Tertiary Learning Advisors in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Part Three: Why do we stay? Rewards and challenges

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Abstract

Defining and re-defining identity is important for any profession, particularly so for tertiary learning advisors (TLAs) in the increasingly uncertain tertiary education environment in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the past ten years, two national surveys of learning centres in tertiary institutions sketched the professional status of TLAs, based on data from managers; there has been little research, however, on individual TLAs' perspectives of their professional status. This special issue, 'Identity and Opportunity', reports on a project designed to address that gap, in three parts: building a professional profile, acknowledging learning advisors' contribution, and rewards and challenges of the role. The findings indicate that TLAs are highly qualified and experienced but – for many – their skills and experience are not adequately recognised by institutions. There are significant barriers to progression within their institution, stemming mainly from organisational policies. Despite that lack of clear career opportunities, and other frustrations, overall satisfaction with the TLA role is high. Underpinning the findings, however, are issues of identity and recognition that should be addressed to ensure a resilient profession.

Keywords: professional identity, tertiary learning advisor, higher education, career, job satisfaction

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Introduction

Since the Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand (ATLAANZ) was formally constituted in 2000, questions of identity and professionalism have been regularly traversed in hui and conferences. Through that discussion, tertiary learning advisors (TLAs) have developed a strong community of practice and a common understanding of our professional identity. In 2012, for example, ATLAANZ officially adopted a professional practice document (Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2012) that described the principles and values, knowledge and skills, and roles and responsibilities of TLAs in this country. Far from being an end point, however, the adoption was another step on the journey, and the document's impermanence was made clear in the consensus that it should be reaffirmed by members every two years.

The profession's focus on defining and re-defining itself is not simply a theoretical exercise: as Cameron and Catt (2014), pointed out, being able to clearly articulate 'who we are' and 'how we fit' within our institutions has become increasingly important in the uncertain tertiary education environment. Nor is it limited to Aotearoa New Zealand, but echoes discussions amongst colleagues in Australia, the United Kingdom and Canada (for example, see Malkin & Chanock, 2018; Samuels, 2013). Arguably, however, the conversation is more complex in the Aotearoa New Zealand environment, since ATLAANZ represents learning advisors in a broad range of tertiary institutions, including universities, institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITPs), wānanga, and private training organisations (PTOs).

One approach taken in examining professional identity is what has been described by many as 'mapping the field'[1]. In 2008, the first full scale survey of tertiary learning centres in Aotearoa New Zealand was carried out (Cameron & Catt, 2008). This project surveyed learning centre managers. Five years later, the survey was repeated

[1] This term has been widely used in the scholarship of teaching and learning; for example, see Gosling (2009) in relation to academic developers.

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(with some revisions) to chart the changes occurring in the intervening period (Cameron & Catt, 2014). Those two projects provided an overview of the services learning advisors provided for students, the professional status of TLAs, and their place within institutional structures, from the managers' perspectives. In their responses, learning centre managers described a community of highly skilled professionals, actively engaged in research, and exerting a positive influence on learning and teaching in their institutions. It was an optimistic picture, suggesting TLAs were "moving in from the margins of their institutions and increasing in influence" (Cameron & Catt, p.17).

The survey's conclusions, however, included some caveats. It was unclear the extent to which TLAs' level of skills and experience was actually recognised by institutions. Surveys of managers can provide only limited information on learning advisor demographics, qualifications and experience, and the links between these features and salary, conditions and role. In addition, the literature suggests that managers are more 'positive' than their staff when responding to evaluative questions (e.g. Sutherland, Wilson & Williams, 2013); if this is the case, managers' responses in relation to morale and career satisfaction may not have reflected the views of TLAs. So, while the 2013 survey of learning centre managers provided a valuable snapshot of the state of the sector, it was clear that surveying individual TLAs would allow a more nuanced picture. This, then, became the focus of the current project, designed to elaborate on the TLA personal and professional profile, and explore learning advisors' perceptions of their professional status. In this project, learning advisors in in universities, institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITPs), wānanga, and private training organisations were surveyed (in 2014) on their demographic characteristics, qualifications and experience, contractual arrangements, role, career opportunities, and role satisfaction.

The project results are presented in three parts. Part one of this 'Special Issue' of the *ATLAANZ Journal*, 'Building a Profile of our Profession' (Cameron, 201b), as well as describing the project, provides a profile of TLAs in Aotearoa New Zealand. In part two,' Acknowledging Our Contribution' (Cameron, 2018c), the focus is on how

institutions recognise the contribution of TLAs to learning, teaching and research. This third part, "Why do We Stay? Rewards and Challenges", examines learning advisors' satisfaction with their role. In the Appendices (Cameron, 2018a), key data tables (including some data not included in the paper) are provided, along with the survey questions and recommendations for future research.

Why do we stay? Rewards and challenges

Tertiary learning advisors (TLAs) in Aotearoa New Zealand are highly qualified and bring a rich pool of experience in education, and other fields, to their institutions (Part one). It appears, though, that few see a clear career pathway for themselves (Part two). What are the implications of limited career opportunities for the overall well-being of the profession and, in particular, for retaining a resilient professional cohort? This paper, Part three, explores that question by examining learning advisors' overall satisfaction with their role, including their intention to remain, and their perceptions of the TLA role's rewards and challenges.

Job satisfaction in tertiary education

Job satisfaction in tertiary (or higher) education has been the focus of research for several decades (see, for example, Bentley, Coates, Dobson, Goodegebuure & Meck, 2013). The interest is sustained by evidence that satisfaction with one's role is associated with a range of personal and workplace outcomes. Satisfaction is related to productivity and performance (Kinman, 2016; Sutherland, Wilson & Williams, 2013), particularly in occupations involving a high degree of complexity (Bentley, McLeod & Teo, 2014), which arguably describes the learning advisor role. Job satisfaction has also been linked to motivation and loyalty to the institution (Machado-Taylor *et al*., 2014; Sutherland *et al.*, 2013), and is the strongest predictor of intention to leave a role (Eagan, Jaeger, & Grantham, 2015; Ward & Sloane, 2000). Individuals' ratings of job

satisfaction, therefore, can be used to assess the morale of a profession and predict retention.

Despite decades of research, Bentley *et al.* (2013) conclude there is still no definitive evidence on the factors associated with job satisfaction in higher education. The uncertainty stems partly from the complexity of the construct: job satisfaction is a multi-faceted notion involving the interaction of individual motivation and values, workplace context, and culture (Bentley *et al*., 2013; Eagan *et al*., 2015). To add to the complexity, researchers have employed a wide range of methodologies and measures Oshagbemi, 1999; Sutherland & Wilson, 2017); in Eagan *et al.*'s words (2015, p. 451), "there appear to be as many ways of operationalizing satisfaction as there are studies examining it".

Some key points of agreement have emerged, however. International studies indicate faculty academics[2] are highly satisfied with the intrinsic features of their role (such as intellectual challenge, making a contribution to society, collegiality and autonomy), but not with extrinsic factors, such as salary and working conditions (see, for example, Bexley, Arkoudis & James, 2013; Bryson, 2004; Machado-Taylor *et al.*, 2016; Ward & Sloane, 2000). While few studies have specifically focused on the job satisfaction of academics in Aotearoa New Zealand, similar findings have been reported in analyses of university promotion (e.g. Doyle, Wylie, Hogden & Else, 2004), workload (Houston, Meyer & Paewai, 2006), and early career success (Sutherland, 2017).

Although this literature has provided considerable insight into job satisfaction in tertiary education, investigations so far have been largely limited to university faculty teaching staff. Few studies have examined job satisfaction in institutes of technology and polytechnics (ITPs), wānanga (or their equivalent in other countries), or amongst university teaching staff outside the traditional lecturer role. One exception is Bentley *et al.*'s (2014) study of work and wellbeing, which surveyed both academic and general

[2] The terms 'faculty academics' or 'faculty teaching staff' are used throughout this paper to describe staff engaged in tertiary teaching programmes; i.e. 'tutors' in ITPs, 'lecturers' in universities, 'kaiako' in wānanga.

staff in New Zealand ITPs, universities and wānanga; however, their findings did not consistently delineate the type of institution, or the type of role. Another is Regan and Graham's (2018) work on professional (general) staff in Australian and United Kingdom universities; some of their participants were engaged in what they describe as 'learner support', but again the authors did not segment their findings according to the type of role. More recently, Malkin and Chanock (2018) surveyed Academic Language and Learning (ALL) practitioners in Australian universities on a range of issues related to professional identity, including rewards and challenges. Nevertheless, given the limited research so far, therefore, it is not clear how satisfied tertiary learning advisors are with their role and what factors contribute to that satisfaction.

Learning advisors' overall role satisfaction

In the survey (see Appendices: Cameron, 2018a), participants were asked to indicate how satisfied, in general, they were with their role, and how likely they were to move to another institution or to another role entirely. Responses to these closed questions provided a measure of overall job satisfaction and allowed comparisons of different cohorts.

Eighty two percent of respondents reported being satisfied to some degree with their role and only 8% reported being dissatisfied (Figure 1). Overall, 11% said they were likely to seek a different role, other than learning advisor, in the next year (53% unlikely), and 7% said it was likely they would seek a TLA role in another institution (69 % unlikely).[3] The proportion indicating they were likely to leave was lower for those who reported reporting being 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied': only 5% of that group said it was likely they would leave the role altogether. Tertiary learning advisors in Aoteroa/New Zealand, then, appear satisfied overall with their role, and few of those who were most satisfied reported being likely to leave.

[3] Not surprisingly, the change intention was slightly higher amongst those under 60 years of age (16% of under-60s reported being likely to change roles and 9% to change institution).

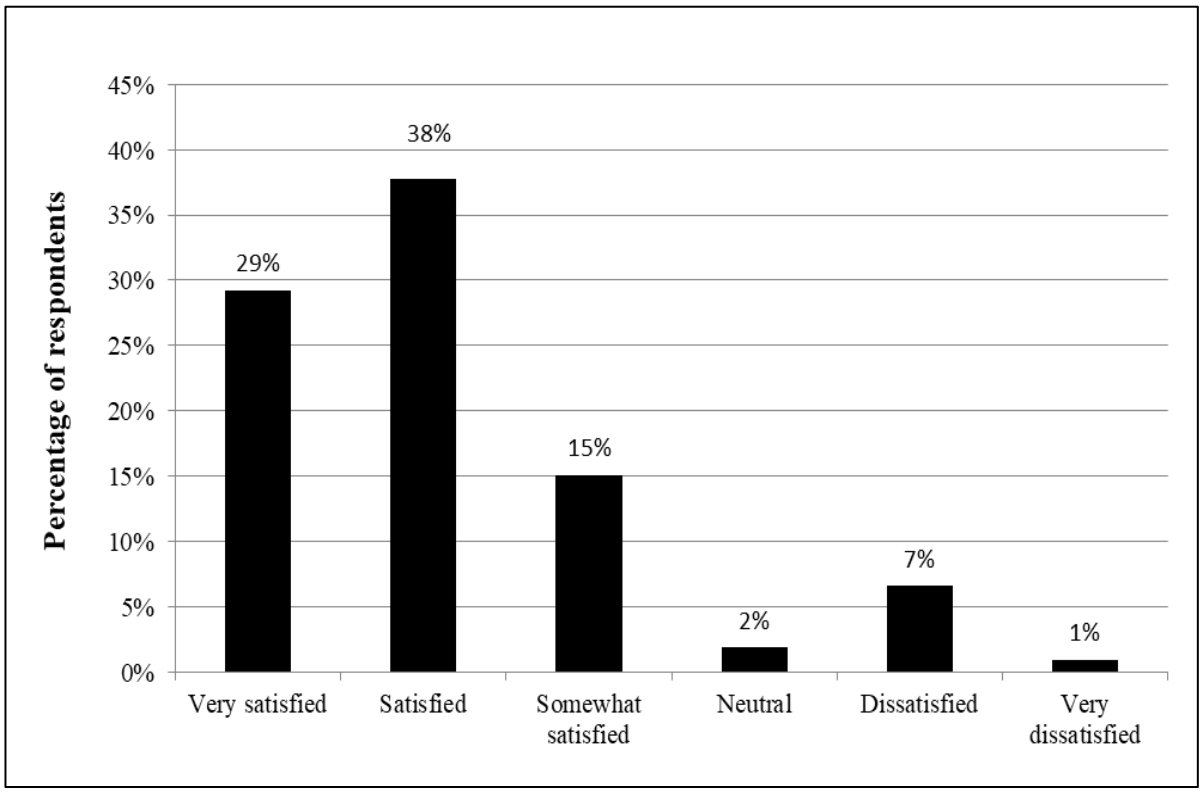

Figure 1. Satisfaction with role (n = 106, incl. 9 "no response")

These overall job satisfaction findings were higher than those reported for other staff in tertiary institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand. In Doyle *et al.*'s (2004) study of academics at Massey University, 62% of respondents reported being satisfied overall with their role with 17% dissatisfied; Sutherland *et al.* (2013) found 75% of early career academics in universities were satisfied with their role; Bentley *et al* (2014) reported a little over half (54.7%) of academic and support staff in tertiary institutions as a whole were satisfied, with 39.3% dissatisfied. Perhaps learning advisors are more satisfied than colleagues in other teaching roles in tertiary institutions.

One needs to be cautious in making comparisons, however. First, Oshagbemi (1999) pointed out that single-item global measures, such as used in this study, tend to overestimate satisfaction; in contrast, Doyle *et al.* (2005) and Sutherland *et al.* (2013) used multi-item measures. Second, and perhaps more significantly, TLAs' higher

reported satisfaction may be an artefact of the age and gender distribution of this study's respondents.[4] Although the existence of simple age and gender associations with job satisfaction in academic cohorts has been questioned, there is evidence that interactions of age and gender with a range of other factors (such as seniority and teaching focus) are associated with higher job satisfaction (e.g. Bender & Heywood, 2006; Oshagbemi, 2003; Kessler, Spector & Gavin, 2014; Webber & Rogers, 2018). The over-representation of older women amongst the survey participants, therefore, may partly explain the higher levels of satisfaction amongst learning advisors.

Overall, there were no links between reported satisfaction and organisational characteristics (such as institution type), and few with individual characteristics. This is not surprising: as Bryson (2004) points out, satisfaction with one's role is less defined by membership of a group than by an individual's construction of their own experience.

The characteristic that appeared most associated with satisfaction was role tenure: the proportion of those in the role five years or fewer who said they were satisfied to some degree (72%) was lower than that amongst the rest of the respondents (92%). While this was not a statistically significant difference, chi-square counts indicated a weighting in the 'first five years in the role' category. Those in the 'first five years' group were also more likely to report intending to leave the role in the next year: 18% in that group were likely to leave, compared with 8% of those in the role more than five years. The finding is, at one level, intuitive: those in their first five years are exploring their affinity with a new role; on the other hand, those who remain in a role for many years are more likely to do so because they are satisfied. Nevertheless, given the size of 'first five years' group (37% of participants), and evidence from the literature that satisfaction is associated with retention, addressing job satisfaction in novice learning advisors would be wise if the profession is to plan for succession.

[4] 82% female; 90% over 40 years of age (see Part 1: Building a profile of our profession, Cameron, 2018b)

What keeps us in the role?

The high overall job satisfaction levels were in contrast to the predominantly negative views of promotion prospects and career opportunities described in part two, 'Acknowledging our contribution'. Why such a discrepancy? The literature suggests the answer lies in the significance of intrinsic rewards in tertiary education; faculty academics are not only highly satisfied with intrinsic features of their role, but also consider those factors highly important (Bexley *et al*., 2013; Houston *et al*., 2006; Machado-Taylor *et al*., 2014). As Houston *et al.* (2006, p.18) conclude, job satisfaction is not simply a response to extrinsic, or objective, facets of one's role, but is influenced by the values the individual brings to that role.

To explore – within participants' own frames of reference – the factors that underlay satisfaction, the survey asked respondents to describe the key rewards of their role; in other words, to explain what kept them in the job. Open-ended questions such as these allow insight into the factors that are most meaningful to an individual and, hence, are likely to have greater influence on overall job satisfaction.

The responses lend weight to the participants' valuing of intrinsic factors. Ninety two TLAs (87% of all participants) answered this question, providing rich qualitative data. Many provided extensive (and, at times, moving) explanations of the aspects that were most motivating, as one response illustrates:

> "Positive interactions with students and the sense of contributing to their learning journey. Constant learning opportunities and professional challenges. I enjoy the variety in the work and the diversity of the students I engage with in classes and one on one encounters. I thought I would miss lecturing but actually I really love the range of opportunities in this role. I also enjoy the camaraderie of the staff and the supportive and welcoming team culture." (Respondent 55)

Two broad clusters of themes were apparent in respondents' descriptions of the role's rewards: the inherent nature of learning advisors' work with students (mentioned by

just over 75% of participants, N=80) and the work environment (mentioned by 35% of participants, N=37). These themes were representative of the range of demographic and institutional sub-groups, and were unrelated to participants' rating of overall job satisfaction.

The first cluster of inter-related themes predominantly centred on the sense of achievement associated with facilitating student (learner, *tauira*) success. There was a strong focus on contributing to a positive change process: participants used words such as 'development', 'progression', and 'transformation' to describe their satisfactions. One expression recurred frequently in this regard: 'making a difference'.

The TLA contribution was regarded as holistic: respondents were motivated by facilitating not only students' academic achievement, but also personal development. Learning advisors wrote of watching learners "grow in confidence and ability" (Respondent 45), and encouraging them to "embrace their culture and identity" (Respondent 10). The rewards came from being part of any learning journey, regardless of whether the student ultimately met an objective measure of success: "I love working with students. Many are working through adversity and it is wonderful to assist them … at whatever level they are currently working at" (Respondent 50).

Participants noted not only the satisfaction of playing a role in individuals' successes, but also the wider impact of their work. The impact on Māori and Pacific communities was highlighted in this regard: "whanau transformation through education" (Respondent 12) and "knowing that I am a facilitator of Pasifika success is a huge motivation" (Respondent 10). Others referred to the 'ripple effect' of their work: one wrote "In teacher education that positive impact will go beyond the University into schools and ECE" (Respondent 14), while others noted their ability to improve their own institution through "educating/developing teaching staff" "Respondent 9), or "influenc[ing] policy" (Respondent 3).

Echoing Malkin and Chanock's (2018) findings in their survey of ALL practitioners in Australia, respondents reported one-to-one and small group work as particularly rewarding: "developing a rapport with learners on a person to person level"

(Respondent 102), as one learning advisor put it. In particular, participants talked of the opportunity individual contact gave them to witness the impact of their role first-hand, especially "when 'light bulb' moments occur" (Respondent 65) or when students leave the learning advisor appointment "with such relief on their faces and in their posture" (Respondent 6). In these comments, the choice of language conveyed certainty TLAs knew they had been of value to students (and, in some instances, staff): many talked of 'seeing' and 'knowing', for example. Personal observations such as these were commonly cited; in contrast only a small number of respondents reported receiving tangible feedback from others recognising their contribution (e.g. "unexpected compliments from students", Respondent 1; or "tutor's feedback on the help I give them", Respondent 94). Evidence of impact, in other words, was more commonly framed as personal observation based on individual interactions rather than direct feedback from others.

As well as the inherent nature of learning advising, rewards came from the work environment, in particular the collegiality, and the autonomy and variety of the role. The importance of collegial relationships was cited frequently. A few mentioned staff in the wider institution in this regard, but most referred specifically to their learning advisor team. Respondents commented on the breadth of skill and experience, the strong work ethic and commitment, and the personal support and encouragement they received from their "passionate" and "inspiring" TLA colleagues. Some included the team leader in their comments[5], describing them as supportive and encouraging mentors, who "advocated tirelessly" (Respondent 24) for the team and created an atmosphere in which learning advisors felt appreciated.

The final rewarding factor was the variety, flexibility and level of autonomy the role allowed. The diversity of students and tasks was motivating: for example, "[the] variety that comes with every student being different and each student's needs being

[5] While it could be argued that comments about 'leaders' or 'managers' do not necessarily constitute a marker of collegiality, responses in this survey were couched in a way that suggested the team leader was considered a 'colleague' as well as a 'manager', so I have chosen to include them in the collegially theme.

different" (Respondent 54). So, too, was the challenge inherent in that diversity: several referred to the rewards of having to "think on one's feet" and, as one put it, "the unpredictability of the work – I never really know what help the student wants till they come to the appointment" (Respondent 22).

Perhaps of greater importance to participants, though, was the autonomy of their role. Learning advisors appreciated the ability to be "innovative", "make changes", "use initiative", and "think outside the box". They spoke of their "autonomy to create programmes that interest [them] and opportunity to develop them to broad success" (Respondent 5) and to "make decisions within [their] field of expertise" Respondent 3). Underlying this satisfaction, for many, was the trust inherent in being granted autonomy: as one said, "I am trusted to do my job, and given the opportunities to experiment with alternative approaches" (Respondent 63).

Learning advisors share many of these perceptions of job rewards with colleagues in other roles in tertiary institutions. Academic language and learning (ALL) staff in Australia have reported similar rewards (Malkin & Chanock, 2018): that is, contributing to student success, personal contact with students, collegiality, and flexibility. Faculty academics and general (professional) staff also report a range of intrinsic motivators, including the high satisfaction gained from 'making a difference' to students and communities, collegiality, and role autonomy (e.g. Bentley *et al*., 2014; Bexley *et al.*, 2013; Graham & Regan, 2016; Sutherland, 2017). It is also worth noting, given the high proportion of female TLAs in this study, that the findings echo those in the literature that indicate women highly value intrinsic features, such as non-pecuniary rewards (Bender & Heywood, 2006; Ward & Sloane, 2000), and roles with high levels of personal interaction, including teaching, mentoring and collegiality (Kessler *et al*., 2014; Webber & Rogers, 2018).

Why might we leave?

The survey participants were as expansive about the challenges of the role as they were about its satisfactions (with comments from 84% of all participants, N=89). Interestingly, while many reported limited opportunities for progression within their institution and pessimism about career opportunities available as a learning advisor (see part 2, 'Acknowledging our contribution', Cameron, 2018b), only two specifically mentioned career barriers in response to the question on challenges. It may be that, having already responded in detail to the question on advancement, respondents chose not to repeat themselves. More likely, given the evidence on the priming effect of prior survey questions (Babbie, 2016), they did not consider lack of promotion or career opportunities sufficiently important to mention as a challenge of the role[6].

Three key sources of frustration were apparent: resourcing pressures (53% of respondents, N=56), lack of institutional recognition of the TLA role or of issues important to learning advisors (29% of respondents, N=31), and job insecurity (12%; N=13). The responses did not appear linked to ratings of overall satisfaction; those who were 'very satisfied', for instance, cited challenges similar to the remainder of participants.

Participants were concerned about the impact of limited resources: lack of staff, time and budget in an environment of increasing student needs in general, and growing numbers of 'high needs' students in particular. Some couched this challenge in terms of not being able to deliver the high standard of service to which they aspired: "reductions in staffing and serious budgetary restrictions … is progressively reducing my team's ability to be effective" (Respondent 8) noted one; "[finding time to] teach students skills and not just put plasters on each assignment" (Respondent 68), said another. Others noted the negative impact on individual learning advisors. In some cases, there was frustration with lack of training, such as support to use new technologies, or the general inability to carve out time for professional development

[6] Evidence from the literature tends to favour the second explanation: prior survey questions on a similar theme tend to increase the likelihood later comments will be consistent with the earlier ones (Babbie, 2016).

and reflective practice. Overwork also created stress: “The intensity of the one on one appointments at busy times [makes it] difficult to keep focused and refresh between appointments when students present with challenging issues and long assignments” (Respondent 55) said one, while another pointed out “chronic under-resourcing … leads to stress and increases the likelihood of errors” (Respondent 3).

Frustration stemmed also from lack of recognition of the nature and contribution of the TLA role and of the importance of learning and teaching in the institution as a whole, echoing many of the comments made in relation to career progression (in part 2: ‘Acknowledging our contribution’, Cameron, 2018b). Participants reported that their institution did not appreciate the actual or potential contribution of learning advisors, especially at the strategic level: “The institution's senior management has little understanding of our role and has not developed any strategic or operational policies or strategies that would allow for meaningful development of our service” (Respondent 8). Some attributed the lack of recognition to the inaccurate characterisation of the TLA role as purely remedial: “we are still regarded by many in the university – staff and students – as a purely remedial unit, only here for the illiterate and second language students. Overcoming this misconception is a huge challenge” (Respondent 44). More often, the issue was cast as one of role constraint: despite TLAs having extensive experience and capabilities, their potential contribution was not widely acknowledged: “the limited definition of the learning advisor role … does not allow me to use all my skills and experience to best help students and the university” (Respondent 101). Respondents also raised concerns about widespread under-valuing of learning and teaching, evidence of a mismatch between organisational or faculty priorities and those of TLAs. Typical comments centred on the reluctance of faculties (or individual teaching staff) to take responsibility for improving their practice and/or collaborating with learning advisors to improve student success.

Finally, not surprisingly given the extent of restructuring identified in this study and in the 2013 manager survey (Cameron & Catt, 2014)[7], job insecurity and change fatigue

[7] In this survey, 22 respondents (21%) reported imminent restructurings and redundancy; in 2013, 65% of managers reported having been restructured in the previous five years (Cameron & Catt, 2014).

were frequently cited as a challenge. Several reported 'constant' restructuring, including one who had experienced five reviews in 11 years. Some noted the challenge was not so much the review itself as the process undertaken: "our institution is hell bent on major change without adequate time to plan and implement changes. …I have little confidence that our well-established centre's good practices will be left intact" (Respondent 37).

As with rewards, there were commonalities between the frustrations identified by learning advisors in this study and those reported by other tertiary staff. Resource pressure and job insecurity feature consistently as a concern amongst staff in tertiary education institutions (e.g. Bentley *et al*., 2014; Houston *et al.,* 2006; Malkin & Chanock, 2018). There is, however, one notable exception: the lack of recognition of one's role *per se*,[8] reported by ALL practitioners in Australia (Malkin & Chanock, 2018) and general staff in New Zealand, Australian and UK universities (Rickets & Pringle, 2014; Graham & Regan, 2016), is not a frustration typically shared by faculty academics.

Will we stay?

It appears from participants' comments that learning advisors in Aotearoa New Zealand are strongly intrinsically, and pro-socially, motivated. The primary reward of the role is the opportunity to make a contribution to individuals and communities by facilitating student success. That success is viewed holistically; it is, in other words, not limited to students' academic achievement but also encompasses personal development. Individual engagement is important, with both students and colleagues. So, too, are the variety and autonomy inherent in the role. At the same time, there are undoubtedly

[8] While the concept 'lack of recognition' appears frequently in studies of job satisfaction amongst faculty academics (e.g. Bentley *et a*l., 2013; Bryson, 2004; Houston *et al.,* 2006), the usage relates to the individual's performance or contribution rather than the role itself.

significant frustrations: resource pressure and the consequent impact on service delivery and individual job stress; institutional lack of recognition of the TLA role or importance of learning and teaching; and job insecurity.

Studies of those working in tertiary education consistently report the primacy of intrinsic motivation in determining job satisfaction. Learning advisors in Aotearoa New Zealand appear no different: despite the frustrations, respondents' overall satisfaction was high, and relatively few in this study said they intended leaving the role in the following year. As one participant, summing up the views of many in this survey, commented, "I could earn more money elsewhere, but the job satisfaction is too high to trade in" (Respondent 24).

Nonetheless, reported high satisfaction should not be grounds for complacency. As noted earlier, the over-representation of women and older individuals may have inflated the measures, and it is possible the more recent recruits (i.e. those in their first five years in the role) are less satisfied than others. Perhaps even more important, maintaining high levels of role satisfaction depends on the balance between the rewards of the role and the inevitable frustrations. Intrinsic motivators typically compensate for dissatisfaction with extrinsic factors, but, as Kinman (2016) notes, it is not yet known at what point intrinsic factors cease to provide that protective function. It is essential, therefore, to pay attention to a fundamental tension that underlies these findings: some of the features that give learning advisors most satisfaction are also those most under threat within institutions.

The divergence is most obvious in relation to individual work with students. Learning advisors highly value the holistic nature of their role and the opportunity for individual contact, the two facets being closely intertwined. In this regard, responses indicated that participants had internalised the Māori proverb '*He aha te mea nui o te ao, He tangata, he tangata, he tangata*'[9]. One-to-one teaching, however, is in a precarious position, increasingly under pressure as tertiary institutions strive to meet economic imperatives (Cameron & Catt, 2014).

[9] What is the most important thing in the world? It is people, people, people.

As a profession we must, therefore, convince institutions of the value of individual teaching if that mode is to be preserved. Herein lies a related tension: how do we evaluate the impact of TLA work with students? In this study, respondents' comments suggested their sense of achievement was largely validated through personal observation. That evaluation – on its own – is unlikely to convince institutional management, who are increasingly focused on countable indicators (Sutherland, 2017). Can learning advisors reconcile the institution's preferred measures with the nature of the TLA role? One-to-one learning advice consultations may not lend themselves to the usual metrics. Nor might the goals of personal or community development: increased student confidence was an often-cited criterion of success, for example, but one difficult to measure if not accompanied by academic grades. Nevertheless, there are evidence-based indicators available that are consistent with the modes and goals of teaching in which learning advisors engage (for example, those described by Reid & Gao, 2015). The profession should continue to develop these alternative metrics and promote them to institutional management.

A mismatch between the aspects of the role that learning advisors prize and those that institutions consider important not only threatens rewards but also reinforces learning advisors' belief that their role is not recognised by institutions. That belief is likely to pose a significant risk to retention in the profession, as the absence of 'esteem' has been found to predict intention to leave a role (Kinman, 2016). Resolving disparities such as those above, therefore, will play a key role in maintaining learning advisors' high role satisfaction.

Conclusions

A decade ago, Carter and Trafford (2008) noted that much discussion amongst the learning advisor profession centred on TLAs "legitimising who they are" (p.41). That discussion persists, arguably with greater urgency given the highly dynamic tertiary education environment since then.

Despite strong interest in clarifying our professional identity, however, there is little empirical data available. Research by Cameron and Catt (2008; 2014) provided a 'snapshot' of learning advisors and their role within institutions from the managers' perspective, but the TLA's voice was missing. This project has aimed to fill that gap.

The results of the project have been presented as a series of separate parts. The first part (Cameron, 2018a) provided a profile of the demographic characteristics, prior career experience and qualifications of TLAs in Aotearoa New Zealand. Learning advisors, it concluded, are highly qualified and experienced, but the profession would benefit from improved demographic representativeness and formal peer recognition of TLA core competencies. Part two (Cameron, 2018b) focused on the acknowledgement of learning advisors' contribution to learning, teaching and research, through salaries, progression and promotion, and opportunities for research activity. The findings suggest the contribution of many learning advisors to learning, teaching and scholarship, and the consequent opportunities for career progression, are constrained by barriers entrenched in organisational policies. Finally, this third part of the paper, has examined job satisfaction. Most learning advisors, in the words of one participant (Respondent 89), gain "immense personal satisfaction" from their work, but there are inevitable challenges and the maintenance of some rewards of the role may be in jeopardy.

Underpinning the three-part findings of this Special Issue (Cameron, 2018a, b, c) are two inter-related themes: identity and role recognition. There appears to be a dissonance between the identity TLAs have constructed for themselves and the identity institutions have assumed for them. Learning advisors view themselves as scholarly professionals, central to learning and teaching in the institution; conversely, in many institutions, both organisational culture and policy position them otherwise. Consequently, many TLAs believe that their role is under-appreciated – even invisible – within institutions.

These tensions have significant implications for the sustainability and well-being of the profession, since job satisfaction is associated with recruitment and retention.

Nevertheless, as a profession we have the opportunity to explore a number of initiatives. A professional recognition, or accreditation, scheme would provide meaningful peer-validation of identity. It could be used to educate institutions about TLA competencies and attributes, and make the role more visible for recruitment purposes. We should also investigate alternatives to the current binary 'academic/general' employment agreement arrangements. The characteristics encapsulated in each of these different agreements, and the goals on which they focus, do not necessarily match the TLA identity and role emphasis; perhaps a different framework would better recognise the role's breadth of potential as well as provide more meaningful career pathways. An accreditation scheme might become part of that solution if it could be integrated into progression and promotion processes. Perhaps most importantly, we should continue to explicitly promote to our institutions our wealth of experience and qualifications, the contribution we make to learning, teaching and research and the rationale for our modes of work, supported by evidence of its impact. In doing so we will need to find frameworks that suit the institutions', as well as our own, values.

In exploring issues of identity and recognition, we might also learn from research on other tertiary sector cohorts outside the traditional academic role. Learning advisors are not alone in believing their role is insufficiently recognised: it is a perception shared by teaching-only academics (Bennett *et al.*, 2018) and by general staff (Graham & Regan, 2016; Rickets & Pringle, 2014). In Bennett *et al.*'s (2018) study of teaching-only academics in Australian universities, for example, many of the challenges identified were strikingly similar to those facing learning advisors in Aotearoa New Zealand. Bennett *et al.*'s model (p.280), conceptualising the cultural change necessary to move to an environment in which teaching roles are more highly valued, could usefully inform the discussion on acknowledgement of the TLA role.

Further research is needed to inform these initiatives. The Association could take responsibility for regular monitoring of the profession, to continue and expand the benchmarking work begun in 2008. ATLAANZ could also encourage more in-depth investigation of some of the issues scoped in this paper. It would be useful, for

instance, to examine existing employment agreements and related policies in more detail; to benchmark salaries with other comparable roles; and to interview learning advisors, particularly those in their first five years in the role, to learn more about why people enter the role and what distinguishes those who stay from those who leave.

This 'Identity and Opportunities' project began by asking questions about the well-being of the learning advisor profession in Aotearoa New Zealand. In essence, it sought to examine the sustainability and resilience of the profession by exploring 'the lived experience' of the TLA role. The findings suggest learning advisors are highly satisfied with their role. There are a number of factors that may jeopardise that satisfaction but, as a profession, we have the knowledge, the motivation, and the opportunity to explore solutions.

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