Bachelor of Information Technology Monitoring Report 2015

Institute: Otago Polytechnic

College: College of Enterprise and Development

Programme: Bachelor of Information Technology

Visit date: 19th and 20th October 2015

Summary

This is my first report as the external monitor for the Bachelor of Information Technology (BIT) degree at Otago Polytechnic and also my first visit to the Otago Polytechnic campus.

The BIT has seen a substantial amount of change since the 2014 monitor visit and report. A number of staff have changed with a number of new appointments to the team. The students provide mainly positive feedback and are positive about and appreciative of the dedication and attention they receive from the staff.

The academic team are positive about the programme and have a high level of commitment to quality delivery. The research culture is undergoing change with the addition of new members of staff and with one of the research co-ordinators on leave. Research is incorporated into teaching.

Introduction

I visited Otago Polytechnic on 19th and 20th October 2015, during my visit I met with:

Lesley Smith (HOC) and Joy Gasson (BIT Team Leader), the BIT academic staff, Sue Thompson (Director, Quality), PEAC representative David Scoular, students and observed two student classes.

I was provided with the following documents to support my visit:

- Timetable of Visit
- 2014 Monitors Report
- Team Performance Plans 2014 and 2015
- Retention and Completion Analysis
- 2015 Research Spend Data
- Otago Polytechnic Work Environment Survey 2014
- Annual Programme Review 2014
- OT4765 Bachelor of Information Technology Programme Document 2015
- Monitors Visit Process
- BIT Course Evaluation Plan
- BIT 2015 Course Evaluations
- PEAC Documentation (Presentation & Meeting Minutes)

- October 2014 – Path of Study Forum Notes
- College Organisational Chart

The visit commenced with a review meeting with Lesley Smith and Joy Gasson, during which the staffing changes to the BIT were discussed and the 2014 Monitors Report recommendations were reviewed.

The 2014 Report Recommendations were

- Give careful consideration to the communications provided to staff as the College structure is embedded and further defined.

College structure has now been in operation for a while and communications to staff have been undertaken.

- Provide a clarified position description defining the role and responsibilities of the BIT Team Leader.

Joy now has a position description for the BIT Team Leader role.

- Clarify the role and responsibilities of the self-managing teams and communicate these to the teams.

Self-managing teams how now been in operation for a while and teams now more fully understand their role

- Increase the number of Library databases research staff are able to access.

No current issues with the databases currently available to staff. Needs and requirements may have changed with staff changes

- Provide regular, updated information to students with regard to the building and facilities improvements.

The BIT Facebook page provides a good communication channel for communicating information to students

It was encouraging to see that the College had worked to address the issues raised in the 2014 Monitor report.

Staffing

The most significant change for the BIT programme since the last monitor report is the change in staffing. A number of new staff have joined the programme, the majority on permanent contracts. This change in staff has been welcomed and been positive for the BIT

programme, however some workload issues remain due to the timing of appointments and the requirement for staff to undertake a Graduate Diploma in teaching and learning as a condition of their appointment.

Staff have also introduced some new courses without retiring existing courses, this has increased workload both in terms of course deliveries and in developing new course material.

BIT Team Leader

Joy Gasson holds this position and receives a time allocation of .3FTE. During my discussions with Joy, I found her to be very knowledgeable about the programme and about the students enrolled in the programme. Joy teaches the first year Maths for IT module, which allows her to develop an informed relationship with all students in the programme at an early stage of their study. Joy now has a position description for the BIT Team Leader role and works closely with the Head of College and the whole BIT team in a "self-led" team.

Academic and Support Staff

I had two meetings with Academic staff – the first focused on Research (and is discussed later in this report) the second was at the end of my visit and focused on the BIT programme.

Since the 2014 review there have been a number of staff changes (as discussed above) and also chance for the self-led/managing teams to develop and embed. The work environment has therefore evolved since that time and will continue to do so as additional initiatives are rolled out, new staff become established and existing processes mature.

Overall staff are positive about the programme and working arrangements including the opportunity to conduct staff reviews from within the team. This however highlighted complexities with different staff reporting lines for some within the BIT programme team.

Workload is highlighted as an issue by some staff exacerbated by the departure of staff, the introduction of new courses, and the requirements on new staff. Staff were hopeful that 2016 would alleviate some of these issues as stability returned to the staffing situation.

I would like to that the time that staff took to talk with me about the programme and to share their views.

Students

During my visit I talked to a number of groups of students and visited two classes that were in progress and talked to student in those classes. The students included representatives at all levels of the programme. The students were positive about the programme, most staff and the commitment of individual staff members to student achievement.

Students were positive about the Facebook page in operation for the programme and communication between the College and students.

Those students who had been present during the staff transition noted that some continuing staff were carrying heavier workloads but that overall the transition had gone well. Students noted that the addition of new staff had led to a greater diversity of teaching styles; students were divided in their views on the value in more self-directed vs. guided learning. Overall they felt that different styles were more appropriate at different levels in the programme with a transition from guided to self-directed – currently staff did not alter their teaching style significantly based on level which some students felt was an issue. Students felt the course evaluation survey needed to be at the end of the semester or for them to have some ability to "snooze" reminders for a period, they commented that they often completed the survey with "junk" answers in order to clear reminders and give them unfettered access to the learning management system.

Second year students commented on their restricted access hours outside of teaching time compared with final year students, they did not understand the rationale for the differentiation.

The difference in performance of computers in different rooms was noted depending when they had been upgraded. Students gravitated towards the rooms with the most recent computers with the best performance.

Courses which included CISCO CCNA modules were a source of confusion for some student regarding the requirements for an academic pass in the module vs the CISCO requirements.

I met with a group of third year students as part of my visit. These students reflected on their whole experience in the programme with significant focus on the project aspects of the third year of the programme.

Specific comments that these students made included the introduction of technology in later years of the programme that had not been used in earlier courses but that would have been valuable to those courses.

With regard to the project course students had a number of observations that are outlined below:

- Technical Support provided had been excellent
- Staff availability during the course was highlighted as a recurring issue, this included the course examiner and the availability of other staff as mentors due to other workload pressures.
- The project was felt to have a strong software component which disadvantaged those pursuing non-software streams in the programme.
- The number of, requirements for, and relevance of, presentations was raised with students feeling disengaged.
- Intellectual Property issues such as code ownership, licencing and IP management
- Lack of provision for project teams that disband during the project
- Praise for external speakers, in particular Ian Simpson.

Overall students are positive about their experience with the overall BIT programme and I would like to thank them for engaging in the review process.

Research

I met with all members of the team to discuss research activity. Research activity has diversified since 2014 due to the appointment of new staff with different research interests. A strong interest in research on computing education is still evident and the addition of new staff has added to the research culture. It is pleasing to see students working on research projects as part of the final year project course. The overseas leave of one research co-ordinator has meant a reduction in the formal structured activity around research but research endeavours have continued.

Permanent External Advisory Committee (PEAC)

I met with one member of the Permanent External Advisory Committee, David Scoular, who reported strong engagement between the PEAC and the BIT programme. A number of PEAC members provide projects for the capstone project course, guest lectures and support other initiatives.
The PEAC meet regularly and provide feedback and input to the programme. A number of PEAC members actively recruit and employ BIT graduates.
The PEAC has a strong relationship with the BIT and this level of engagement should be applauded.

Academic Services

I met with Sue Thompson, the Director of Quality at Otago Polytechnic. Sue indicated that she was satisfied with the academic management of the degree. There had been no student complaints over the last three years. There was some divergence between the BIT team self-review and the senior management team rating but this is a relatively new process and limited feedback is provided by the senior management team to assist development. One area of variability that was highlighted is Maori and Pasifika achievement – however this is can be greatly influenced by the performance of one or two students. It was pleasing to note in conversations with Maori and Pasifika students the support they felt they had from the BIT Team in helping them to achieve.

Commendations

Having visited Otago Polytechnic and spent time with the staff and students in the BIT programme I would like to commend the team in a number of areas:

- The dedication that the team have and show towards the students and ensuring they deliver a strong programme.
- The engagement with Industry, particularly through the PEAC is strong and that delivers good student outcomes.
- The team are embracing aspects of the "self-managing team" initiative – particularly around staff reviews.

Recommendations

I would like to reinforce the 2014 review report comment that "The Otago Polytechnic Bachelor on Information Technology is an extremely well managed and delivered programme". There are a small number of recommendations that could help ensure the continued success of the programme:

- Staff workload is monitored and workload allocation is transparent.
- New courses are not introduced without retiring other courses and workload models account for course development activities.
- The project course is reviewed and re-evaluated to ensure that it is delivering the desired outcomes for students and that students are adequately supported in the course.

It was a pleasure to be welcomed by the staff and students at Otago Polytechnic and to spend time understanding and reviewing the BIT programme.

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