

MEMO

TO: Academic Board
FROM: Members of the Research Committee
DATE: 15 November 2016

RE: Submission on the Productivity Commission Draft Report, page 7 of the Overview – “Allow the unbundling of research and teaching”

We submit that the proposed unbundling should not be encouraged. The Education Act of 1989 bundled these together for tertiary institutions offering degrees and postgraduate degrees, with NZQA requiring staff teaching on a degree programme to be mainly research-active. This allows for a considerable percentage of staff not to be research-active, thus acknowledging that scholarship is in many cases adequate for the academic support of students, while simultaneously acknowledging that many staff members at tertiary institutions choose to focus primarily on teaching rather than on research. Those who are research-active can engage with the requirements of Performance Based Research Funding. This assessment process leads researchers to focus, integrate, and articulate research, while also networking research nationally and internationally.

Research leads to a number of clear benefits and these are listed below, with some salient examples:

- Because Otago Polytechnic is attuned to the need for work ready students we accentuate project-based work by students. This has the effect that even undergraduate students incorporate an applied research element into their learning, making our research culture uniquely horizontal rather than vertically hierarchical. This is very different from the typical university model wherein research and teaching are often dissociated.
- Research does inform teaching and at Otago Polytechnic this is evident everywhere; we are not ourselves unbundling research and teaching but rather connecting them closely. Research even changes teaching itself. Ako Aotearoa education-research grants have enabled 40 plus research projects at Otago Polytechnic over the last 10 years. One example of a direct link between research and teaching is a new investigation of the processes Occupational Therapy practitioners use to apply clinical reasoning in order to translate this knowledge into the curriculum in future.
- Research prevents staff from stagnation as it brings them to the leading edge of contemporary thinking in their fields, and thus also provides students with the benefit of connecting to ever-changing and often fast shifts in their areas of study.
- At Otago Polytechnic, the combination of teaching and research provide a rounded career development pathway for staff. This can be seen in the criteria for achieving professorship in our institution being excellence in all three of teaching, research, and leadership.
- Research activeness and dissemination maintain the credibility of degrees and postgraduate degrees at Otago Polytechnic and also maintain credibility in the professional fields these degrees are connected with and that provide work for our students after they have completed their degrees.

- Unbundling research and teaching or even the perception amongst staff and students will inevitably lower the importance of research to programmes; this will threaten the degree equivalency with universities that we currently enjoy.
- We have a responsibility as teachers to engage with evidence-based research to justify and adapt our curricula and teaching methods to changes and external factors
- Research within the New Zealand context is important to understand and develop the local / national and the particular aspects of the country we live and work in.
- Otago Polytechnic has a growing cohort of postgraduate students. These students add mana and financial benefits to the institution. Staff research credibility is what attracts them to us. This vital link between staff and postgraduate research should be maintained as we move to grow this student body further.
- Māori and Pasific students benefit from research at Otago Polytechnic. An example is Midwifery's research with an external Māori researcher who engaged students through a Kaupapa Māori protocol to hear their stories. This led to changes and improvements to ways of supporting Māori students. Another research study in Midwifery worked with the Pasific Student Advisor to better understand and respond to the needs of Pasific learners.
- Scholars and teachers at tertiary level have a responsibility to be constructively critical of society. The sustainability research project led from within the College of Enterprise and Development at Otago Polytechnic is an example of research which changed ways of thinking and doing around the issues threatening our planet today.
- We encourage our students to be curious, creative, and innovative and to contribute to society rather than just to receive from others. Research is a key pathway towards achieving this: it explores, questions the given, looks at problems from different perspectives, connects to others, changes set ways of doing things. In the Dunedin School of Art, Michele Beevors' project titled *The Wreck of Hope* investigates through a creative process of making the plight of endangered animals. This Columbia University alumna's work is travelling to Europe in 2017 to contribute to a wide-ranging discourse on the effects of speciesism on animal ethics.
- Research is a key connector between tertiary study and the real world, recently made clear through Otago Polytechnic's Master of Professional Practice and proposed new Doctor of Professional Practice that rely heavily on research within the workplace. These programmes (and their undergraduate feeder programme) have research deeply embedded in their core structure. It is simply not possible to unbundle the heutagogical approach to learning from the reflexive, auto-ethnographic action research that most of the students in these programmes undertake. Research into new needs in the world led to the establishment of similar programs at Middlesex University in the UK, with which Otago Polytechnic retains research connections in the development of the new doctorate.

- Otago Polytechnic is rated as a highly successful institution on a number of key performance indicators. This is directly connected to the success of its learners. An example of how their success is enabled by research comes from the Institute of Sport and Adventure. Staff members are engaged in research in the area of high-performance analysis, a sub-discipline of sport science. Their research impacts directly on how students structure their own analysis of performance in work placements where they work with industry partners to identify, solve, and implement a solution to a real-world problem – thus manifesting the core features of the applied research vital to the vibrant and connected future of Otago Polytechnic.

In conclusion, we strongly submit that the benefits to learners, the community and society of maintaining a bundled research/teaching model (for the majority of staff engaged in teaching on degree and post-graduate programmes) are numerous and are essential to maintaining the excellent reputation and success that Otago Polytechnic enjoys.

Signed: Leoni Schmidt (Chair: Research Committee) and Alistair Regan (Director:
Research)