

# President's Report 2021

*Tēnā koutou te whānau*

This has been another year of highs and lows, lockdowns, working from home, masks, Vaxathons ... still doing what we do best: supporting students. Even at institutions previously unfamiliar with distance/dual mode delivery, shifting learning services online has enabled us to reach more students --in their own spaces-- than ever before.

Nevertheless, Covid 19 is having far-reaching impacts on retention and success, particularly for undergraduates. Disruptions in 2020 have had a flow-on effect, unsettling not only school-leavers but also second year students, whose first-year experience was less than ideal. While online delivery has the advantage of allowing students to access content anytime, freedom of choice is not necessarily as conducive to developing regular study habits as a fixed timetable. As we all know, missing one lecture makes it that much harder to attend the next one. For this reason, time-management is proving one of the most common reasons for students to seek learning advice – in many cases making an appointment with a learning advisor key to helping get them get back on track.

Border restrictions have also changed the face of international education, with a growing number of students now off-shore. Shifting one-to-one-consultations and workshops online offers a logistical solution to delivery, but also poses new challenges in terms of a meaningful 'student experience'. Kanohi a kanohi (even with masks) offers a much more congenial learning environment than Zoom or Teams. Nevertheless, online workshops are making it possible for students at my institution from as far afield as Bangladesh, Ghana, China, Vietnam, UK and Russia (across as many time zones) to build meaningful rapport with learning advisors and each other.

This year, I have had the privilege of representing the ATLAANZ community here in Aotearoa, at the online Australian conference "[Diversity, Distance, Digitalisation: Inclusive and supportive practices in ALL](#)" (17-19 November 2021) hosted by Charles Darwin University, and on the international ICALLD steering group, meeting regularly with representatives of our sister associations (across a whole range of time zones). Such opportunities have offered insight into fellow learning advisors' experiences as well as sharing initiatives from which we can learn.

\*\*\*\*\*

## 2021 in review:

**ICALLD symposia over time.** Originally, symposia took place once, over a 24-hour time period. While this format fostered international engagement, it placed a considerable organisational burden on the host institution. Consequently, since 2020, ICALLD has changed things up, with each association now hosting a symposium in turn:

- **ScotHELD** (February, 2021). "Not business as usual – a Scottish perspective on student learning & wellbeing in 2020" ([Details here](#))
- **AALL** (May, 2021). "Updating the Australian University Register of Academic Language and Learning Centres/Units" ([Details here](#))
- **ATLAANZ** (June 2021). "Evaluating the impact of Tertiary Learning Advice Consultations on student learning and development: Discussion of a recent pilot study" ([Details here](#))

I look forward to this tradition continuing, together with the possibility of welcoming new

member associations in future.

I invite members to explore the ICALLD-driven 2021 special edition of the *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education: [Compendium of Innovative Practice: Learning Development in a Time of Disruption](#)*, comprising over 100 international contributions from practitioners on writing & study skills support, fostering engagement, prioritising wellbeing, online learning, supporting staff through change, supporting doctoral researchers, students as partners, assessment & feedback, and responding to institutional change.

### [ChatLAANZ:](#)

Following the success of the ATLAANZ symposium over time, and thanks to Exec members Andrea Trueman and Katherine Brown, ATLAANZ now has its own online community for members to share topics of interest. The sessions got off to a great start:

- **July:** 'Working with neurosensitive students' (Kaaryn Cater, Weltec & Whitereia)
- **August:** 'Rainbow 101: supporting diversity on campus' (Andrea Trueman, Weltec & Whitereia)
- **September:** 'Stories of equity from Māori learning advisors' ([Herewini Easton](#), VUW; [Tania Oxenham](#), Wintec; [Matt Tarawa](#), Auckland)
- **October:** 'Wellbeing at work' ([Jennifer Yates](#), AUT).

I acknowledge the excellent discussions these sessions have created, and encourage members to propose further topics and presenters for 2022.

### [MATLAANZ/PATLAANZ hui/fono](#) (15 October 2021), Te Whare Wānanga o Wairaka Unitec.

Hosted by the Māia Māori Learning Advisors and Pacific Learning Advisors Pacific Centre, the second biennial hui-fono welcomed more than 60 Māori and Pacific learning advisors and colleagues from across the motu to korero and talanoa (in a virtual space) on the topic of "Indigenous resilience and perseverance – navigating learning in changing times".

Kaikorero mātua [Hinekura Smith](#) reminded participants to run their own marathon in their own way, "looking to our maunga and remembering whanau are cheering us on", a message reinforced by [Stephen Mata'ia](#), who encouraged learning advisors to develop the "resilience and perseverance of the coconut tree (rather than the banana, which is easily uprooted)". He called for MATLAANZ/PATLAANZ members to be leaders of change, placing learners and communities at the centre: a message that resonates with us all.

[Regional hui](#): the potential afforded by the online environment enabled colleagues to come together across all three regions again this year:

- **Northern:** "Nā te kune te pupuke – from the conception the increase: Exploring ways to build equity and diversity/inclusivity in the teaching and learning environment." (23 November, hosted by Auckland, Waikato & Wintec);
- **Southern:** "Initiatives to build resilience in challenging times" (30 November, hosted by Ara Institute of Canterbury);
- **Central:** "Sharing ideas about current practice in the higher education environment" (3 December, hosted Massey Palmerston North).

I thank the organisers for making such gatherings possible. During another a challenging year, these hui provide valuable opportunities for members to network and share experiences, revealing an organisation in good health.

### Members' achievements:

- **Auckland Institute of Studies:** the Library & Learning Support team attended online conferences, with several members appointed to specialist roles within [IFLA](#) and [LIANZA](#).
- **Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington:** members of Te Taiako Student Learning have strengthened their online offerings, including 'Chats & Tips' for off-shore International students, Zoom [PASS](#) (peer-assisted study) groups, and [learning resources](#).
- **Toi Ohomai:** Learning Support colleagues celebrated the opening of 'Te Pūtake', a dedicated space at Mokoia campus, Rotorua, providing on-the-spot help for trades-based students who do not necessarily frequent the learning centre's library space.

I also acknowledge the achievements of all others within our community whose successes are not captured here.

### [ATLAANZ Journal:](#)

To improve functionality, our web administrator, Peter Moran ([Mercury IT](#)) upgraded the site's [OJS](#) operating system. However, because simply overriding previous software risked losing data, I first needed to download articles and accompanying meta-data from the existing 2015-2019 volumes before uploading them all again to the new site.

Currently, co-editor Liz Roche (Ara) and I are overseeing production of the 2021 volume, due for publication early December. We acknowledge the contributions of our authors, peer-reviewers and copyeditors from NZ and Australia.

**Executive Committee:** Last, but definitely not least, I acknowledge my fellow committee members, who have supported me as President and represented the interests of the wider ATLAANZ membership across all areas of the tertiary education sector:

- **Dawn Marsh (WITT)** has been invaluable as Secretary, helping draft constitutional changes, and joining me in representing ATLAANZ at ICALLD meetings;
- **Kevin Brennan (Ara)** has once again acted as Treasurer and helped organise the Southern hui. Stepping down at the end of this year, Kevin's wisdom and organisational knowledge will be missed.
- **Andrea Trueman (Weltec/Whitireia)** was instrumental in setting up ChatLAANZ, leaving the Exec towards the end of the year to take up a non LA-related position at her institution.
- **Kaaryn Cater (Weltec/Whitireia)** was co-opted onto the committee in Andrea's place, bringing new ideas and energy to the group.
- **Katherine Brown** is our Web manager, keeping members abreast of upcoming events and related matters of interest, and also helped organise the Northern hui.
- **Jennifer Yates (AUT)** joined the Exec this year, bringing knowledge of the Australian & NZ tertiary learning sectors;
- **Jessica Ritchie (Canterbury)** continued in her role as elected member and has a series of projects in train for the coming year.
- **Julia Tanner (Massey)** has been instrumental (together with Xiaodan Gao, VUW) in preparing a comprehensive report on the 2019-20 national survey of learning centres, and also organised the Central regional hui;
- **Leonie Nicholls (Te Wananga o Aotearoa)** was with us for only a short time, before stepping down to focus on other commitments.
- **Matt Tarawa (Auckland)** has continued in his role as elected representative of [MATLAANZ](#), supporting Māori learning advisors, and helped organise the Northern hui.
- Mervyn Protheroe continues to oversee the members' mailing list and [MATHLAANZ](#), the

special interest group for Maths and Stats advisors.

- **Solomon Daniel (Weltec)** continues in his role representing [PATLAANZ](#), elected by fellow Pacific learning advisors.  
**Tania Oxenham (Wintec)** has shared her passion for te reo and was part of the team organising the Northern hui.

The strength of the ATLAANZ Executive Committee lies in its collegial membership and breadth of expertise. After two years as President, I am stepping down from the role, and wish incoming office bearers and committee members all the very best, secure in the knowledge that the association remains in good hands.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Looking to the future

**Proposed 'professional accreditation' scheme:** Increasingly, there are calls to promote learning advising as a profession, although it is often difficult to explain what our roles actually entail. Drawing on the UK's '[certified practitioner' programme](#), and on discussions with regional hui participants, I am keen to explore the possibility of developing an 'ATLAANZ accreditation scheme' here in Aotearoa, in order to more formally acknowledge our profession's specialist knowledge and skills.

**2022 Conference:** ATLAANZ was established in 2002, making next year's conference the perfect opportunity to acknowledge all those who have contributed to the association's success over the past twenty years. Online conferences are likely to be the way of the future and the Executive welcomes expressions of interest from potential hosting institutions.

\*\*\*\*\*

Despite the current challenges affecting Aotearoa as a whole, and the tertiary sector in particular, our profession, peopled by dedicated and passionate colleagues, is in good heart. I wish you and your whanau all the very best for the holiday season and the year to come.

*ngā manaakitanga*



November 2021

DR DEBORAH LAURS (*she, her*) | +64 4 463 5908

**ASSISTANT MANAGER / POSTGRADUATE LEARNING ADVISER | STUDENT LEARNING TE TAIAKO |**

2020-21 ATLAANZ PRESIDENT | CO-EDITOR: *ATLAANZ Journal*: <http://journal.atlaanz.org/> |

CO-EDITOR (with Susan Carter): *Developing Generic Support for Doctoral Students* (Routledge, 2014) and *Developing Research Writing: A Handbook for Supervisors and Advisors* (Routledge, 2017).

