

## Learning support at Auckland University of Technology: Reflections on the first three decades

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### Abstract

This article traces the first three decades of learning support at Auckland University of Technology, from the establishment of Te Tari Āwhina in 1986 to its later relocation to Te Mātāpuna Library & Learning Services. More than an institutional history, it explores how a distinctive learning advising culture emerged through the intellectual, cultural, and ethical commitments of the people who shaped the team. The account examines the growth of learning support from a small equity-focused initiative into a multifaceted service encompassing embedded academic literacies, Māori and Pacific student support, postgraduate provision, peer mentoring, specialist services, and evolving approaches to one-to-one consultations. Drawing on institutional records, published sources, and practitioner recollections, the article highlights the interplay between institutional change, pedagogical innovation, and social justice commitments. The AUT experience offers insight into how learning advising identities, practices, and professional cultures develop and adapt within Aotearoa New Zealand tertiary education.

*Keywords:* learning advising, academic literacies, Te Tari Āwhina, Auckland University of Technology, equity, student support

This article contributes to the broader national story of learning advising by offering a historically grounded account of the learning advisor team at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). Rather than seeking to define a general model of practice, the article traces how this work emerged, evolved, and consolidated over three decades in response to specific institutional conditions, leadership decisions, and pedagogical commitments.

Learning advising in Aotearoa New Zealand has not developed as a uniform or linear field. Instead, as Cameron and Catt (2008) and Cameron (2018) observe, it has taken shape through a range of locally situated responses to institutional mission, student demographics, and shifting understandings of academic literacy and student success. The AUT experience represents one such trajectory within this broader landscape.

The historical account presented here begins with the establishment of Te Tari Āwhina in 1986 and traces the development of learning advising at AUT through successive phases of expansion, specialisation, and pedagogical consolidation while the team was located within Student Services. The narrative concludes prior to the team's relocation to the AUT Library. While the transition to Te Mātāpuna Library & Learning Services marks an important later phase in the team's history, it is beyond the scope of the present article.

In reflecting on the team's early history, the article combines institutional chronology with elements of biography, anecdote, and collective memory. This approach seeks to illuminate the cultural, intellectual, and ethical context within which these practices have developed. Individual stories, staff backgrounds, and recalled moments are used selectively to illustrate how shared values, pedagogical orientations, and modes of working were formed and sustained during the critical early years of this team's development.

At the same time, the analysis draws on later research and scholarship, including work published after the period described, where this helps interpret earlier practices or situate them within contemporary debates in learning advising. As with any retrospective account, this narrative reflects the perspectives and recollections available to the author and contributors, and does not claim to capture all experiences or viewpoints<sup>1</sup>. In keeping with the

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article's focus on practice and collegial professional culture, individuals are referred to by name rather than title.

### **Early Days: Learning Support at AUT**

To understand how AUT's learning support identity took shape, it is useful to return to its earliest configurations, where many of the philosophies and practices that still guide us were first established.

In late 1986, with the support of John Harre and Phil Ker, the Learning Assistance Centre was established. Fe Day held a 0.5 appointment in the Department of Community Development and Māori Studies, funded by the Labour Department to support Labour Department–assisted courses at Auckland Technical Institute.

When drop-in services were established and it was clear that these services were also needed (and used by) mainstream students, additional staffing was added year by year, following annual reports which were sent to all Deans, and the Vice Chancellor John Hinchcliff, who later remarked that he always read the appendices of Case Studies which were included in the Annual Reports. During these years, input into Labour Department assisted courses was made, specifically Education Bridging for Women, and Education Bridging courses. As new courses were established staffing would be shared between Te Tari Āwhina and the new courses (which prioritised Māori and Pasifika unemployed people). During these years, Marilyn Wilkie who worked for Auckland Regional Council as a Learning Assistant convened regular meetings of the Labour Department funded learning assistants in the Auckland area.

Around 1990 Community Development was re-sited in the Health Faculty, and Wai Makiri was co-leader with Fe in leading Te Tari Āwhina (Office of Support). Learning support included individual student appointments, generic workshops, embedded sessions, daily drop-in consultations, and a suite of self-access handouts.

At an ATLAANZ conference, Fe heard of one centre offering its generic courses in the format of a mainstream course and so the team established a suite of courses as part of a

Certificate in Education Bridging: this enabled a very steady development of both new staffing and new opportunities for students.

In terms of staff profiling, Te Tari Āwhina, like so many other teams, employed Tertiary Learning Advisors (TLA) with language teaching or linguistics backgrounds, but also expertise in diverse fields: history, law, Māori studies, maths, physics, chemistry, education, psychology, and business. From the earliest days, close collaboration with Māori colleagues gave Te Tari Āwhina staff a philosophical grounding in critical pedagogy. Reflecting on this formative period, Day (2003) characterised learning development work as a continuing process of collective reflection and identity formation, documenting both the history of the centre and its evolving sense of purpose.

### **Te Tari Āwhina: A Magnet for Interesting People**

Beyond formal programmes and pedagogical frameworks, the character of Te Tari Āwhina was inevitably shaped by the people who were drawn to the team. From its early years, TLAs quickly became aware that they were working alongside colleagues with unusually diverse disciplinary backgrounds, international experience, and commitments to social and political engagement. This diversity constituted a form of collective intellectual, cultural, and activist capital that shaped how this work was understood and enacted.

Disciplinary and international experience was a feature of everyday team life. Conversations regularly moved across history, mathematics, Māori studies, the sciences, politics, and education, informed by staff members' experiences beyond Aotearoa.

Conversations sometimes touched on Russia and the former Soviet Union. Sue Bretherton had worked in the Ukraine in the 1980s as the economist and futures trader for an English company; Donald Ripia had visited as a cultural attaché with the New Zealand Navy in the 1990s; others were able to share stories of taking the Trans-Siberian railway over to Moscow and up to Leningrad. And of course, we had a colleague who had degrees from Novosibirsk State University and Moscow University. Before emigrating to Aotearoa, Vitali Babakov had been the head of a big engineering organization in Russia. Colleagues knew Vitali as an accomplished mathematician, with two doctorates (his second in Newtonian

mechanics), and an impressive publication record. During Te Tari Āwhina meetings he would be toying with various equations, many of which later appeared as articles in Q1 journals. When asked how he got into mathematics, Vitali replied that he had originally intended to train as a cinematographer, but on his first day at university, on finding himself in the wrong lecture theatre, he realised how interesting the subject of mathematics was and decided to switch his programme. This story exemplified a playful and exploratory intellectual stance that informed Vitali's teaching. Another Soviet educated staff member Alla Shymanska had worked on the Russian space programme before emigrating to Aotearoa New Zealand. Alla was a key member of the Te Tari Āwhina team until she was 'poached' by the Mathematics Department.

Activism was a constant theme. Sue had a wealth of experience, including protesting against nuclear warships visiting Aotearoa, at one point serving as crew on a Peace Squadron yacht that tacked provocatively in front of the USS Texas, a U.S. Navy nuclear-powered guided missile cruiser, during its visit to Auckland Harbour in August 1983. Another TLA, Robyn McWilliams had volunteered as crew on a yacht sailing to Mururoa Atoll as part of a Greenpeace peace flotilla, just weeks after the bombing of the Rainbow Warrior in July 1985. These experiences were of inherent interest as private histories, but from a pedagogical perspective, discussion yielded valuable insight into institutional power, ethics, and agency.

In its early organisational location, Te Tari Āwhina was closely allied with Māori Studies, and themes of self-determination and tino rangatiratanga (Māori sovereignty) were highly visible within the team's working culture. Co leaders Fe Day and Takuwai Makiri Mason (Aunty Wai) actively encouraged staff to bring their whole selves into their work. Aunty Wai was widely remembered as an influential activist whose contributions included substantial social justice work with the New Zealand AIDS Foundation. She passed away in 2013, and her legacy continued to shape the team's commitment to equity focused and culturally grounded practice. Other staff members' commitments extended beyond the university. Kay Ryan left the team to participate in Volunteer Service Abroad. Marcus Henning, a Tai Chi exponent, offered Tai Chi sessions free of charge to AUT staff and students, reflecting a broader understanding of wellbeing and learning as intertwined.

Intellectual and activist capital were also evident in scholarly and community leadership. David Parker, co-chair of the Kōtare Trust, worked to bring together left wing activists and thinkers and was a foundation member and leader of an AUT discussion group

titled *Critiquing the Neoliberal University*. His earlier shift from physics to physical chemistry, prompted by discomfort with the military applications of rocket science, further illustrates how ethical reflection informed academic trajectories within the team. The presence of a distinguished Pacific historian, I'u Tuagalu, added another dimension. In 2008, I'u travelled to Samoa as part of the editorial team for *Su'esu'e Manogi*, a landmark publication honouring Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta'isi Efi (Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2018). Working closely with Tui Atua and scholars such as Professor Damon Salesa, I'u's involvement brought Pacific epistemologies and leadership into the intellectual life of the team. Creativity and 'thinking outside the box' were a common theme. Day (2008), for example, explored the use of narrative and Playback Theatre to foster critical awareness within interdisciplinary healthcare teams, reflecting the team's broader interest in dialogic and experiential approaches to learning.

Commitments to equity were also reflected in scholarship emerging from the team. Day (2005) drew attention to the importance of supporting LGBTQ students within tertiary education, while later work by Waerea (2016) and other staff researchers explored questions of agency, identity, social justice, and the consequences of exclusion for marginalised communities. Together, these examples suggest that Te Tari Āwhina's professional culture was informed not only by concerns about student learning, but also by wider commitments to equity, critical inquiry, and social change.

Taken together, these experiences shaped a team culture that valued curiosity, critical dialogue, cultural responsiveness, and ethical engagement. This collective diversity normalised interdisciplinary thinking, legitimised critical pedagogy, and helps explain the team's later pedagogical orientations, including its sustained commitment to equity focused practice, embedded academic literacies, and resistance to purely deficit-based conceptions of student support.

When Fe retired in 2010, her role was filled by Jeanette Wikaira, who (in addition to driving to AUT City Campus from Thames every day) brought a sense of gravitas and focus to the role at a time of instability and uncertainty; when Jeanette took up a role at the University of Otago in 2011, Robyn McWilliams stepped up as acting Manager, with ongoing administrative support from Beverly Chan.

So many talented and interesting people have been involved in the team. We can't mention them all, but here are some other key staff members from the early years:

- Jane Bradley (ESOL)
- Jennifer Naeem (Business student support)
- Jenny Sionepulu (Administration)
- Lois Watt (Health student support)
- Takuwai Makiri Mason - Aunty Wai (Māori support)

### **Generic Workshops and Pedagogical Deepening**

This section traces a shift in Te Tari Āwhina's workshop provision from large scale, credit bearing programmes designed to extend access, towards increasingly explicit and theory informed approaches to teaching academic literacies.

From 2000 to 2012, Te Tari Āwhina delivered the *Keep Enhancing Your Success* (KEYS) programmes, a suite of credit bearing academic skills papers that represented one of the most significant periods of expansion in the team's history. Coordinated by Sue Bretherton, KEYS was designed to support student transition and academic success at scale, offering structured, timetabled learning opportunities that were embedded within AUT's formal curriculum (Manalo et al., 2010). Unlike ad hoc workshops or voluntary support services, KEYS positioned learning advising as an integral academic component of students' programmes of study. The initiative also reflected broader pedagogical thinking about how learning support could promote critical engagement rather than simply academic skill acquisition. This concern with critical perspectives was evident in Day's (2002) discussion of action methods within large-group study skills teaching. The KEYS suite comprised a broad range of papers promoted as 'keys' to specific capabilities, including study success, group work skills, computer basics, numeracy, academic writing, critical thinking, transition success, algebra, oral presentations, postgraduate writing, and statistics. Collectively, these papers reflected an expansive conception of the team's role that encompassed academic

literacies, quantitative skills, and transitional support. At an institutional level, KEYS enabled sustained staffing growth and provided learning advisors with opportunities to design, deliver, and evaluate teaching at scale over an extended period. For more than a decade, KEYS was a distinctive and highly visible feature of AUT's learning support provision before being discontinued in 2012.

Within this wider KEYS framework, *KEYS to Academic Writing Success* (KAWS) emerged as a site of particular pedagogical innovation. Originally developed and coordinated by Sue, KAWS integrated classroom teaching with self-access interactive activities delivered through Blackboard, AUT's learning management system. In one instance, the Health Faculty introduced KAWS across all first-year courses. See Manalo et al. (2010) for a discussion of that programme's effectiveness in supporting student performance in early essay assessments. This combination of institutional reach and pedagogical coherence positioned KAWS as a flagship component of the KEYS initiative.

From 2010, under the leadership of Quentin Allan, KAWS became a vehicle for further pedagogical development. Its theoretical foundations were consolidated through the integration of genre-based pedagogy and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Genre based pedagogy, developed within Australian literacy scholarship (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Martin & Rose, 2005), emphasised the teaching of whole texts and their social purposes, making explicit the staged structures and rhetorical demands of academic genres, such as the essay. In parallel, Halliday's (1985) SFL framework was employed to foreground the relationship between language, meaning, and context, directing attention to register, text organisation, and patterned lexico-grammatical choices in academic writing.

These theoretical perspectives were operationalised within KAWS through a structured six stage writing process: question analysis, idea generation, reading and referencing, planning, drafting, and proofreading. TLAs explicitly modelled each stage using annotated exemplars, drafting frames, and guided 'think aloud' demonstrations, making academic writing processes visible and teachable. Delivered through ten hours of intensive face to face teaching supported by guided online activities, KAWS aimed to develop students' confidence and academic literacies through scaffolded, contextualised learning rather than through decontextualised skills instruction.

Evaluation data indicated strong student endorsement and reported improvements in writing performance, contributing to KAWS's reputation as a distinctive and pedagogically sophisticated feature of Te Tari Āwhina's work (Allan, 2012). Historically, KAWS is noteworthy because it exemplifies a broader shift within learning advising at AUT: from large scale provision focused on access and participation, towards increasingly explicit, theory informed teaching of academic literacies. When the KEYS programme was discontinued in 2012, KAWS remained an important reference point for subsequent developments in embedded teaching, postgraduate writing support, and consultation practice.

### **Academic Literacies Through Embedding**

Alongside student facing provision, learning advising at AUT increasingly involved collaboration with academic staff to embed discipline-specific academic literacies within curricula. These collaborations centred on integrating academic literacies teaching directly into courses rather than positioning it as peripheral or remedial support (McWilliams & Allan, 2014). Over time, embedded work at AUT developed a distinctive focus on close analysis of student writing within disciplinary contexts, supported by the use of annotated exemplar texts that made expectations, rhetorical moves, and assessment criteria explicit (Allan, McWilliams, & Raleigh, 2023; Allan, McWilliams, & Raleigh, 2024). A further innovation involved team teaching with information literacy librarians, creating an inter professional approach that brought writing development and research practices into closer alignment.

Where embedding also involved the course lecturer, these partnerships enabled a gradual redistribution of teaching responsibility. Rather than reliance on ongoing specialist intervention, embedded approaches created opportunities for lecturers to assume greater ownership of academic literacy teaching over time, supported by shared design of teaching materials and flexible configurations of expertise (Macnaught et al., 2024). This model emphasised sustainability, collaboration, and contextual responsiveness rather than one off interventions.

Across AUT and more broadly, embedded academic literacies have become a defining feature of contemporary practice. Nevertheless, a persistent profession wide tension

remains: while learning advisors widely recognise the pedagogical value of embedding, this work often receives limited institutional recognition, particularly when impact is not easy to identify or quantify (Bassett & Macnaught, 2024b). Research in the field has tended to rely heavily on student and staff perceptions, and there is growing consensus that more robust evidence is needed to demonstrate impact, drawing on multiple data sources such as changes in student writing, assessment outcomes, and patterns of engagement (Bassett & Macnaught, 2024a).

At AUT, this tension has not undermined commitment to embedding; rather, it has shaped ongoing reflection about how embedded academic literacy work can be made sustainable, visible, and institutionally legible. As such, embedding represents both a pedagogical achievement and a site of continuing professional negotiation within the team's pre-Library history.

### **Māori Support**

In 1988, Te Tari Āwhina introduced dedicated Māori learning advisor roles to guide the development of the overall service so that the team would provide culturally responsive and effective academic support for Māori students. These roles were not conceived as add ons or specialist silos, but as a foundation for shaping the team's philosophy, practices, and relationships across the institution. This orientation was consistent with Day's (2004) description of Te Tari Āwhina as a multidimensional learning development centre in which responsiveness to diversity was understood as foundational rather than supplementary to practice.

Initiatives included orientation programmes, writing workshops that incorporated tikanga Māori, and one to one consultations that acknowledged whānau based approaches to learning. Advisors such as Wai Makiri, Leonie Pihama, Jeanette Wikaira, Tui O'Sullivan, Messina Hadfield, Messina Shaw, and Donald Ripia played influential roles in championing kaupapa Māori approaches across all areas of Te Tari Āwhina's work. Through their leadership and advocacy, Māori students were encouraged not only to participate in the team's activities, but also to experience a sense of belonging, recognition, and academic empowerment within AUT.

While it is not possible to document all Māori staff contributions or initiatives within this brief account, the examples included here are intended to illustrate the central and enduring role of Māori leadership and knowledge in shaping the team's pedagogical and ethical foundations.

### **Pacific Student Support**

Parallel to developments in Māori support, Pacific focused initiatives also took shape within Te Tari Āwhina, grounded in principles of cultural responsiveness, relational pedagogy, and collective success. From the late 1980s onwards, TLAs played a significant role in supporting Pacific students at AUT through programmes and practices designed to recognise linguistic diversity, cultural knowledge, and community-based learning values.

Dedicated Pasifika learning advisors, including Rita Fatialofa, Karena Lyons, Juliet Boon Ruth I'iga, I'u Tuagalu, and Tafili Utumapu McBride, provided academic development tailored to Pacific learners. This work included orientation programmes and writing workshops that integrated cultural perspectives alongside explicit academic literacy teaching. In 2007, Tafili translated the Treaty of Waitangi into the Samoan language, with Aunty Wai and her moko Hope Makiri-Henning on the cover. It was a popular teaching resource with the mature students in the Pasifika programme in the School of Education. One of Tafili's postgraduate students later explored the impact of these initiatives in a Master's study, noting that Samoan students particularly valued KEYS writing workshops and ethnic language tutorials for creating a culturally safe learning environment (Penn, 2010).

Reflecting on the team's history, Tuagalu (2025) describes how Pacific student support was initially embedded within Student Support Services before later being disbanded and absorbed into the Office of Pacific Advancement. Despite these structural shifts, Te Tari Āwhina continued to draw on Pacific pedagogical principles, including collaborative learning and relational approaches, and contributed to a shift away from deficit framings towards more transformative, culturally grounded models of academic support for Pacific student success. Grateful acknowledgement is also made to former colleagues such as Tony Solomona, Meiolandra Tima, Willie Uili, and Edmund Fehoko, whose contributions formed part of this broader collective effort.

As with Māori support, this account does not attempt to be comprehensive; rather, it highlights selected examples that reflect the depth, diversity, and significance of Pacific knowledge and leadership within the team.

### **Peer Mentor Programme**

Alongside staff led learning advising provision, AUT also developed a substantial peer led model of academic and pastoral support. Although organisationally distinct from the TLA role, the Peer Mentor programme reflected many of the same equity focused and capability building logics that underpinned Te Tari Āwhina's work and therefore forms an important adjacent strand in the broader learning support landscape.

The Peer Mentors initiative was established in 2006 by Jackie Hammill under the Learning Communities framework, in response to institutional concerns about student success, retention, and belonging. Its core aim was to provide peer to peer academic and pastoral support using recognised best practice models, positioning more experienced students as guides and role models for those navigating the early stages of university study. In 2012, a revised framework was designed and led by TLA Antony Nobbs, strengthening the programme's theoretical coherence and operational structure.

By 2015, the programme employed two full-time staff members, including Administrator Rainie Yu, alongside 91 part-time mentors. Together, they delivered nearly 12,000 one to one sessions across the academic year, indicating both scale and demand. Mentors were organised into four cohorts: General Academic Support, Māori Academic Support, Pasifika Academic Support, and Chinese Academic Support, reflecting an explicit commitment to culturally responsive provision.

A defining feature of the programme was its emphasis on pastoral care and ethical engagement. Peer mentors themselves were mentored and supported by experienced staff from across Student Services, including TLAs who worked within clearly defined guidelines and reporting structures. Mentor training was a collective endeavour: Antony and Rainie led the bulk of the initial training; Mark Bassett was responsible for academic literacy and academic integrity components; and Lian Hong Brebner led the cultural diversity training.

Ongoing supervision was provided by a network of experienced staff, including lecturers and learning advisors, reinforcing professional accountability and reflective practice.

Consistent with Antony's doctoral research, the programme explicitly engaged with issues of structural inequity, misrecognition, and student empowerment (Nobbs, 2017). In this respect, peer mentoring complemented learning advising by operating at scale, fostering belonging, and supporting students' navigation of institutional structures through relational, dialogic support rather than expert intervention alone.

Following financial pressures arising after the COVID 19 pandemic, the Peer Mentor programme was discontinued in 2023. Its historical significance lies not only in its size, but in how it exemplified parallel approaches to equity-oriented learning support at AUT, reinforcing the idea that academic success is fostered through communities of practice, relational capability building, and shared responsibility rather than through individual remediation.

### **Specialist Support Strands: Numeracy and Learning Differences**

In its earlier phases, Te Tari Āwhina operated with a relatively expansive conception of the team's remit, one that included a number of specialist support strands alongside more general academic literacy provision.

Numeracy was recognised as a critical factor in student success, particularly in disciplines such as engineering, health sciences, and business. Practical numeracy support formed part of Te Tari Āwhina's work from the outset, including assistance with foundational concepts, measurements, and quantitative reasoning. Over time, this support was formalised through dedicated KEYS papers, such as *Keys to Numeracy* and *Keys to Algebra*, as well as through one to one consultations and embedded teaching within discipline specific courses.

Vitali Babakov played a central role in shaping numeracy provision during this period. His approach emphasised conceptual understanding and problem solving rather than procedural drilling, helping students develop confidence and agency in working with quantitative material. This pedagogical stance was evident in everyday practice. Colleagues would occasionally hear laughter from Vitali's office when he was working with a student,

followed by his comment in a distinctive Russian accent: “Yes, it is like a game – you have to guess the next number in the sequence – have some fun!” Framing mathematics in this way positioned numeracy as exploratory and accessible, countering the anxiety that many students associated with quantitative work.

Numeracy support was later extended to the Manukau campus, where Bob Beechey provided workshops and consultations tailored to local student needs. Across sites, numeracy work exemplified an approach to learning advising that treated quantitative capability as integral to academic participation rather than as a peripheral or specialist concern.

Alongside numeracy, Te Tari Āwhina also developed specialist expertise in supporting students with learning differences, including dyslexia, ADHD, and Irlen Syndrome. Under the leadership of Marcus Henning and later Sue Beechey, the team provided targeted support that included diagnostic screening, individualised learning strategies, and guidance on adaptive technologies. This work enabled early identification of learning challenges and informed tailored approaches to academic study.

Importantly, specialist knowledge in this area was not confined to individual advisors. Marcus and Sue also played a key mentoring role within the team, supporting other TLAs to develop confidence and capability in working with neurodivergent students. Through this internal capacity building, expertise in supporting neurodivergent learners was shared across the team and integrated into more general learning advising practice.

Together, these specialist strands demonstrate that learning advising at AUT was once conceptualised as encompassing a wide range of academic and cognitive supports, extending beyond writing and language development alone. The scope of this work has not remained fixed, but has evolved over time in response to changing understandings of student need, academic success, and institutional responsibility.

### **Postgraduate Support**

During its time within Student Services, Te Tari Āwhina developed a substantial programme of postgraduate learning support, reflecting a growing recognition that postgraduate research writing required pedagogical attention in its own right rather than

informal or ad hoc assistance. This work emerged following the disestablishment of KEYS to Postgraduate Student Success and represented a shift from credit bearing coursework towards targeted writing focused support for master's and doctoral candidates.

A structured suite of postgraduate thesis writing workshops was developed by David Parker and delivered across AUT's three campuses. The programme comprised five core workshops addressing key thesis elements: abstracts, introductions, and conclusions; literature reviews; methodology and results; discussions; and publishing research. Teaching drew on David's disciplinary background and experience in postgraduate supervision, and was supported by Kathryn Owler at the Manukau campus, alongside other TLAs as they completed doctoral qualifications, including Quentin Allan and Layne Waerea.

The workshops were deliberately designed to be inclusive of students working across diverse disciplinary, methodological, and epistemological traditions. Rather than treating postgraduate writing as a technical skill addressed late in candidature, the programme positioned writing as integral to research thinking, argumentation, and scholarly identity. Materials were structured to support conceptual understanding of thesis elements while also offering practical guidance for managing large scale writing projects.

In addition to workshops, Te Tari Āwhina supported postgraduate researchers through writing retreats and regular postgraduate research (PGR) meetings. These initiatives created space for sustained writing, peer interaction, and community building, complementing more formal teaching provision and mitigating the isolation often experienced by research students. For a period, postgraduate learning support was positioned within the Graduate Research School, before being re integrated into the learning advising team.

Taken together, these initiatives illustrate an important phase in the development of postgraduate learning support at AUT, one characterised by growing pedagogical intentionality, cross campus delivery, and recognition of writing as central to research practice. While postgraduate support would later expand and be reconfigured in different organisational contexts, the Student Services-era work established foundations that shaped subsequent approaches to postgraduate learning advising.

### **English for Academic Skills Independence Programme**

The *English for Academic Skills Independence* (EASI) programme represented the final, fully articulated language focused initiative developed within Te Tari Āwhina during its time in Student Services. Introduced as a non-credit, twelve session course, EASI responded to ongoing demand for explicit support with academic English while also reflecting a pedagogical shift away from generic study skills models toward more theoretically informed language teaching.

Coordinated by Quentin Allan, EASI brought together four complementary strands developed by specialist learning advisors: grammar (Quentin and Karen Margetts), vocabulary (Mark Bassett), punctuation (Pedro Silva), and pronunciation and conversation skills (Robyn McWilliams). While these areas were taught discretely, the programme emphasised their interdependence in shaping students' capacity to participate effectively in academic discourse, both written and spoken.

Delivered through interactive workshops supported by online materials, EASI foregrounded learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness rather than error correction alone. Early evaluations indicated strong student engagement and perceived usefulness, positioning EASI as a pedagogically coherent synthesis of the team's language focused expertise. Detailed discussion of EASI's design, theoretical foundations, and outcomes is outlined in Allan (2014), and Bassett & Allan (2017).

The programme was disestablished in 2016 as learning advising provision continued to evolve and consolidate around other models of support.

### **Material and Technological Conditions**

Alongside changes in programmes and pedagogical emphasis, learning advising at AUT was shaped by changes in its physical environment, including where TLAs were located, how spaces were organised, and how visible the service was to students. Technological developments, particularly the increasing role of the Internet, were also significant. Together, these shaped not only how support was delivered, but also how learning, independence, and access were conceptualised within the team's work. Attending to

these changes helps explain why particular practices emerged, stabilised, or were later reconfigured over time.

A significant early development was the establishment of a Self-Access Learning Laboratory in 1990. This facility, which focused primarily on ESOL provision, was initiated by senior ESOL staff member Trish Daley while seconded to Te Tari Āwhina. Trish steered its development, with coordination provided by Bryce Mason and support from Jane McCartney, who oversaw the acquisition and cataloguing of a substantial collection of self-access resources. Learning advisors worked with an extensive array of physical materials, including graded readers, grammar texts, listening resources, worksheets, and handouts, reflecting contemporary understandings of learner autonomy as something fostered through guided engagement with tangible learning artefacts. Self-access learning was largely understood as something that took place in designated locations, supported by curated collections and advisor mediation.

The physical location of Te Tari Āwhina during this period reinforced these practices. The team participated in the year-long redesign of the main library and administration block, ultimately being positioned just inside the library entrance. This spatial arrangement made learning advising visible and approachable, and allowed TLAs to support students who were hesitant to engage independently with self-access resources. More generic self access materials were also made available across AUT's campuses in the form of printed handouts, complemented by early digital resources hosted on the Te Tari Āwhina website and later through Blackboard, AUT's learning management system.

These practices were characteristic of a period in which learning advising relied heavily on paper based resources, face to face interaction, and physically bounded learning environments during scheduled drop-in sessions. TLAs routinely worked with students' printed assignment drafts, annotating these by hand, and steering students towards printed resources such as APA referencing handouts, annotated exemplar essays, and mind mapping guidelines.

Over time, as digital technologies became more deeply embedded across the institution, practices adapted accordingly. Learning management systems, word processed drafting, and online repositories reshaped how students produced and revised academic texts, and how TLAs interacted with those texts during consultations and workshops. Gradually,

paper based resources were supplemented and then displaced by digital materials, screen-based annotation, and online guidance. From around 2015, the team intentionally moved away from paper self-access provision, reflecting both technological change and evolving pedagogical assumptions about where and how students engaged with academic work.

These transitions laid important groundwork for later developments in online and blended learning support. Although the COVID 19 lockdowns fall beyond the historical scope of this article, the rapid pivot to fully online provision during that period can be understood as an acceleration of tendencies already in motion. Well before the pandemic, learning advising at AUT had begun re orienting towards digital mediation, pedagogical visibility, and integration into students' everyday academic workflows. Seen in this light, shifts in material and technological conditions were not merely operational changes, but central to how learning advising continually reimagined independence, access, and pedagogical responsibility.

### **1:1 Consultations**

‘Go and get someone from Te Tari Āwhina to proof-read your assignment before you submit it.’

This advice was once commonplace at AUT and reflects a longstanding misconception about the purpose of one-to-one consultations.

In the early years, consultation provision was characterised by high volume drop-in sessions and brief appointments, often oriented towards surface level correction. This model was reinforced by lecturers' referrals that framed learning advising as a final checkpoint for proofreading rather than a space for learning. Long queues of students frequently formed at daily drop-in centres, many hoping for ten minutes of TLA attention immediately prior to submission.

The establishment of drop-in sessions was, however, a deliberate equity response. Data on the ethnicity of students using Te Tari Āwhina services showed that Māori and Pasifika students were significantly less likely to book one to one appointments. Once drop-in services were introduced, participation from these groups increased markedly. To manage

consistency and scope within this high demand environment, a diagnostic matrix, ‘SPLATME’, was developed to record the focus of student visits. This captured Study Skills, Personal Skills, Learning Skills, Assignment Preparation, Time Management Skills, Maths Skills, and English Skills. Advisors were encouraged to mark a limited number of issues on two or three pages of student writing and require students to undertake self-correction, returning to the drop-in lecturer for review. While this approach promoted some degree of learner responsibility, the dominant framing of consultations remained corrective and remedial.

Over time, and through sustained professional reflection, this model was critically re-examined. While high volume drop-ins improved access, they also risked reinforcing deficit framings and positioning learning advising as a service for fixing problems rather than developing learning. One-to-one consultations were gradually reconceptualised as pedagogically purposeful encounters in which advisors work with students to interpret assessment tasks, make sense of feedback, and develop strategic approaches to academic work.

### **Extending Learning Support**

As AUT expanded beyond its original city campus, learning advising provision similarly evolved to support students across multiple sites and communities. Extending learning advising beyond a single physical location was not simply a logistical exercise; it required adaptation to different disciplinary profiles, student demographics, and local institutional cultures. AUT now operates across three Auckland campuses: Waihorotiu (city centre), Akoranga (North Shore), and Manukau (South Auckland). The experiences of the Akoranga and Manukau campuses, in particular, illustrate how Te Tari Āwhina sought to maintain pedagogical coherence while responding to distinct regional contexts.

#### **Akoranga Campus**

AUT’s North Shore campus at Akoranga was established in 1980 following the acquisition of the former North Shore Teachers’ College site. From 1988 onwards, Akoranga had access to dedicated learning advisor support, initially through weekly visits and later

through provision based in dedicated spaces on campus. This presence primarily supported students enrolled in health sciences, education, and business programmes.

Learning advising at Akoranga included one to one appointments, drop-in sessions, orientation workshops, and later the delivery of KEYS and EASI programmes. Over time, Tafili Utumapu McBride and Robyn McWilliams provided a more consistent TLA presence, with administrative support from Tania Enosa, and other team members travelling from the city campus as required. This model balanced local continuity with collective responsibility across the wider team.

### **Manukau Campus**

In 2010, AUT established a campus at Manukau on the former Carter Holt Harvey site, serving a predominantly South Auckland community characterised by high proportions of Māori and Pacific students. Learning advising support at the Manukau campus was shaped by both geographic distance and the specific educational aspirations of the local community.

Initial provision included two weekly drop-in sessions, with learning advisors travelling from the city campus to work from space made available within the library. Orientation workshops were also delivered, alongside KEYS and EASI programmes, ensuring continuity with learning advising models offered elsewhere at AUT. Additional support was provided through Student Advisors based on campus, including Tony Solomona, Gema Carlson, Meiolandre Tima, George Kimani, and Willie Uili, under the leadership of William Keung.

In 2015, a permanent learning advisor position was established for the Manukau campus, filled by Quentin Allan, marking a shift towards more stable, locally embedded provision. Postgraduate support was further strengthened by Kathryn Oowler, who delivered thesis writing workshops, facilitated a postgraduate writing group, and supported students enrolled in the Doctor of Health Science programme.

Taken together, learning advising provision at Akoranga and Manukau demonstrates how Te Tari Āwhina extended its work across sites while remaining attentive to local context. Rather than replicating a single model wholesale, learning advising at satellite campuses involved adaptation, collaboration, and responsiveness, reinforcing the view of

academic literacy support as relational, situated, and community engaged rather than centrally standardised.

### **Reviews and Proposals for Structural Change**

Periods of innovation were punctuated by moments of significant organisational turbulence. In 2010, TLAs learned that all programmes and resources were being reviewed by senior management in Student Services. Staff were assured that this was an informal process, but gradually the review morphed into a Review with a capital 'R', involving a round of interviews conducted by an external consultant. From the team's perspective, there was a sense that literacies development work with students was neither understood, nor valued. In frustration, a meeting was sought with the Vice Chancellor and a move requested. Options included the team being relocated to the Centre for Learning and Teaching (now Office of Learning, Teaching and Educational Design), or to the Library. The Vice Chancellor listened carefully and concluded that he would prefer for Te Tari Āwhina to remain within Student Services, but that he could see a need for a new academic leadership post to be created: Director, Student Learning & Experience, a role filled by Paul Fenton. Paul introduced a number of changes, including new workshops, a revamped Orientation programme, and the establishment of the Peer Mentor programme.

After some staffing adjustments, followed by a few years of relative stability, towards the end of 2015 our team was invited to respond to a proposal for structural change. Under the leadership of Pedro Silva the team co-constructed a formal response. Then, following our team's feedback, high-level talks took place, as a result of which the TLAs were from 2016 structurally located within Te Mātāpuna Library & Learning Services.

### **Conclusion**

By the mid-2010s, learning advising at AUT had reached a point of clear pedagogical consolidation. Across nearly three decades, the team had moved from a small, equity driven support unit to a professionally confident service with a coherent set of pedagogical principles, practices, and areas of specialist expertise. Although organisational structures

shifted during this period, the team's work was characterised less by adherence to fixed models than by ongoing reflexivity, collaboration, and responsiveness to student need.

This consolidation was evident across multiple strands of provision. Generic workshops and credit bearing programmes gave way to more strategically embedded approaches to academic literacies development. One to one consultations were gradually re conceptualised as pedagogically purposeful encounters rather than corrective services, situated within a broader ecology of support that included workshops, and self-access resources. Specialist strands (including Māori and Pacific student support, numeracy, language development, learning difference provision, postgraduate writing, and peer mentoring) reflected an expansive understanding of learning advising as academically situated, relational, and attentive to equity as well as skill development.

This article has traced the emergence and development of learning advising at AUT from its origins in Te Tari Āwhina through to a period of consolidation within Student Services. It has shown how practice was shaped not only by formal structures and programmes, but also by the intellectual, cultural, and ethical commitments of those involved. This history of the early days of learning support at AUT offers insight into how professional cultures form, stabilise, and adapt at the intersection of equity, pedagogy, and technological and institutional change.

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