

Te Whare Wānanga O Awanuiārangi: Putting the e in Wānanga

Wānanga have been particularly successful in using e-learning to provide accessible and supportive study options for their widely dispersed student populations.

TE WHARE WĀNANGA O AWANUIĀRANGI is one of three wānanga in New Zealand. It is based at Whakatāne but operates multiple campuses and study sites throughout the North Island of New Zealand.

Awanuiārangi has a particular focus on the educational needs of iwi, hapū and the wider community in the Bay of Plenty–Mataatua region. However, it also seeks to promote, grow and sustain Māori language, culture and tikanga, and to develop tertiary educational opportunities for Māori at every level on a nationwide basis. The academic programme at Te Whare Wānanga O Awanuiārangi ranges from community education to doctoral degrees. There is a strong focus on language recovery, tikanga and ahutanga, which staircase students into certificates, diplomas and degree programmes.

To begin with, the leadership at Awanuiārangi had a strong preference for face-to-face teaching and learning. This was seen as being consistent with Māori cultural, social and educational values and remains a strong emphasis of the institution. The Wānanga developed a range of community education programmes delivered on marae that would serve as the basis for further marae-based and campus-based programmes at certificate, diploma and degree level.

This has been a very productive partnership between the Wānanga and local communities. In many instances, negotiations with local marae determine the courses to be delivered there. The Wānanga has been able to draw on the skills of community members to help with learning and teaching on the marae and often to access Māori community funding to resource these efforts. The interest developed in these courses has encouraged others to take up further educational adventures and the Wānanga is on track to support 900 marae-based students by 2010.

In recent years, the Wānanga leadership has come to recognise the potential of e-learning to provide more flexible study options for campus-based and marae-based students and for students in the home and workplace throughout New Zealand. An important step in this evolution was the appointment of a Director of e-Learning in 2001. The appointee has been able to give direction to a number of developments in e-learning at a programme, operational and strategic level. At a programme level, some kind of online support is now provided to most of the Wānanga's courses. This ranges from the use of simple communication functionality to support many marae-based programmes through to multifunctional use in support of the full online, one-year primary teacher education programme offered for dispersed, work-based graduates.

TAKING THE LEAD

Strategic Management for e-Learning

Case Study



At an operational level, the Wānanga has a maturing infrastructure to support e-learning. This infrastructure includes clusters of cooperating schools and marae which are assisted to install the necessary hardware and network services to support the students. The Wānanga also operates a mobile study centre equipped with mobile computers for students to access. This van is well supported by three-quarters of the students who study on marae visited by the mobile centre. The communication is via satellite because of the limited cellphone access in remote areas. The service is particularly valuable in those remote settlements that do not possess reliable internet access or sometimes even electricity. Fortunately, costs for these online services have fallen dramatically over the last couple of years.

The Chief Executive is supportive of reaching out to these places. The Wānanga is investing in research into e-learning to discover the best ways to achieve this form of community outreach and to investigate their long-term effects. Significant investments have also been made in the technical and organisational infrastructure required to support e-learning. These systems are now capable of supporting a sizeable increase in demand. The Wānanga has been able to attract and retain a group of well-educated IT support staff who are able to support the efforts of other staff using the online medium.

The Chief Executive is providing strong strategic direction for e-learning. e-Learning is an important element in the Wānanga's draft Investment Plan. One element of this plan is the proposal for an eWānanga/e-Learning Centre. This centre is to provide a strategic and operational focus for all e-learning but it is also intended to develop a strong postgraduate research programme into e-learning.

Another element of the plan is a commitment to incorporate an e-learning dimension in all degree-level programmes across the institution. The Director of e-Learning is also encouraging the use of appropriate pedagogies for online teaching and learning across the institution and supporting a strong staff development programme in this area. Looking to the future, it is planned that nursing qualifications will be offered online and in te reo Māori by 2010.

These proposals and initiatives have been enthusiastically supported by the Tertiary Education Commission and are seen as being entirely consistent with the Tertiary Education Strategy. The eWānanga now has assured funding for the next three years and plans are underway to support up to ten doctoral students drawn both from New Zealand and from indigenous communities of Canada and Alaska.

Reflections

The strategic and operational contributions of the Director of e-Learning continue to be critical to the developing use of e-learning at Awanuiārangi. However, the success of his efforts depend very much on the continued support of the Chief Executive.

Understanding the needs, the potential and the limitations of a community being served by e-learning strategies is fundamental to successful e-learning provision.

e-Learning is generally not seen as an alternative to face-to-face learning. More commonly it is used to augment and support the continuing emphasis on community, marae and campus-based learning and teaching. e-Learning is a means to an end and not an end in itself.