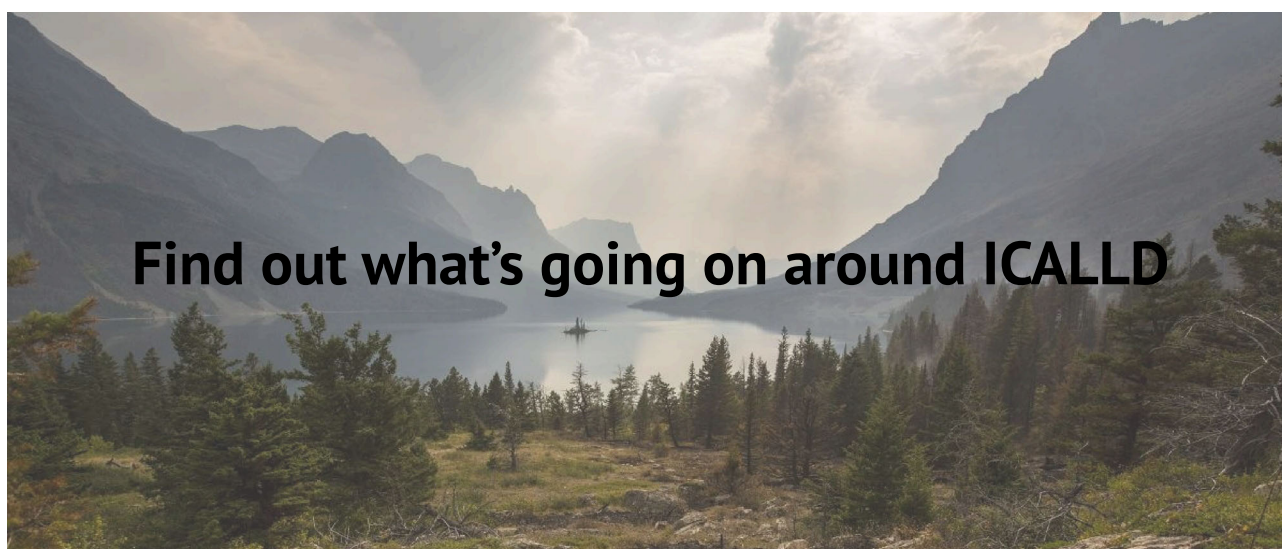


International Consortium of Academic Language and Learning Developers

Community Blog



Symposium over time 2025

Tracing the ripples to make waves: The challenge of generating meaningful evidence of our impact

Rachael Harding & Dr Mark Bassett, Auckland University of Technology, Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau

16 May 2025

The waves of change

Higher education is constantly experiencing extreme waves of change. Rather than sandcastles inevitably washed away by these waves, learning advisors/developers/strategists (from here, LAs) ought to instead be making waves of our own. In a recent facilitated discussion, seventeen participants

(from a range of institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Scotland, and the UK) explored and compared current and potential methods for collecting evidence of the impact of our practice, as well as who this evidence is reported to and how. In this blog post, we present a summary of what participants shared.

Like surfers waiting for the ‘perfect set’ of waves, the group collectively felt that there could be more effective methods and collection of evidence to demonstrate the impact of our work. For more sustainable and long-term success, rather than focusing on immediate results or numbers, most participants felt a need for longer term evidence collection involving enhanced collaborations and longitudinal studies.

Current evidence types

Figures 1 and 2 show that – despite participants mentioning feelings of dissatisfaction with feedback mechanisms, uptake and feedback fatigue – student and staff perceptions were by far the most common methods of collecting evidence through questionnaires and feedback (similar to the study by [Bassett & Macnaught, 2024](#)). Perceptions dwarfed all other forms of evidence, with the next most common being online content usage, and then student attendance. Other forms of evidence, such as changes in student writing, academic performance, and course completion/retention were negligible.

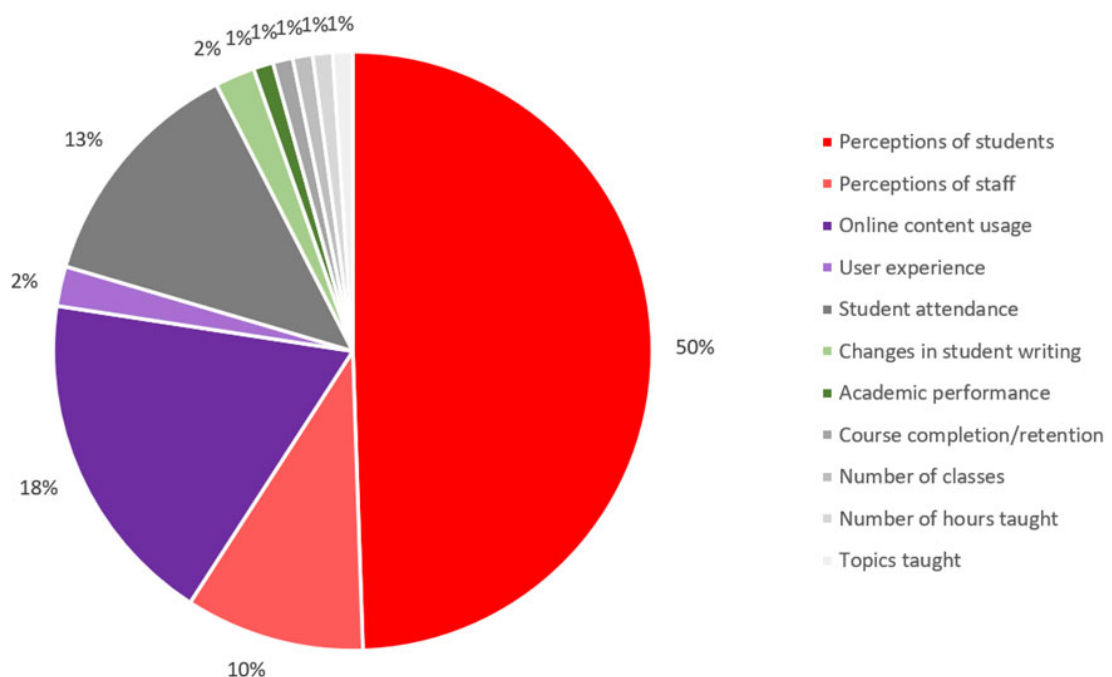


Figure 1: Types of reports impacts

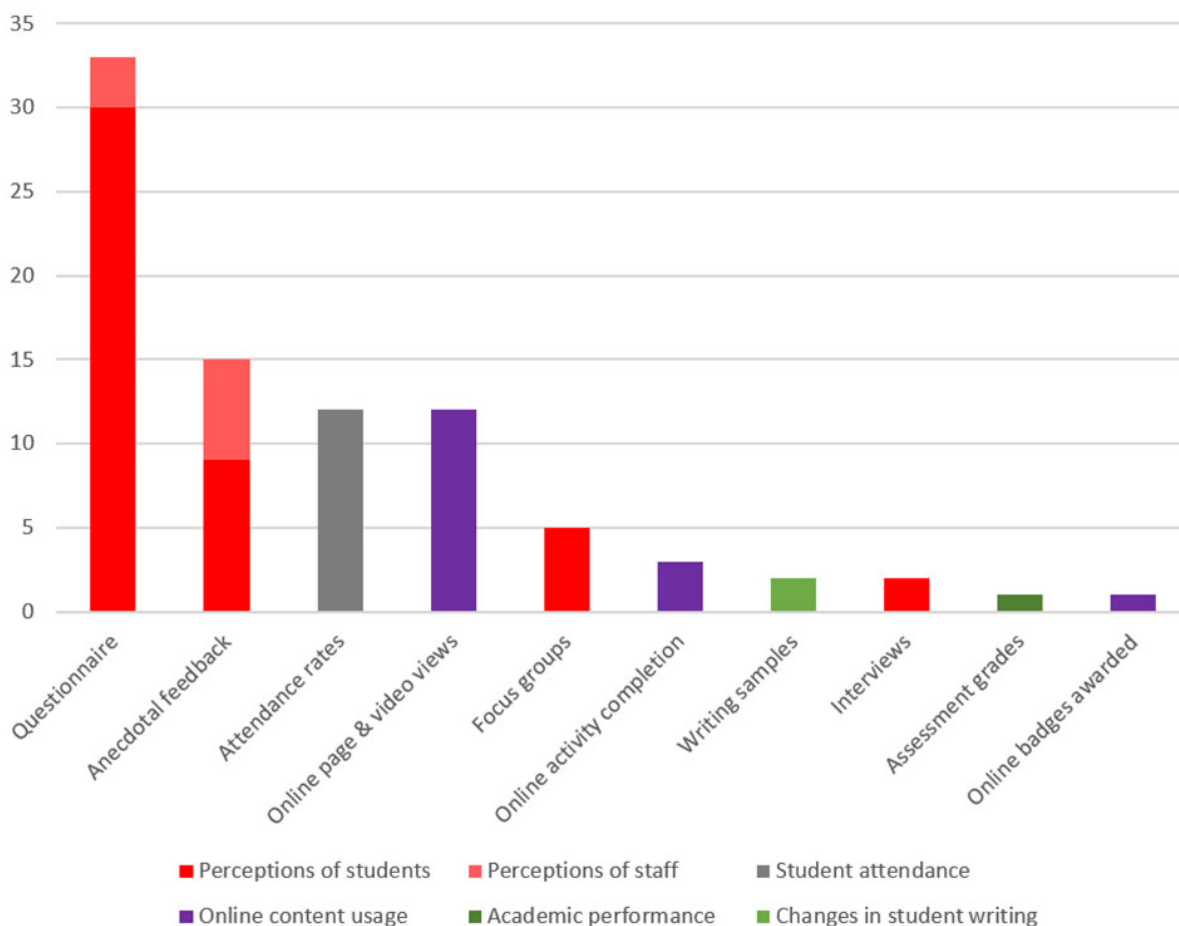


Figure 2: Data types used as evidence of impact

Collection of evidence was typically conducted by individuals within departments and sometimes through other institutional teams such as an Assurance of Learning team. Common difficulties included not only how to report certain types of activities or feedback but also the receptiveness to it. In some cases, there was no systematic collection or reporting of evidence, resulting in individuals doing it by themselves to gauge their impact more meaningfully than institutionally required to do so.

In terms of reporting (Table 1), the majority of reporting was done within departments and teams. Reporting to faculty and upwards within institutions occurred less frequently:

Reporting to:	Number of activities reported
Department	30
Institution	14
Team	13
Faculty	9
Individual	4
Government	1

Table 1: Reporting

As shown in Table 2, the dissemination of evidence of impact to the wider community (for example, by publishing evaluations of practice or research articles, or presenting at conferences, etc.) was not mentioned by many participants.

Some participants stated they conduct research, but did not specify how they disseminate findings (these we classified as ‘Unspecified outputs’).

Dissemination types	Mentions
Unspecified outputs	3
Research articles	2
Blog posts	2
Conference presentations	2

Table 2: Dissemination

Participant feedback suggested that inconsistencies in evidence collection processes along with lack of awareness of the role of LAs contribute to questions of professional recognition and credibility within their institutions.

Additionally, some participants were wary of a perceived institutional preference for quantitative evidence over qualitative, which they thought undervalued and obscured the visibility of their impact. These examples

support the case for identifying more varied data types that can be triangulated in various combinations depending on motivations for communicating impact.

Generating more meaningful evidence: How can we show we are making a difference?

With research and data on current practices clearly showing the dominance of student and staff perceptions in reporting impact, participants were next invited to imagine what a more comprehensive picture of impact might include, given the luxury of no time limitations or costs.

In general, responses (Table 3) highlighted the need to diversify and triangulate multiple data types and mixed methods to communicate impact more effectively.

Evidence type	Details
Course-specific / Programme-specific data	Identify impacts of embedding through increased specificity related to individual courses and programmes
Comparative studies	Compare interventions or groups of students for: Changes in student writing Academic performance Changes in students' attitudes to communication Staff responses to students' writing
Implementation of feedback or interventions	Document how students apply feedback or teaching from workshops
Longitudinal studies	Track individual students for: How, when, and why students engage LA teaching and resources throughout their higher education careers Impacts on their academic performance and their writing Connections between assessments and workplace tasks after graduation
Holistic impact	Gather culturally appropriate qualitative data from students that tell their stories about their learning experiences

Table 3: Alternative types of evidence/evidence reporting

After asking the participants about the types of evidence they would ideally like to collect, we then asked what barriers there were to doing this and how those

barriers could be overcome. The barriers related to the following interrelated issues:

- LA skills and knowledge about how to identify and manage relevant data
- Access to student data (including ethical approval to use it for research purposes)
- Access to lecturers / curriculum
- Low credibility / profile / awareness of LA work among staff and students

Encouragingly, participants shared some practical ways of overcoming these barriers. To enable better access to student data and to raise the profile of LA work, we should engage in strategic cross-departmental collaboration with staff, as well as students. These collaborations ought to form the basis for published evaluations of practice that can be reported internally and externally, as well as research reports.

To increase LA skills and knowledge in identifying relevant student data and how to manage it, we should leverage staff collaborations within and across our institutions. These staff might be lecturers or other LAs who can provide relevant skills and knowledge which can be adapted to various LA team contexts. Again, the collaborations ought to generate internal and external forms of reporting / dissemination.

Let's make some waves!

Clearly, if we want to make waves by generating meaningful evidence of our impact, we must trace the ripples by collecting various types of data and triangulating them effectively.

Our 2025 ICALLD Symposium sessions comprised just seventeen LAs from across the world, and we could see how similar we are regarding what evidence we collect and how we communicate about the impact of our work. It was also clear that we are frustrated by systemic institutional practices / perceptions that LAs can't really do anything about. The waves of pressure on our profession are always there, and they are only going to increase as artificial intelligence automates more and more interactions between institutions and students.

To bring about change, we need to be strategic in collaborating with staff and students over time to identify our impact and make a stronger case for our

work. We also need to ensure that we regularly report on and disseminate our practices. Surely, we don't want to be the sandcastles that get washed away. We want to be making waves of our own.

This is why we are keen to collaborate with LAs from across the world on how to generate and communicate meaningful evidence of our impact. So, we would like to hear from you about what you are doing – you can contact us:

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mark.bassett@aut.ac.nz

ATLAANZ Regional Hui 2023

Learning Advisors connect across Aotearoa New Zealand

Margaret Evans (Unitec, Auckland), Ruth Thomas (Toi-Ohomai, Rotorua), and Marje Schaddelee (Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin)

The ATLAANZ Regional Hui (meetings) are usually organised by member institutions in the Northern (Upper Te Ika-a-Māui North Island), Central (Central and Lower Te Ika-a-Māui North Island), and Southern (Te Waipounamu South Island) regions of the country. The hui usually run biannually between the national conference years, and they are opportunities for learning advisors to kōrero (discuss) and be among their professional ropu (groups).

Northern Hui

Unitec Mt Albert campus, Tāmaki Makarau Auckland: 6th December, 2023



Pathways to Success: Challenges and Opportunities

The theme has **three strands**

- The Impact of students' life and learning experiences on their studies
- Unlocking opportunities for academic success with Learning Advisors
- Beyond the traditional approaches to teaching and learning

The
ATLAANZ
Northern
Regional
Hui

2023
6th December

Learning Advisors from Unitec were pleased to be able to host the biennial Northern regional hui for members of ATLAANZ. Held at the Mt Albert campus, the participants had a chance to both renew and forge new connections, which was appreciated after several years of COVID disruption. Open to Learning Advisors and staff in associated roles from the northern education sector, participants shared experiences, ideas, skills and knowledge.

After a welcoming pōwhiri (welcoming ceremony) onto Unitec's Te Noho Kotahitanga Marae (meeting place of unity), ATLAANZ President Tania Oxenham gave an inspirational address reflecting on the challenges and opportunities experienced in the tertiary education field.



She reminded us that “education, as a pathway to success, is not a straight and unobstructed path. It’s a journey marked by twists and turns, and the challenges we face may be as diverse as our backgrounds; but it is stepping into these challenges that we truly grow and learn.” Tania urged participants to be a cohesive team, to be respectful of akōnga (learners) and staff (kaimahi). Learning Advisors help to forge meaningful pathways for others to follow. Through stepping into challenges new opportunities are created, providing stepping stones for others to use, in pursuing their academic journey.



The theme of the one-day event “Pathways to Success: Challenges and Opportunities” incorporated three strands:

1. The impact of students’ life and learning experiences on their studies
2. Unlocking opportunities for academic success with Learning Advisors
3. Beyond the traditional approaches to teaching and learning

Workshop sessions during the day covered topics aligned with the three strands of the theme:

- With the growing use of Artificial Intelligence, digital specialist Dr Kara Kennedy facilitated a workshop on this topic. This workshop was a highlight session for many participants.
- Unitec has a digital specialist, Emma Hall, working on providing relevant students with Assistive Technology. Emma presented a hands-on workshop in which participants had the opportunity to use various hardware and software available to students whose educational opportunities are enhanced through the use of such tools.
- Josta Heyligers, I’u Tuagalu (Auckland University of Technology) and Mona O’Shea (University of Auckland) presented a session outlining the development of the position of Learning Advisors in Aotearoa New Zealand over the past 40 years and an opportunity to create visions for the future of this role.
- Other workshops gave participants the chance to learn more about the Skills Hub offering Literacy and Study Skills help at Unitec, as well as Unitec’s Maths & Science Corner, Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) at Unitec, and the relevance of knowing yourself, being aware of others you work with, and of your learners in akō (teaching and learning together).



The closing speaker, Senior Pastor Stephen Matai’a, spoke of his personal study and teaching experiences. These include more than twenty years teaching at Unitec, with some years working as a Pacific Learning Advisor. He reflected on challenges and opportunities he has become aware of in students. He gave us

insight into the motivational factors which have promoted academic success in some learners.

Stephen is dedicated to helping others find and appreciate their life journey. Through sharing his own life-long journey in learning, he inspired us all to continue on our own life-long journey of learning.

The ATLAANZ website has material of interest to the work of Learning Advisors and associated staff who help students on their life-long journey of learning: <https://www.atlaanz.org>

Margaret Evans

Central Hui

Toi-Ohomai Mokoia campus, Rotorua: 2nd & 3rd October, 2023

The ATLAANZ Central Region includes learning advisors located across the central and lower parts of Te Ika-a-Māui, the North Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. In 2023 the ATLAANZ Central Hui was hosted by Toi Ohomai Institute of Technology at their Mokoia campus in Rotorua, at Tangatarua Marae.

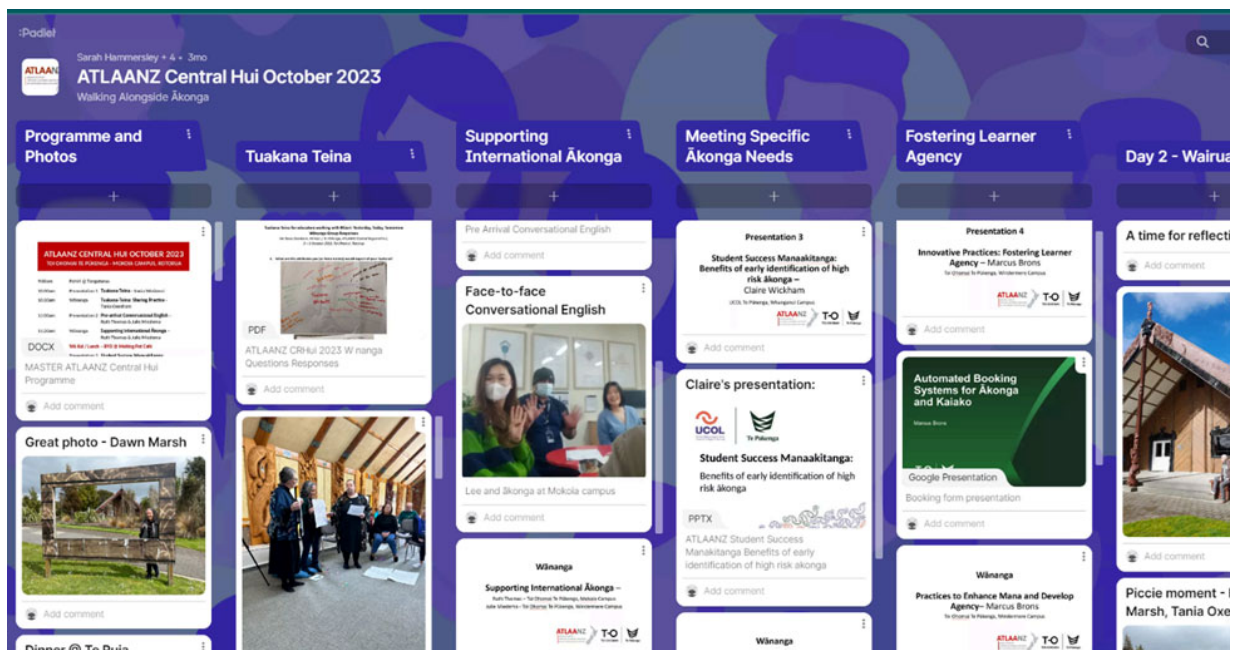


ATLAANZ Secretary Dawn Marsh, and President Tania Oxenham with Tangatarua Marae in the background

Day 1 was made up of four themed sessions. Each session comprised a 15-minute presentation, and a 40-minute follow up wānanga (discussion). Topics were: Tuakana-Teina (reciprocal learning/mentoring); Pre-Arrival Conversational English/support for international students; the benefits/practice of early identification of high-risk learners and innovative practices to foster learner agency, e.g., a system enabling student choice and control in booking support appointments.



Attendees engaged in deep discussion in the wānanga sessions. Presentations and artefacts from the wānanga were shared via Padlet.





Day 1 closed with a delicious meal at Te Puia



Day 2 focussed on wellbeing. After breakfast, we toured Ohinemutu and listened to pūrākau (stories) of this significant area, before exploring the lakefront and Government Gardens. Participants very much welcomed the opportunity to share practice and new ideas kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face).

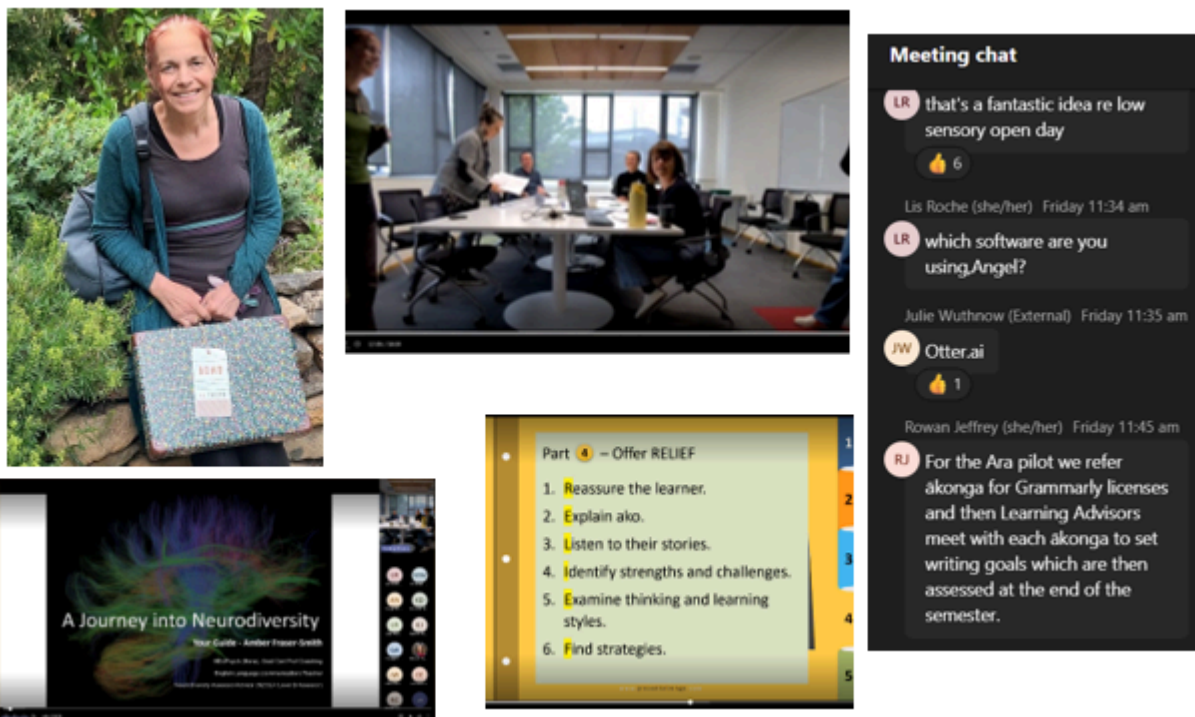
Ruth Thomas

Southern Hui

Otago Polytechnic, Ōtepoti Dunedin: 24th November, 2023

Otago Polytechnic hosted 25 ATLAANZ members, online, at the Southern Regional Hui on the 24th November. Ara Institute of Canterbury, Lincoln University, and University of Canterbury were represented on the day.

A survey of Southern ATLAANZ members indicated that while they value face-to-face hui, the preference this year was to attend online. It is a five-hour drive from Christchurch to Dunedin and sustainability was a consideration for us offering an online option. Our call for presenters did not generate much enthusiasm (could it be we're all tired after another big year?) so we put together a programme that allowed for lots of discussion around the theme of sharing good practice. Amber Fraser-Smith, a neurodivergent senior lecturer at Otago Polytechnic opened the hui with an interactive session on neurodiversity, that led into a discussion on how learning advisors support neurodivergent students. Other sessions included 'workshops and drop-ins' with Ruth Laing and Gabriel Frederikse from Unitec joining us to outline the 'Skills Hub' drop-in they piloted this year; 'wraparound support'; and 'sustainability initiatives.' We appreciated the preparations and thoughtful collaboration and sharing from participants.



Feedback was positive. It was a big undertaking for our small team, and we were pleased that we were able to create a sense of whanaungatanga (relationships) in an online setting. We look forward to continued collaboration with our learning advisor colleagues.

“Thank you to the OP team for your organisation and inclusiveness. Much appreciated – you made it easy to be online. Ngā mihi koutou.”

“As an online participant, I felt included. There was opportunity to contribute both verbally and in the chat.”

“To be honest, this [online format] worked better than we had anticipated.”

“There were great opportunities to listen and learn, as well as contribute our experiences. It was good to hear about different practices and systems/technologies used.”

Marje Schaddelee, Sarah Wood, Caroline Brown, and Kristen Bracey (Ross Gilbertson in absentia)

Co-creation with students

Students could not care less how you organise your online resources

Mark Bassett – Auckland University of Technology Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau Learning specialists typically avoid dwelling on the negatives, but I feel there’s something we need to talk about. Let me repeat for

dramatic effect: Students could not care less how you organise your online resources! Hopefully, I've intrigued you enough to...

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by **partnerworking** 19th Mar 2024

Uncategorized

So what is it you do again? You teach at uni? What exactly do you teach?

Mapping LD in Scotland Learning Developers are not alone in having jobs that are not among the list of options pre-school children understand and consider. Nor are we alone in having job titles that do not immediately give away what our day to day working lives. Yet, working in a field where people who have...

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by **partnerworking** 2nd Feb 2024

Conference news

ALDCon23: celebrating 21 years of conference

Portsmouth, on the south coast of England, is the UK's only island city and as a result is more densely populated than London. Regardless, it managed to find room for the 170 Learning Developers who descended upon the town for two warm and sunny days in June. Fresh from a hugely successful online day the...

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by **partnerworking** 19th Oct 2023

Uncategorized

ScotHELD Summer Meeting 2023 at the University of Strathclyde's Learner Development Services (and a little bit about our LD journey at Strathclyde)

ScotHELD Summer Meeting 2023 On 25/05/23, Strathclyde's Learner Development Services (LDS) hosted the Summer Meeting and AGM of the Scottish network of Effective Learning Developers (ScotHELD) in our recently opened Learner Development Centre. More than 40 learning development professionals, from 14 of Scotland's higher education institutions, met to share current research and practice, including discussions...

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by **partnerworking** 10th Aug 2023

Association news

ATLAANZ Conference an Undoubted Success

Members of the Association of Teaching and Learning Advisors of Aotearoa New Zealand (ATLAANZ) were excited to launch their inaugural online biennial national conference held 30 November – 1 December 2022, despite going through one of the most challenging years yet in tertiary education. Participants from tertiary education organisations (TEOs) across Aotearoa and Australia, attended...

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by **partnerworking** 7th Dec 2022

Uncategorized

The Life Pursuit: From student to teaching assistant to learning developer

A blog with an optional soundtrack (hyperlinks to the music are in bold) Dr Mona O'Brien, LEADS, University of Glasgow Every so often I remember snippets of my undergraduate essays, when my glasses are a little rose-tinted, I call them passionate; other days, I think they sounded a bit angry, especially where I tried 'critiquing'...

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by **partnerworking** 7th Jul 2022

Uncategorized

Designing accessible online learning resources

By Siri Barrett-Lennard, The University of Western Australia – As Academic Language and Learning Developers, we know that for learning to be inclusive it needs to be accessible. We also know that Universal Design for Learning (UDL) benefits all students. But when it comes to making our online learning resources accessible, do we know how...

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by **partnerworking** 16th Jun 2022

Uncategorized

“Why can’t they write like we want them to?!” Developing Students’ Writing Across an Institution

by Andrew Struan, University of Glasgow ‘Our students can’t write.’ ‘What are they taught at school, anyway?’ ‘Why can’t they write properly?’ ‘It’s a comma and not a piece of decoration for the page!’ We’ll all have heard complaints about students’ writing. These complaints can range from a focus on the mechanical element of writing...

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by **partnerworking** 31st Mar 2022

Uncategorized

We don’t do it alone: Fostering resilience in difficult times

by Lindsay Heggie Academic Skills and Writing Specialist (Queen’s University at Kingston, Canada) and International Relations Director, LSAC Board of Directors Every time I see an advertisement for a workshop on resilience, I think, “oh fantastic, just what I need to better support my students!” And a little voice in my head says, “I hope there’s...

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by **partnerworking** 24th Mar 2022

Uncategorized

Leadership in Learning Development

By Carina Buckley and Kate Coulson, ALDinHE Sound and vision: introducing leadership As a Learning Developer, how do you influence University policy and practice? “Influencing”, “Visions” and “Strategy” – all seemingly ethereal concepts when you are fresh out of school or university. We wish we had been offered a module as undergraduates which had equipped...

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by **partnerworking** 21st Jan 2022

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