
Collaborative Academic Framework

Introduction

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACADEMIC HARMONISATION.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	1
Project Outline.....	2
Overview of Project Methodology	3
KEY LEARNINGS	3
Overview of Deliverables.....	4
Framework Documents	4
Appendices	4
SCOPE OF USE.....	5
Within TANZ	5
Other Contexts	5
Next Steps.....	5
TERMINOLOGY	6
ACADEMIC HARMONISATION FRAMEWORK AND ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS	7

ACADEMIC HARMONISATION

INTRODUCTION

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) allocated funding to the Tertiary Accord of New Zealand (TANZ) to complete a project to harmonise academic systems across the TANZ member institutions. This project generated the deliverables that are presented in this document.

As outlined in the materials that follow, this project was every bit as difficult as expected, and progress was only possible in the high trust environment that had developed between TANZ members over the preceding period. As these deliverables are implemented in other contexts, there will be real challenges around the development of a similar set of relationships.

BACKGROUND

For about 15 years from the early 1990s the Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics (ITPs) in New Zealand operated in an environment that emphasized institutional autonomy and encouraged competitive behaviour. During this period each ITP developed its own systems and culture, as well as developing many local programmes and qualifications.

Notwithstanding this environment, the sector has always retained an element of cooperation, both in respect of individual programmes and in sharing expertise in other contexts. The Tertiary Accord of New Zealand (TANZ) is one example of an initiative to collaborate that was established by a group of institutions during the time when the motivation to compete was at its strongest.

The tertiary reforms initiated in 2005 signalled a change in direction at a government policy level. As the implementation of these reforms has proceeded there has been a stronger expectation of collaboration between ITPs in programme development, rationalisation of delivery to contribute to the national network of provision, and the operation of the institutes. TANZ was well placed to respond to these shifts, as they aligned with the philosophy of the accord, and could build on the structures that had been put in place.

As TANZ sought to strengthen its collaborative activities it became increasingly obvious that a key barrier to more effective collaboration with respect to the development and delivery of academic programmes lay in the differing academic processes, rules and regulations within the member institutions. These differences often forced repetitive activity, and undermined the consistency of practices across the accord.

This project was designed to design a set of academic processes and related rules and regulations that could be adopted by each member in respect of programmes that were either developed collaboratively, or were to be delivered collaboratively.

PROJECT OUTLINE

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) awarded funding to this project, which was specifically to develop the following six deliverables.

1. Shared Glossary of academic terms used in institutional academic statutes, qualifications regulations and other formal academic documents.
2. An agreed process for implementation and review of the glossary.
3. Documented process for qualification development and quality assurance body approval including templates, guidelines and academic board resolution for partner quality assurance.
4. A set of shared academic values and principles for teaching and learning that includes differences in academic practice (for example, around intellectual property, open entry, sustainability) that may need to be identified.
5. A generic Academic Statute that includes common understandings of Academic Board and sub-committee functions, and academic regulations (including admission and enrolment, fees, academic requirements, withdrawals from courses, assessment matters, examinations, grading systems, special assessment circumstances, notification of results, programme regulations and course information; and institutional Awards). Statute areas that are specific to institutions and or programmes will be identified.
6. Documented collaborative self assessment practices for quality assurance, including shared survey tools, checklists, development of benchmarks, guidance information and good practice scenarios.

The project was intended to develop these deliverables for implementation by the TANZ members, but it was also envisaged that they would offer a framework that may be useful for other collaborative activity across the sector.

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Each deliverable was allocated to a lead institution. The lead institution was responsible for developing the material required for the deliverable. Each lead institution had one or two supporting TANZ member ITP(s) to assist with the development. Each lead institution was also allocated other sector ITPs with which they were to maintain communication and update channels. Sector Academic Managers and peak bodies (ITP New Zealand and ITPQuality) were updated and informed of progress through this project at sector academic managers meetings.

The initial focus of discussions was upon the shared Academic Values and Principles. It was agreed that this provided the context for the remaining body of work. The natures of the other deliverables were such that they were developed in parallel, and frequently there was overlap between the workstreams.

Frequent workshops were held to discuss and review material as it was developed. There were also teleconferences, and exchange of electronic versions of draft documents.

The final phase was the collation the deliverables into a cohesive document.

KEY LEARNINGS

Complexity of this subject.

It was expected that this subject would be complex and would experience many challenges as it endeavored to 'harmonise' academic systems and requirements. It was as complex as expected. Progress has only been established through the collaborative relationship based on openness and high trust between the participating institutions. This would not have been successful without this values based relationship.

Journey of Academic Harmonisation

It became apparent that a number of key points were going to have a substantive impact on the harmonisation.

- Legal – impact of Education Act
- Institutional autonomy – related to legal aspect
- Attractiveness to sector – ability for sector to adopt and utilise the information

Impact on existing processes / structures

- Institutional structures – impact of current structures on the management of collaborative regulations.
- Institutions may be required to significantly change the way that academic requirements are managed within their institutions.
- Significant organisation / sector change is required.

- There may be an impact on collaborative programme delivery due to SDR reporting of completion and success rates.
- There must be an ongoing focus on cohesion and improvement on rules and structures, aimed at continued progress in a collaborative manner.
- Future collaboration will be encouraged by funding mechanisms which are contingent on a collaborative manner and approach to programme development and approval.
- A lot more has been involved than was foreseen, and the collaborative discussions required have been to more depth than initially anticipated.
- The level of detailed discussion with the wider sector has not been to the depth that initially anticipated or hoped due to the amount of focus on the participating institutions work.

OVERVIEW OF DELIVERABLES

The documents developed are presented in six major sections, matching the six deliverables. These cover the implementation and maintenance of the approaches outlined in the documents, the overarching values and principles on which they are based, a general academic statute incorporating a glossary of terms, processes for the development and maintenance of qualifications, and processes for self assessment. Where appropriate these sections are divided into framework documents and appendices.

FRAMEWORK DOCUMENTS

The framework documents are the substantive components of the systems and processes. Adoption of all aspects of the framework documents is essential if the overall outcome of harmonised academic practices is to be achieved. Any changes to the framework documents must therefore be approached very carefully, as set out in the deliverable that defines maintenance of the framework

APPENDICES

Appendices set out supplementary documents, including templates, guidelines, and examples of specific documents. These support the approaches set out in the framework documents, but they are not regarded as binding.

SCOPE OF USE

WITHIN TANZ

The systems outlined were designed by the TANZ member institutions for use within the TANZ collective. While the documents do not make specific references to TANZ, they describe organizational structures based on the TANZ model. This includes the TANZ Board and the TANZ Academic Committee. The documents as included are therefore ready for immediate consideration and adoption by TANZ, following the processes outlined in the implementation and maintenance section that follows.

OTHER CONTEXTS

A second important objective of the project was to develop materials that could be adopted in other contexts. These could be either other groupings of Tertiary Education Institutions set up along similar lines to the TANZ collective, or they could be based on the collaborative development and delivery of specific qualifications. Use of these materials in either of those contexts could require some modifications. These would need to address the establishment and recognition of appropriate boards and committees to take responsibility for the pan-institution roles.

NEXT STEPS

The deliverables are designed to be used with programmes and qualifications that have been developed collaboratively, are being delivered collaboratively, or both. There is no specific expectation that TANZ members or institutions that are part of some other collaborative arrangement using these materials will adopt any of these systems or structures in respect of other programmes which are delivered totally within one institution.

This could mean that institutions are using two systems or approaches in respect of different programmes. This is not uncommon within ITPs, as various other bodies such as professional organizations have requirements that must be met in respect of some programmes. However, individual institutions may decide to progressively move their internal systems and processes to align more closely with the approaches defined in these documents. This would result in even better harmonization of their academic systems.

TERMINOLOGY

One key deliverable is a glossary of academic terms used in these documents, and for wider use within member institutions. However, there is one particular issue of terminology which presented a major difficulty, and that is the use of the terms “course” and “programme”. Inconsistent definition of these terms between different legislation and different government bodies makes it impossible to use them clearly and consistently, yet they form a key part of the vocabulary of tertiary education.

The definitions used within these documents, as set out in the glossary, are:

Course: A course may be known as a paper, module or unit. A defined course or collection of courses forms a programme of study, which, if completed successfully, results in the award of a qualification.

Programme: A self contained block of study or a combination of courses that normally lead to an award.

ACADEMIC HARMONISATION FRAMEWORK AND ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

