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# An investigation of induction policies for university teachers: (re)valuing staff and cultural diversity

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## Abstract

In an increasingly globalised, neo-liberal, Higher Education (HE) sector, emphasis has been placed on responding to the complex needs of international students, even before their enrolment. In New Zealand, this group currently forms over 15% of the HE student population (New Zealand Government, 2018). Paradoxically, evidence from publicly-available induction policy documents suggests that the same emphasis is not placed on valuing the diverse cultural backgrounds and expertise of international academic teaching staff. Effective, culturally-sensitive induction programs have the potential to improve new staff integration and retention, encourage engagement with a culturally diverse institutional environment, and enhance teaching quality. This paper presents the outcomes of a study that investigated new staff induction programs in each of New Zealand's eight publicly-funded universities. Our findings highlight the general lack of intercultural depth and sensitivity in the programs. They also show that there is some potential for tension between the needs of new academic teaching staff from diverse cultural backgrounds and institutional policies delivering managerial, organisationally-focussed inductions. We present several recommendations through which universities can improve their inductions, with a view to (re)valuing staff and cultural diversity.

**Keywords:** staff development, cultural contexts, higher education policy

Main conference sub-theme: Academic Work and Identities: staffing within the HE sector

## Introduction: induction programs for new HEI teaching staff

Worldwide, higher education institutions (HEIs) increasingly strive to meet the complex requirements of international students. Initiatives include prospectuses published in multiple languages, providing spaces for culturally-specific student communities, nominated mentors, counsellors and specialist language tutors. In recognition of international students' diverse

needs, a law in New Zealand requires tertiary institutions to provide students with a 24/7 emergency helpline (Ministry of Education, 2016).

Paradoxically, there is little evidence of HEIs similarly striving, from the outset of their recruitment, to value the cultural diversity of their international academic teaching staff. This notion is illustrated by the lack of available data regarding recruitment, retention and promotion of overseas-trained staff. According to Sutherland (2018), New Zealand has one of the highest proportions of international HE staff in the world, yet data regarding this group is ambiguous at best and often unrecorded. However, one indication of the recruitment and retention situation of overseas academic staff is Immigration New Zealand's "immediate skills shortage list", which, at the time of writing, includes tertiary teachers with doctorates in education (INZ, 2018).

This paper presents study findings examining cultural sensitivity in the policies and procedures of new staff induction (sometimes called 'onboarding') programs in each of New Zealand's eight publicly-funded universities. The analysis of these induction processes was guided by research outcomes from well-established generic 'best practice' approaches within Human Resources (HR) and related literature. These practices include having, for instance, interactive rather than didactic information sessions, avoiding information overload, facilitating a 'buddy' system, and sharing goals and contextual experiences (see, for example, Employment New Zealand, 2018). Our findings highlight some possible tensions between university policies delivering organisationally-focussed inductions and the needs of new academic teaching staff, many of whom inevitably originate from diverse cultural backgrounds. The paper thus speaks directly to the conference theme of (re)valuing higher education by examining how HEIs can better (re)value staff and their cultural diversity.

The paper begins by outlining the contextual issues involved in the movement/migration of HEI staff. It then outlines the method and results used to investigate the induction policies of New Zealand's eight publicly-funded universities. This is followed by a discussion critically highlighting tensions and challenges found within the induction policies. The conclusion offers several recommendations for improving HEI inductions.

## **The changing global HE context and the movement/migration of tertiary teachers**

In an era of globalisation and technological advances, HE teachers (like many professionals) are moving or migrating in ever-greater numbers. Along with the advantages of relocation come multiple challenges in settling in a new country of residence. Migration to New Zealand is no exception. The country's economic strength is high compared to that of other OECD nations; like many other member states, there is also a continuing shift towards high-skilled occupations, with "strong growth in the share of people working in managerial and professional jobs and declining employment shares in agriculture and manufacturing" (OECD, 2017). However, multiple concerns about New Zealand's economic future are relevant to HEIs: namely, labour productivity levels being well below OECD average, low salaries, and citizens' well-being and quality of living being constrained (OECD, 2017).

HE teachers in New Zealand particularly find that they need to come to terms with their status as a sector relative to their skills. Over the past decade, levels of inequalities have polarised; New Zealand has high levels of skills, but also high levels of mismatch between job levels and qualifications. In other words, those without the appropriate qualifications are retained in managerial positions, while those in lower-skilled jobs are frequently over-qualified for those roles. Clearly, then, academic tertiary teaching staff are a highly qualified but under-valued sector of the workforce. The advantages of addressing these disparities are numerous, and are highlighted in the New Zealand Government's own review of tertiary education, which states:

International education helps to *improve* domestic teaching and learning so that New Zealand students can benefit from an internationally competitive curriculum and access to *high quality, internationally recognised teaching staff*. It gives students a *global context and enhances their understanding and respect for their own and other cultures*. (New Zealand Government, 2014, p. 18; authors' emphasis)

In the absence of data specifically regarding the recruitment and retention of HE teachers, we turned to a comparable group of highly-skilled professionals documented in OECD reports: international medical graduates. New Zealand has the second-highest proportion of these graduates among OECD countries (behind Israel), including 43% of the specialist workforce. Currently, around 25% of the medical graduates recruited to New Zealand leave their roles within three years (Association of Salaried Medical Specialists, 2017). Their reasons are complex, but include a lack of recognition, few promotion opportunities and low salaries. These low levels of retention have multiple societal and economic implications, including significant impacts on taxpayers, employers and patient care.

If this data is reflected in the New Zealand HE teaching population (and, given the level of education required, there is no reason to suggest that it would not), this could have serious implications for the quality of teaching and learning in New Zealand. The average cost of recruiting an academic staff member is estimated to be \$4,200 per individual (University of Otago, n.d.a). However, relocation, training, support and administrative costs can increase this figure significantly. Hence the importance of our investigations into New Zealand HEIs' induction policies, and addressing the needs of international academic teaching staff.

### **(Re)valuing migrant tertiary teachers in HE**

Universities face ever-increasing burdens in demonstrating 'value for money'. This is fueled by on-going marketisation and the rising importance of interpretations of comparative performance data in a competitive global market. The costs of recruitment, training and retention of high-quality academic staff are intrinsic to these assessments. These neo-liberal influences are highly visible in universities' documentation (see, for example, Ball & Youdell, 2008).

Within this global, marketised environment, the quality of tertiary teaching has increasingly been subjected to analysis; New Zealand has not escaped these developments. Recent moves towards capturing student evaluation and feedback of teaching quality illustrate management's implementation of recommendations from the Government's Tertiary Education Strategy (op. cit.). Undoubtedly, promoting and enhancing more effective ways of drawing on the expertise and cultural diversity of its own workforce would be a realisable way to meet these objectives.

Many scholars (such as Biesta, 2011) emphasise that a culturally-sensitive approach to pedagogical strategies can enhance learning for students of diverse backgrounds. In the New Zealand context, the emphasis has primarily been on using a bicultural approach inherent in the New Zealand National Curriculum, which incorporates explicit references to the Māori worldview and philosophy, through creative metaphor and narratives (Mahuika, Berryman, & Bishop, 2011; Mahuika, et al., 2011; Simpson & Williams, 2012). However, the extent to which these types of strategies are utilised in induction programs for HEI staff are underexplored in the literature. This is disappointing, because induction and professional development that aims to improve HE sector staffing by (re)valuing teachers' expertise and cultural knowledge can enhance the delivery of student-centred learning. To help fill this gap in knowledge, universities' induction policies were examined.

## Methodology

The analysis of the induction policies was conducted through an interpretivist paradigm; an inductive approach was adopted using qualitative content analysis. This method involves systematically and closely examining texts in order to identify manifest or latent meanings, themes and patterns (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2008). It was suitable for the study given the need to uncover a range of elements relating to culture in the context of inductions, rather than any specific or pre-determined list of elements. The units of analysis were publicly available documents and web-pages relating to the universities' induction programs, available on the institutional websites. Where these documents were unavailable (due to broken hyperlinks or restricted access, for example), the institutions were emailed directly for further information. As the investigation needed to capture as much information as possible about the inductions, no samples were chosen; in other words, all (publicly available) web-pages and documents relating to inductions were analysed.

## Results

We outline below our findings from each of the eight universities, with one over-arching question front-of-mind: *What evidence is there of intercultural sensitivity in these universities' induction policies and documents?* Our inquiry on this aspect of best practice was framed by Cushner (2015, p. 203), who defines intercultural competence as:

the critical knowledge and skills that enable people to manage their interpersonal interactions with people different from themselves, thus allowing them to make increasingly more complex perceptual distinctions about their experience with cultural differences, and thus, to be successful within a wide range of culturally diverse contexts.

This definition was suitable for the investigation, as it captured the broad range of cultural elements inevitably found in workplaces. It also emphasised, with regard to universities specifically, the importance of staff inductions as the juncture at which individuals should acquire the “critical knowledge and skills” to help them function successfully in increasingly culturally diverse academic contexts. We now turn to the eight universities (in alphabetical order) and their induction programs.

### Auckland University of Technology (AUT)

The induction system at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) features a combination of centralised programs – for all new staff, for permanent/fixed term staff, and for hourly paid staff – as well as Faculty- or School- specific activities. Although all information about the induction processes is stored on the staff intranet, in response to a request they were outlined in an email from the manager of the Organisational Development (OD) team (V. Duffy, pers. comm.). This team coordinates a New Staff Orientation programme, entitled ‘A Good Start – New Staff Orientation’, combined with a New Staff *Pōwhiri* [welcome] *hui* [meeting] at the *Marae* [community assembly house]. This is followed by an overview of the University's strategic directions, vision and values given by senior leaders. The University also offers three “bite-size” orientation sessions: (1) Introduction to Academic Practice (for academic staff), covering topics such as ethics, research and the library; (2) Welcome on Board (for all staff), covering subjects such as HR systems, branding and communication; and (3) IT Know How (for all staff), dealing with information technology systems and support. All of these sessions are held five times a year. New staff also take part in specific induction programs delivered by their respective Faculties or Schools. Orientation for hourly paid academics is also provided,

covering student services, health and safety, and AUT technology. Its intranet also houses a “new Staff Centre” featuring various materials.

Few culture-related elements feature in the orientation processes aside from the *Pōwhiri*. One relates to teaching. Staff have opportunities to attend programs provided by the Centre for Learning and Teaching; one programme caters for staff new to university teaching and the other for existing lecturers wanting a refresher. The latter programme provides details about critically evaluating a range of evidence-based teaching methods for use in various disciplinary contexts; this includes bi-cultural curriculum, and culturally-responsive teaching. However, these cultural elements are oriented towards students, rather than educators.

## **Lincoln University**

Lincoln University has made very little information public about its induction processes. Although the “For Staff” section of its website contains a range of resources for employees – about health and safety, privacy, and University regulations, for example – it does not feature detailed content specifically about induction procedures (Lincoln University, 2017a). Generally, according to the “Policy on Staff Development”, the University is committed to ensuring each new staff member undertakes “a structured orientation and induction programme” (Lincoln University, 2008). The University’s “Induction Procedure” document states the HR division is responsible for meeting with the new staff member and orienting her or him to the University, as well as providing an induction kit. The staff member’s Division, Centre or Group is responsible for delivering an induction programme that includes an orientation to the staff member’s area of work, role(s), and the provision of “mentors and/or “buddies”” (Lincoln University, n.d.). The “Recruitment, Selection and Appointment Procedure” also mentions that a Health and Safety Representative is responsible for undertaking a Health and Safety induction (Lincoln University, 2017b). Further information was unavailable at the time of research; the University’s Interim HR Director has replied to requests for further details, stating that the processes are currently being updated.

## **Massey University**

Massey University presents a comprehensive set of information that is openly accessible (Massey University, n.d.). The processes seem to be in line with best practice, being highly structured, in terms of dates and feedback opportunities. Responsibility for inductions is delegated to an individual’s line manager.

In contrast to the promotion of intercultural communication through the engagement of culturally-different people, there seems an emphasis in the documents on a managerial approach and assimilation of the new staff member to organisational norms. For example, the aim of the managers’ role in the induction programme is to ensure that a “...new team member fully understands the objectives of the University and the department, the University’s policies and the key performance indicators [KPIs] of their position and that you are in touch with their development and support needs” (Massey University, n.d. p. 2). Throughout the induction documents, language emphasises the commercialisation of the institution, by stressing the importance to staff of KPIs and competence assessments. This analysis leaves us wondering whether the lack of phrases providing explicit acknowledgement of the value of inclusivity, diversity, and an individual’s broader motivations for teaching and researching may alienate some staff, particularly individuals from cultures outside New Zealand. Although the front page of the staff member’s induction handbook states that “[t]he Massey workforce is a rich mix of people”, from the documentation available, there seems a missed opportunity for expanding upon the *how* and explaining *why* this cultural diversity may add value to the institution on both the micro- and macro-levels.

## The University of Auckland

The University of Auckland provided comprehensive, open-access information on its website (University of Auckland, 2018). In terms of inclusivity, the induction policy is only applicable for staff working 20+ hours per week; this could be interpreted as part-time staff being less valued or included than their full-time colleagues. It is unclear from the University's *Annual Report* how many staff are part-time, and what their genders and ethnicities are; however, in view of recent changes within the workplace, part-time workers are likely to be a significant, and increasing, percentage. If induction is absent for this group of staff, misunderstandings about institutional structure and policy may arise.

More positively, in line with established 'best practice', there are clear lines of demarcation between orientation ('on-boarding') of new staff and induction. The internationally recognised software system 'Red Carpet' promotes a structured online programme of events and procedures that can be completed and submitted where appropriate and allows up to six months for staff to obtain full institutional induction requirements. Inductions are delegated to Heads of Departments, who are directly responsible for each new staff member's programme. Teaching and research roles are overseen by a separate department.

There are clearly-structured, timed schedules of events that support new staff to explore (for example) Māori traditions and protocols, institutional policies and other elements of university operations. In terms of intercultural competence, there were no explicit references to the promotion of the Māori language, customs, philosophy or worldview, other than commonly-used terms such as *marae* and *pōwhiri /hui*. Our initial search of the University of Auckland's induction documentation included no references to the word 'culture' (other than referring to institutional culture as organisational norms), or valuing the diversity of the new staff recruits, and no reference to the value they may bring to the University in terms of cultural knowledge and experiences. A further, more in-depth investigation of the processes 'behind the scenes' is therefore required to explore this area in more detail.

## University of Canterbury

The University of Canterbury is another institution that provides little public information about its induction processes. The University's website states that details are available on its intranet, which is restricted to staff (University of Canterbury, n.d.a). Requests have been made by this paper's authors for further details, but no response has yet been received.

However, induction information is provided for fixed-term academic support staff and casuals. A dedicated page provides various resources, including a video-welcome from the vice-chancellor, whose opening greeting is in *Te Reo Māori* (the Māori language), as well as information about health and safety, and an "Online Ergonomic Self-Assessment" tool (University of Canterbury, n.d.b). Unfortunately, some of the information on this page is incomplete or unavailable. The link to "Your Employment" takes the reader to a general HR page. An "Additional Resources" link is broken, leading to a 'page-not-found' notification. These shortcomings may indicate a limited valuing of fixed-term and casual staff by the university: an issue that features increasingly in current international debates about the marketisation and casualisation of academic staff in HEIs (Holmwood, 2016; Sutherland, 2018).

## University of Otago

The University of Otago's 'onboarding' program centres on three key elements: the online Red Carpet system, HR Starting Essentials, and Department Induction Facilitators. The Red Carpet system has already been outlined in a previous section; Otago particularly highlights the "[c]onsistent welcoming information for new employees – delivered via personal interactions and online portals" (University of Otago, n.d.b). HR Starting Essentials is a one-hour-long seminar delivered fortnightly by the HR division covering a variety of general topics relating to work in the organisation (University of Otago, n.d.c.). The crux of the onboarding program is the Department Induction Facilitator (DIF). That person is tasked with tailoring "a personal onboarding experience for new employees" (University of Otago, n.d.b). This involves a variety of tasks, large and small, before and after the new employee has arrived, such as introducing colleagues in the department, providing an overview of the physical workplace, familiarising the new hire with the various computer systems, helping the new employee obtain a staff ID card, and more. Other staff – such as Supervisors, IT support and HR officers – are also involved, but the DIF is the primary facilitator of the program (University of Otago, n.d.b).

Although Otago's systems are structured, and detail is provided about each element, surprisingly little attention is paid to interpretations of culture at any point during the onboarding process. The Introduction to the Department for general and academic staff features an "Introduction to the *Kaiāwhina Māori* [Support staff for Māori students] and familiarization with relevant policies" (University of Otago, n.d.c.). This is unavailable, though, for casual staff. While another key document briefly and indirectly mentions the importance of familiarisation with organisation culture – in "help[ing] new employees integrate quickly into their new environment" (University of Otago n.d.b) – no more is said on the topic of culture.

## The University of Waikato

The University of Waikato has a comprehensive "welcoming program" that incorporates cultural elements in a slightly more integrated way than the other universities. The main Staff Induction page states, at the outset, that the University "views the core values of *manaakitanga* [hospitality] and *whanaungatanga* [family/community] as essential to the way we lead and manage staff and these are reflected in a strong sense of belonging and common purpose coupled with people-friendly processes and practices" (University of Waikato, n.d.a; original emphasis). The induction program comprises four pillars, with additional information (about the University, health and safety, and the New Zealand Tertiary Education Sector) being available on the website. Those pillars are: (1) a "Sign-On" session with a HR representative to complete forms, and receive a staff ID card and information pack; (2) a "Personal Induction Programme", likely to last several weeks, developed with one's line manager; (3) a "Buddy" system involving a colleague who acts as a guide during the first few weeks; and (4) an Introductory Session and a *Kanohi ki te Kanohi* session (about Māori culture), both of which staff are expected to attend (University of Waikato, n.d.b).

The University's tacit (though relatively minimal) acknowledgement of the importance of culture, as part of the onboarding process, is evidenced by other induction elements, though the main one is the *Kanohi ki te Kanohi* session. It includes a *Pōwhiri* at *te Kohinga Marama ō* (the University's communal Māori space), and a workshop about the Treaty of Waitangi (University of Waikato, n.d.b). Other elements include the acknowledgement that all new staff have unique induction needs for various reasons, including "being new to New Zealand". The Buddy programme also implicitly shows the university's awareness of inducting staff into organisational culture. As it tells new employees, the initiative is designed to provide:

someone you ask about basic day-to-day practices (What do we do for tea breaks?  
How do we get rid of our rubbish? Can we use the phones for personal calls? etc.)

which may not otherwise be covered. It provides an informal contact point for all kinds of query and is intended to assist with the initial settling in and culture shock associated with a new work environment. (University of Waikato, n.d.b).

These relatively brief mentions of culture, apart from the Māori-focussed session, mark the extent in the publicly available documents of this University's engagement with inter-cultural factors that might affect new teaching staff.

## **Victoria University of Wellington**

Victoria University of Wellington provides very limited openly-available information on its website. The documents that *were* available focus on health and safety policies, checklists and legislation. Disappointingly, some of the documents were difficult to read due to the poor quality of the scanned copies. This raises issues of equality of access to staff with disabilities and/or impairments, and/or for whom English is not their first language. Again, the delegation of each new staff members' induction goes to her or his line-manager.

## **Discussion: culturally-sensitive inductions as critical to valuing HE migrant teachers**

Our analyses relied only on the available documents from these eight universities and, therefore, we cannot be certain that they provide all the information needed to determine specific outcomes. However, the documents and websites analysed do provide useful insights, and show how inductions vary considerably between institutions, as do approaches to intercultural elements when they are acknowledged. Indeed, these elements are virtually absent from the universities' induction programs, apart from acknowledgements (in varying degrees) of Māori cultural elements. New international staff arriving in New Zealand will be pleased to know that several institutions will make a commitment to helping them understand Māori culture. However, it would appear from the documentation we have analysed that the cultures of their own countries of origin may be ignored.

Although new international students' cultures are increasingly explicitly acknowledged and valued by universities, migrant educators' cultures are sometimes not explicitly acknowledged, at least not in their induction documentation. Cultures are increasingly valued for students from enrolment onwards, but not for educators from induction onwards. This poses distinct challenges to fully valuing migrant HE teachers. It suggests a possible cultural ignorance or insensitivity on the part of universities' management. This is particularly troubling given that the marketing messages from these centres of learning generally claim that they act as critics and consciences of society.

Including more cultural, and especially inter-cultural, elements in induction programs would be beneficial in many ways, not least in helping new staff become more adept at navigating complex socio-cultural terrain. As our analysis showed, the induction programme is likely to have a corporate spirit that predominantly focuses (implicitly) on organisational culture. As it also showed, new employees are unlikely to be introduced to New Zealand's increasingly varied cultural practices and norms, as well as the challenges that New Zealand faces as a bicultural and multicultural society in the twenty-first century. The lack of attention to culture across the induction programs is problematic and deserves a deeper investigation.

The lack of access to information about many induction programs is also highly problematic. As mentioned in the preceding section, documentation was often missing or difficult to read and, from some of the universities, was not forthcoming at all, either from their websites or

after formal requests via telephone and/or email. This aspect of the investigation was in itself significant. A lack of transparent and easily accessible policies – especially for research purposes – potentially calls into question the fundamental philosophy of induction policies that should aim to place value upon publicly attracting, recruiting and retaining new, culturally-diverse staff.

## Conclusion

New Zealand's society contains significant levels of inequalities: between levels of income, qualifications within job roles, and ethnic diversity in higher management positions. It could be argued that New Zealand's economy could benefit from a more explicit focus on (re)valuing the highly-skilled migrant workers: those currently within the workforce and future recruits. HEIs could be at the forefront of improving aspects of staffing that address these economic problems. As the OECD points out, labour productivity levels could be raised by increasing the levels of research and development activities that could be enhanced with international connections and improved support for innovation.

Research confirms that improved induction processes provide multiple benefits on social and economic levels (see, for example, Bauer, 2010). For instance, the costs of staff recruitment are reduced through enhanced staff retention. With a better match between qualified individuals and role expectations, the costs of training could be reduced, adding to efficiency savings for university administrative budgets. Perhaps most importantly, teaching staff who feel valued can contribute towards positive student-centred outcomes.

The findings from our study highlight several possible recommendations for universities.

- More explicit explanations of Māori culture could be integrated into university induction policies and documentation.
- The collation and sharing of data regarding HEI staff origin, recruitment and retention would be valuable. More recognition (and potentially celebration) of the different cultural backgrounds of new academic employees could also be beneficial.
- On a practical level, induction details could be made publicly available on all universities' websites, to help insiders and outsiders (including prospective staff).

Further research in this area is needed. This study performed a qualitative content analysis on policy documents; subsequent studies, looking at induction and onboarding in universities in Australasia more broadly, could also benefit from interviews with HR personnel. Surveys or interviews exploring new staff members' (especially overseas-trained academics') experiences could also be beneficial.

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