one and group support and guidance in the review and development of new and current courses. The UW-La Crosse guidelines are informed by other well-founded similar guidelines such as the rubric accessible through Quality Matters. While designed specifically to suit the UW-La Crosse context, the Online Course Evaluation Guidelines are available for use under a Creative Commons License.

3. *Online Learning Model – Charles Sturt University* [SS]

An Online Learning Model (OLM) at Charles Sturt University provides a guide for online course development, design and implementation. Founded explicitly on work by Garrison & Anderson (2002) and Moore & Kearsley (2012) on distance education and online Communities of Inquiry (CoI), the OLM is made up of a matrix of seven key features. Within each cell of the matrix, theoretical and practical ideas to inform teaching and course design and implementation are presented in an easily accessible format. Links are provided to case study examples. OLM is linked explicitly to university goals and is nested in processes of staff development and institutional imperatives for enhanced student engagement.

Scenarios for the future

As part of developing this submission, the TeLRG spent some time working with Stephen Marshall's scenario tool, which was first presented at the DEANZ Conference earlier this year (<http://hub.vicinnovate.ac.nz/scenarios>). While such tools do not claim to predict the future, they do illustrate trends which need to be considered in future policy planning. The dimensions of change in this tool include:

- The dominance of technology
- Public cost containment
- Standardisation of the learning experience
- Level of focus on the academy versus focus on the needs of external stakeholders

- The scale of the system
- Openness
- Commodification
- Commercialisation
- Social conformity
- Level of sector steering

The scenario tool uses these dimensions to explore a range of different scenarios in order to encourage engagement with how the range of outcomes experienced can be shifted to more positively impact students, teachers, and society in general. Although this is still in development, it has already generated a number of interesting observations. These include the need to adjust multiple parameters in the system to make significant changes, and also how any reasonable set of choices generate a range of potential outcomes consistent with the risk that the outcomes of any substantive change are likely to be more unpredictable than the literature and policy might suggest.

One thing that is very clear to the TeLRG is that we are reaching a tipping point. Trends in massification of tertiary education, the breaking down of traditional boundaries through digital technologies (not only teaching environments *per se*, but also across sectors and internationally) and the changes in future work opportunities that technology is already driving all present high levels of risk to achieving a prosperous and inclusive society.

The current models of tertiary education within New Zealand may well serve specific interests, but it is clear they are no longer fit for collective national purpose. We urgently need to develop our policy capacity at both strategic and implementational levels if we are to maintain a tertiary education system in Aotearoa, New Zealand that provides opportunities for all.

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Appendix A

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