

Tertiary Learning Advisors in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Part Two: Acknowledging Our Contribution

Caitriona Cameron
(Past President of ATLAANZ)
Lincoln University

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

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

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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 (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).

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

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 (Cameron & Catt, 2014) 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 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, 'Building a Profile of Our Profession' (Cameron, 2018b), as well as describing the project, provides an overview of TLAs in Aotearoa New Zealand. In this second part, 'Acknowledging Our Contribution', the focus is on how institutions recognise the contribution of TLAs to learning, teaching and research. Part three, 'Why do We Stay? Rewards and Challenges' (Cameron, 2018c) 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 improvement.

Acknowledging our contribution

Part one of this series, 'Building a Profile of our Profession', argued that learning advisors in Aotearoa New Zealand are highly qualified and bring to the role a diverse

range of relevant prior experience. However, there are challenges for the profession – poor demographic representativeness and no formal peer recognition of TLA core competencies. These challenges need to be addressed to recruit and retain a sustainable professional cohort. This paper, Part two, continues the discussion by focusing on how institutions recognise the contribution of TLAs to learning, teaching and research, in particular through salaries, progression and promotion, and opportunities for research activity.

Learning Advisor Salaries

The distribution of salaries in the 2014 survey findings [See Appendix] was slightly skewed by the inclusion of data from those in a role with a significant level of management, supervision and/or coordination responsibility (7 respondents); salary bands for all but one of that group were above the mid-point (approximately \$70,000). To provide a more accurate description of TLA salaries, data from respondents describing their roles as ‘solely’ or ‘mainly’ management, supervision and/or coordination have been excluded from this analysis of salaries.

Amongst those describing their role as solely, mainly or equally² TLA, full-time equivalent (FTE) salaries spanned a wide range in 2014 – from \$30,000 to above \$110,000 – but almost two thirds were paid between \$60,000 and \$80,000 FTE (see Figure 1). The spread of salaries was consistent with the scales cited by learning centre managers in 2013 (i.e. \$38,000 to \$102,000) see Cameron and Catt, 2014; it appears, therefore, that institutions are using the full range of potential salaries, contrary to the fears expressed by 2014 ATLAANZ conference attendees that no TLAs were being paid in the upper deciles of the scales.

In 2013, some learning centre managers suggested salaries were being augmented by bonuses for those performing at a consistently high level (Cameron & Catt, 2014), but there was no evidence in the current survey that this option was extensively used.

While some TLAs reported receiving payments for additional hours, higher

² i.e. working 50% as TLA and 50% in management

responsibilities, or study expenses, none³ reported a performance-based bonus arrangement.

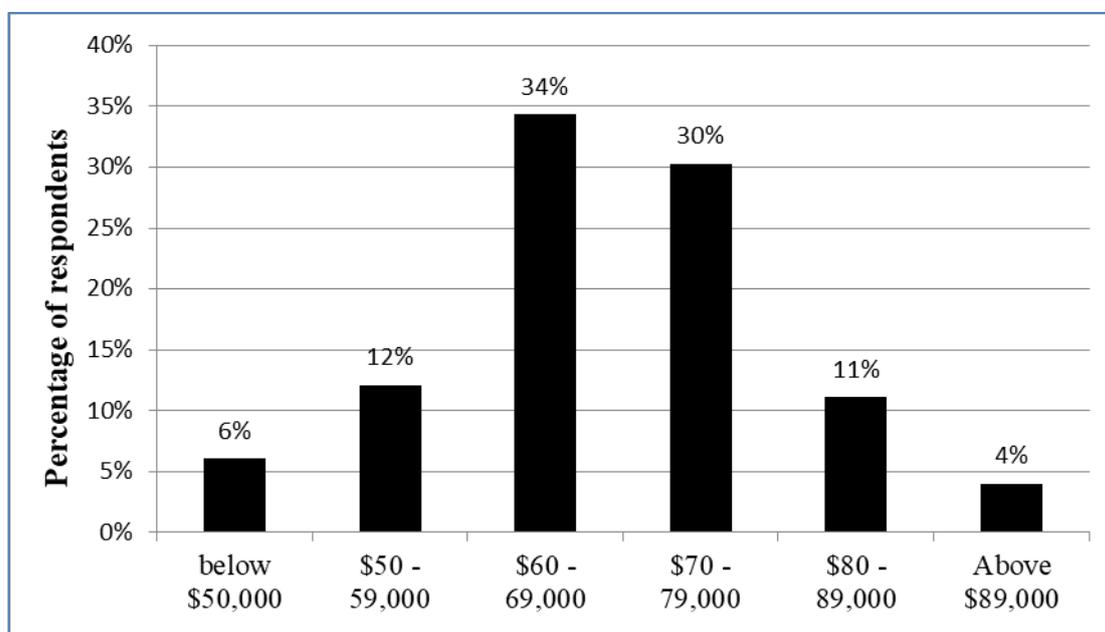


Figure 1. 2014 range of salaries for those in roles described as ‘solely/mainly/equally⁴’ TLA (n= 99, incl 3 “no response”. Categories below \$50,000, and above \$90,000, have been aggregated to protect respondent privacy)

Few individual factors were found to be clearly associated with salary. As might be expected, salaries tended to increase with the length of role tenure as a learning advisor, and with age (which could be considered a proxy for years of work experience). There appeared little direct link between salary and qualifications, although a lack of a postgraduate qualification may have created a salary barrier, since few with a Bachelor’s degree earned more than \$80,000. However, having a postgraduate qualification did not guarantee a higher salary – those with Master’s and PhDs were represented throughout the full range of salary bands in both ITPs and universities.

³ Only one (‘mainly management’) respondent in the total sample reported receiving a performance-based bonus arrangement.

⁴ ‘Equally’ refers to those respondents employed 50% as TLA and 50% managerial role.

Apart from management responsibilities, being research active was associated with higher salaries: 60% of TLAs who reported engaging in research were paid above the mid-point (compared to 29% of non-researchers). This pattern was similar in ITPs and universities.

Overall, the factor most clearly associated with FTE salary levels was the type of institution. Learning advisors employed in universities were more likely to be paid in the higher salary ranges (See Figure 2.) Half (53%) of university respondents (without significant management responsibilities) were paid in the \$60,000 to \$80,000 FTE range, and 29% were paid \$80,000 and above. In contrast, the majority (80%) of those working in ITPs were clustered in the \$60,000-\$80,000 range, with few paid above \$80,000. Those in the wānanga (data not included) were clustered in \$50,000 to \$79,000 range.

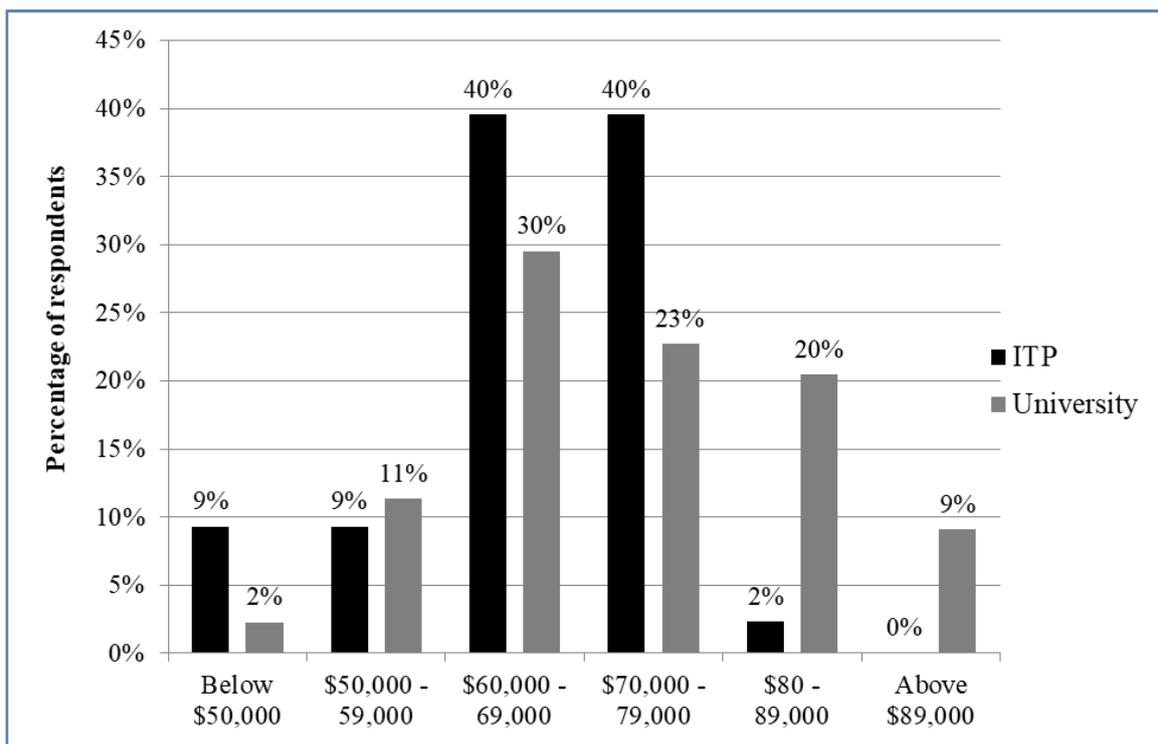


Figure 2. 2014 salary ranges in ITPs and universities for those in roles described as 'solely/mainly/equally' TLAs (n=87, incl. 3 "no response")

Salary was also linked to type of employment agreement. As noted in Part One, learning advisors are employed on a range of agreements: academic, general

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(sometimes called ‘professional’ or ‘allied’) and ‘other’ (usually individual agreements). Within these broad agreements, some learning advisors are paid on the same scale as non-TLA colleagues in their institution (i.e. faculty teaching staff⁵ for those on academic agreements; or library/administrative staff for those on general agreements); some others are on a scale specifically for TLAs.

In universities, learning advisors employed on academic contracts tended to be in higher salary bands than those on general contracts: 48% of learning advisors on academic contracts were paid \$80,000 FTE and above, but only 20% of those on general contracts were in that range. As only five university participants were employed on academic scales specifically designed for TLAs, it was not possible to compare their salaries with those employed on the same scale as faculty colleagues. Amongst participants on general contracts, there appeared little difference between the salaries of those on a separate TLA scale and those on the same scale as administrative or library staff.

In the ITPs, more than 80% of respondents were employed on an academic agreement; hence, it was not possible to meaningfully compare salaries of those on academic and general agreements in ITPs. However, within the group employed on academic contracts, TLAs on the same scale as their faculty colleagues were more likely than those on separate scales to be paid above the mid-point: 60% were in salary ranges above \$69,000, compared with 20% of those on separate scales.

Salary, *per se*, was not reported as a significant source of discontent: only five participants said their salaries were too low, comparing rates unfavourably with those in the state school sector or similarly qualified staff elsewhere in their own institutions. It was beyond the scope of this project to test this perception by examining salaries of those in similar roles, so no conclusions can be drawn about salary adequacy. Nevertheless, it would be worth exploring the link between salary and type of employment agreement in more depth. The survey data suggests salaries are lower for TLAs on general, rather than academic, agreements. Given that more institutions are

⁵ The terms ‘faculty teaching staff’ or ‘faculty academics’ have been used throughout this paper to describe tertiary institution staff engaged in teaching programmes – i.e. ‘tutors’ in ITPs, ‘lecturers’ in universities, ‘kaiako’ in Wānanga.

employing TLAs on general contracts (Cameron & Catt, 2008; 2014; Malkin & Chanock, 2018), there may be increasingly downward pressure on learning advisor salaries in the future.

Progression and promotion

Progression procedures

The 2014 survey focused on salary increases as a concrete way of illustrating formal advancement within institutions. Specifically, participants were asked how their salary increases were determined: through automatic yearly increase (with or without some form of appraisal), an application process, or some other procedure.

In all types of institution, the most common salary progression or promotion process available to participants was by application, or a combination of application and automatic increases (58% of respondents, N=62); a further 24% (N=25) reported their progression was based on automatic annual increases alone (with or without performance review). For a small group (13%; N=15), however, there was no clear merit-based system: these learning advisors only received institution-wide cost of living increases negotiated by the union, or sporadic increases solely at their managers' discretion.

Promotion applications

As a way of examining advancement through the most common pathway, participants were asked about their success rate in applying for promotion.

Respondents who had applied for promotion in the past five years indicated how many times their applications had been successful. Overall, 42% (N=44) had applied for promotion during this period; just under half had applied only once, and the remainder two to five times. Almost 60% reported being successful in every application, 23% experienced mixed success, and 14% reported never having been successful. Since approximately half of those applying had done so only once in the past five years, the

‘always successful’ group was heavily weighted towards promotion every five years; nevertheless, 20% of applicants were successful on multiple occasions.

There was no apparent link between either application or success rates and organisational (e.g. institution type, employment agreement type, contract type) or demographic characteristics.

Those who had not applied for promotion or progression were asked why not. Just under a third said progression was automatic or based on performance appraisal, or they had not been in the position long enough; another six said they were content with their current status and pay and had no wish to apply for progression or promotion. The remainder cited a range of organisational barriers. As their comments echoed those made about promotion opportunities in general, these issues will be discussed in the next section.

Perceptions of progression and promotion opportunities

All participants, regardless of whether they had applied for promotion, were invited to comment on the advancement processes and TLA career opportunities within their institution. Eighty TLAs (75% of all participants), representative of all age groups, institution types and role tenures, commented on one or both of these issues.

Approximately 12% (N=13) said they had no experience of promotion procedures in their institution and were unsure what opportunities existed. The remaining responses constituted a rich set of data clustered into two recurrent themes: organisational culture (e.g. management support) and policy (e.g. promotion process and criteria).

A small group of respondents (N=12) was positive about their own promotion experience and/or the career pathways for learning advisors in their institution. Several described a constructive organisational culture, noting the strong support they received from managers. Others described organisational policy measures as “open and fair” or “robust” (even if requiring considerable work and resulting in small increases), and outlined the clear pathways available.

For the most part, though, participants' perceptions of the opportunities for advancement within their institution were negative (N=55), particularly amongst the ITPs. The dissatisfaction was unrelated to promotion success – a similar proportion of successful applicants and those who were either unsuccessful or had not applied reported barriers to advancement. The lack of a link between promotion success and satisfaction may appear counter-intuitive, but is not unusual; Doyle, Wylie and Else (2005), for instance, noted a similar phenomenon amongst faculty academics, with application success mostly unrelated to perceptions of barriers to promotion.

Organisational culture barriers (such as insufficient management support, invisibility of the TLA role, or over-work) were mentioned by many. Some said their managers were unsupportive, or actively discouraged them from applying: “The Institute think I’m overpaid for what I do” (Respondent 23) summed up the view of several. Others talked more generally of a lack of understanding amongst management, or promotion committees, about what the learning advisor role entailed: “The review process was conducted by faculty-based academics who were very pleasant but totally ignorant of the type of work I did” (Respondent 3). While few cited workload as the *sole* reason for their dissatisfaction with the promotion process, the sheer amount of time and effort involved in applications was clearly a frustration; one, for example, commented “the process seems extremely time consuming and I already feel overloaded with work, study and family commitments” (Respondent 81). It was not only the applicant’s time commitment that was of concern: as one respondent noted, “Many advisors feel diffident about soliciting supporting comments from multiple people because of the time involved for all concerned versus the financial return” (Respondent 28).

Similar frustrations related to organisational culture have been reported by faculty colleagues: for example, in Doyle *et al.*'s (2005) study of academics' perceptions of promotion, the two most common work-related barriers were lack of time and lack of managerial support. However, these academics rarely mentioned the *policy* barriers described by learning advisors. Policy barriers were the most frequently cited (36 respondents) in this study, in particular salary scales and criteria for advancement. Some TLAs reported there was no (transparent) progression system in place. Others noted that scales were extremely restricted, with ceilings many learning advisors had

already reached, or seemingly insurmountable bars to the next scale; for example, one learning advisor said that “although I was told when I applied for the job that I was able to apply for promotion ... no learning advisors have moved beyond the top of the academic staff salary scale” (Respondent 55).

Equally challenging was the nature of criteria for advancement, particularly reported by those on the same employment scales as their academic faculty colleagues. Concerns were expressed about the lack of recognition of learning advisors’ particular contributions, and the difficulty of meeting promotion criteria tailored to the course-related responsibilities of their faculty colleagues. This frustration was evident in many of the comments; for example:

The paperwork drove me nuts in terms of defining measureable evidence/standards from a learning advisor view versus students attaining a qualification. How does one KNOW students have achieved a required standard due specifically to an advisor/student relationship/collaboration – unless [students] choose to share results? (Respondent 93)

[The promotion system] is intended for staff teaching within degree programmes, so I don't know how to make my work ‘fit’ with the criteria, e.g. providing teaching evaluations and research outcomes, when my role is not research active and not evaluated through the course appraisals systems. (Respondent 81)

It is very difficult for advisors to gain promotion ... One of the reasons is the lack of recognised teaching experience. (Respondent 92)

In the previous study of Aotearoa New Zealand learning centres (Cameron & Catt, 2014), manager-respondents were divided on the most suitable contract type for TLAs. Some questioned whether being on an academic agreement conferred any meaningful benefit and considered that the promotion criteria disadvantaged learning advisors. Others believed academic contracts highlighted TLAs’ professional status and argued that learning advisors should be active in the full range of activities required of their faculty colleagues and, therefore, eligible to meet promotion criteria. In the current study, a similar division of opinion was apparent, but responses tend to lend weight to the view that being on an academic employment agreement does not necessarily ensure recognition of learning advisors’ contribution to learning and teaching.

In general, survey participants painted a bleak picture of career prospects. Under half of all respondents (N=48) reported any recognition of seniority in their learning centre (through title, salary and/or role), and few mentioned the various grades available in the academic collective agreements of most ITPs (i.e. ASM – SASM – PASM) and universities (Tutor – Senior Tutor; Lecturer – Senior Lecturer), suggesting such pathways were not regarded as realistic by most respondents. Many noted that the only opportunities for career development involved moving into management or another role (such as faculty academic). They may not all have stated it as expressively as the respondent who declared, “Redundancy, retirement or death are the only events likely to change the status of a learning advisor here” (Respondent 79), but the sentiment was widely shared.

Opportunities for research activity

A key stress point was engagement in research, seen by many in the profession as integral to their role and identity, but frequently neither encouraged nor supported by employing institutions.

There has been a growing expectation among the TLA community that members will engage in research, particularly (but not exclusively) into learning and teaching, an expectation explicitly included in the *ATLAANZ Professional Practice Document* (2012). Two key rationales have been advanced: being a research-informed discipline both improves practice and strengthens professional status (see, for example, Manalo, 2008; Samuels, 2013). These themes were echoed in the 2013 survey of learning centres (Cameron & Catt, 2014), with several managers arguing that research activity not only ensured evidence-based practice, but also enhanced TLAs’ credibility with faculty colleagues.

It was clear from the managers’ responses that research activity amongst TLAs had strengthened over the preceding five years: in the 2013 survey 80% of managers reported that ‘some or all’ TLAs in their centre were research active (Cameron & Catt, 2014), a significant increase from the previous study (2008) when the figure was 55%.

What was not clear from the centre-level studies, however, was how many individuals were research active.

In this current survey, approximately half the participants (53%) said they had been active in research (mostly focused on learning and teaching) in the previous five years. There were clear institutional differences: fewer respondents in the ITPs (43%) reported being research active than in the universities (60%), and those who were research active in ITPs were more likely to be *required* to do so as part of the role (Figure 3). Six of the nine wānanga respondents were research active, two of whom required to do so.

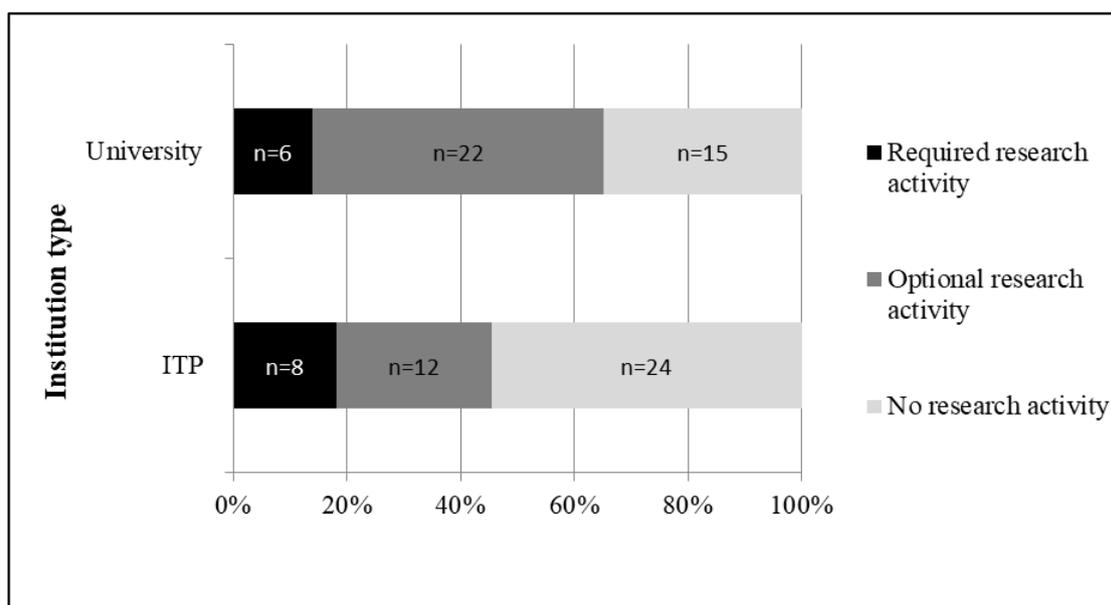


Figure 3. Research activity for ITP and university respondents (n=94, incl 7 “no response”)

While just over half of all respondents described themselves as ‘research active’, a higher proportion (68%) reported having presented at a conference or published during the previous five years. This discrepancy in responses may be the result of unclear wording of the survey question. Alternatively, it may reflect the contested nature of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) and, in particular, the debate on whether SoTL should be considered research (e.g. see Chalmers, 2010). In other words, some respondents may have subscribed to Brew’s (2011, p.3) argument that the “the ‘show

and tell' type of contribution to discussions in some conferences", while enlightening, is not research.

There were institutional differences in the type of research outputs. TLAs in ITPs and universities had a similar number of outputs per researcher; those employed in universities, however, were more likely to have published in peer-reviewed conference proceedings or journals, or written monographs or book chapters (43% in universities; 19% in ITPs).

Despite the levels of research and scholarship, institutional support for the activity was not automatic. Just under 40% (N=22) of those describing themselves as research active had a formal time allowance: 13 had a regular time allowance (varying from half a day a week to 0.3 of full time); others could use professional development or study leave for research time, or were paid additional contract hours. More than half, however, said their research occurred only during low demand periods of the year ("I squeeze it in" being a common refrain) or undertaken in evenings, weekends and annual leave. While a similar proportion of all researchers in ITPs and universities said they were given some time allocation for research, amongst the subset who were *required* to include research in their role, those in the ITPs were less likely to have any time provided (three of the eight, compared with all six in the university group). This finding is somewhat surprising and, if accurate, concerning.

Given research activity is usually optional, and time allocation not guaranteed, the proportion of TLAs who are research active shows a strong commitment. It was clear from responses that the potential is even higher – 75% of respondents said they were, *or* would like to be, involved in research. The barriers to doing so, in some cases, stemmed from organisational culture. Some respondents attributed the poor institutional support to a lack of recognition of learning advisors' skills and contribution, with one noting a manager had specifically vetoed the suggestion that TLAs carry out research. Others noted workload barriers, a concern shared by many faculty academic colleagues (for example, see Sutherland et al, 2013). The most commonly cited barrier, however, related to organisational policy, in particular the omission of research activity (whether voluntary or obligatory) from contractual

arrangements. This omission was not simply a function of the type of employment agreement: a similar number of participants employed on general and academic agreements noted that their contractual arrangement did not include research. In other words, the detail of position descriptions, rather than the broad academic-general classification, facilitated or hindered research activity. It is probably not surprising, then, that several respondents attributed their ability to complete research almost exclusively to having “a very supportive manager”.

The findings in this survey, and in Cameron and Catt (2014), indicate research activity is valued by both learning centre managers and individual learning advisors, and has the potential to grow. There appear two barriers to that occurring. The first, evident in the responses to the survey, stems from contractual arrangements and is particularly pronounced in ITPs, where learning advisors were less research active and possibly less supported even when they were. If research amongst the TLA profession is to grow (or simply be maintained), the value of such activity will need to be recognised in contracts and position descriptions.

The second barrier, not specifically addressed in the survey, relates to the nature of research activity. The literature examining how institutions conceptualise and reward the scholarship of teaching and learning indicates that some consider SoTL equivalent to research, while others regard it as ‘second class’ (e.g. Chalmers, 2010; Vardi & Quinn, 2011). As learning and teaching practitioners, TLAs are likely to be researching in the area of SoTL and, hence, may be potentially disadvantaged. Institutions, therefore, need to make explicit what scholarly activity is recognised and rewarded, and ensure promotion committees are capable of appropriately evaluating SoTL contributions (Chalmers, 2010; Fanghanel, Pritchard, Potter & Wisker, 2016).

Conclusions

How do learning advisors in Aotearoa New Zealand perceive their professional status and career opportunities? Do they believe their contribution to learning, teaching and research is recognised and rewarded by their institutions? Do they see a clear, realistic career pathway? These are some of the questions underlying this paper.

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Previous surveys of learning centre managers (Cameron & Catt, 2008, 2014) presented TLAs as a community of highly skilled professionals, contributing to learning, teaching and research within their institutions. Those surveys, however, provided little data about institutional recognition and reward of that role. Absent, too, was the individual learning advisor's perspective. The current project was designed to address that gap.

In this survey, few participants specifically indicated they were dissatisfied with their salaries. However, there was evidence that learning advisors' salaries are lower on general than on academic employment agreements. Given the trend towards employing TLAs on general agreements, salaries may come under pressure in the future.

Of greater concern was the limited opportunity for progression. The responses suggest that – for many learning advisors in Aotearoa New Zealand – there are significant barriers to a career pathway within their institution. Some impediments, such as workload or perceived lack of managerial support, are grounded in organisational culture and may not be unique to TLAs. More significant are the policy barriers and, in particular, those related to the employment agreements under which TLAs are employed. These organisational arrangements limit both the opportunity to engage in research and (independently, or as a consequence) promotion prospects.

The findings evoke a long-standing discussion amongst learning advisors about alignment in tertiary institutions: should we be considered 'academic' or 'general' staff? This conversation is not simply about salary and conditions, but reflects a fundamental concern regarding professional identity. The language a profession uses to describe itself goes to the heart of its identity. At an ATLAANZ conference in 2007, for instance, Crozier argued that the work of tertiary learning advisors was "academic, scholarly, professional and integral to teaching and learning in tertiary education today" (Crozier, 2007, p.11). It is a description that has been often echoed, including in the association's professional practice document (Association of Tertiary Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand, 2012). It is not surprising, then, that the type of employment agreement should be contentious.

Nevertheless, focusing the pursuit of professional recognition on the simple dichotomy of academic versus general contracts may not be profitable. The experience in this

study suggests organisational arrangements are disadvantaging learning advisors in both classifications, as we often do not ‘fit’ the institution’s perception of either an ‘academic’ or ‘general’ staff member. Perhaps the discussion needs to be reframed: i.e. moving from a focus on the binary of academic versus general to identifying the specific contractual features that best suit the skills, knowledge and role of TLAs, in order to enable appropriate reimbursement and meaningful career pathways.

The situation in which learning advisors find themselves – *vis à vis* employment agreements and associated career barriers – is not unexpected. What happens when a ‘new’ profession enters an ‘old’ institution, one in which cultures and systems have developed over decades to suit the existing players? Ideally, a clear change management processes should be in place to facilitate the integration, but it seems the TLA role has been most often fitted into existing structures and policies in an *ad hoc* manner. The result is a mismatch between the identity learning advisors have constructed over the past two to three decades, and established organisational arrangements.

The challenge now is to explore ways in which institutional arrangements, such as contract types and promotion policies, can better reflect the learning advisor role. A framework with greater consonance would increase TLAs’ confidence that there is a realistic career pathway.

Acknowledgements

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