

Online Learning Community

olc.school.nz [no longer active]

Type of provider – Programme, non-profit
Primary distance modality – Synchronous

Background

The Online Learning Community was an association of several virtual learning programmes that provided secondary level courses (more specifically FarNet, HarbourNet, Volcanics, and WeLCom programmes). The administration of the programme was based on the North Island, and it primarily operated on the North Island. Unlike other distance learning providers, which are special institutions or private schools, the Online Learning Community is considered a distance learning programme – in that it doesn't have legal status as a school within the educational context.

The Online Learning Community programme merged with the Virtual Learning Network Primary prior to the 2023 school year to form Kōtui Ako | Virtual Learning Network Aotearoa. To view the Kōtui Ako's full profile, visit:

<https://flanz.org.nz/dl-pulse/profiles/kotuiako/>

Governance

The Online Learning Community was established as a charitable trust on 01 June 2010 (registration number CC45060), and was originally known as the Virtual Learning Network Community. The trust was established by the leaders of several of the existing e-learning clusters that were in operation at the time (i.e., OtagoNet, BayLink, FarNet, CoroNet, WestNet, and Volcanics). The original purpose of the Virtual Learning Network Community was “to facilitate and support coherent organisation of educational activities, within and across ‘Communities of Schools (CoSs),’ which promote the vision and values of the Virtual Learning Network Community Charter” (Virtual Learning Network Community, 2010, p. 2). In particular the VLN Community was designed to:

1. facilitate national level educational activities;
2. provide national level 'voice'/advocacy for CoSs and build the institutional recognition;
3. address issues of the immediate & longer term sustainability of CoSs;
4. assume joint ownership and responsibility of ongoing development of the Virtual Learning Network sites and services, in line with any relevant contracts and/or memorandums of understanding in force at the time;
5. foster a culture of innovation & knowledge building which enhances and enriches learning;
6. facilitate national and regional level collaboration and flow of ideas in a coherent and effective way;
7. facilitate/provide professional growth and mentoring for eTeachers, CoS leadership and other VLNC members; and
8. provide guidance & support role for CoSs (existing and emerging) and new schools. In summary, to be an organisation that can provide the 'matrix for

growth' and acts as a 'catalyst for educational transformation', and to generally promote, develop, utilise and support educational services and resources across the New Zealand education system. (p. 2)

The trust was changed to the Online Learning Community on 01 May 2019. The trust was governed by a constitution, and it also followed all of the requirements outlined in the *Charities Act*. On 20 October 2022, as a part of the merger to form Kōtui Ako, the Online Learning Community came to be governed by the charitable trust of Kōtui Ako | Virtual Learning Network Aotearoa (registration number CC50872). The Online Learning Community charitable trust was officially dissolved on 09 January 2024.

Resourcing

Funding for the Online Learning Community was based on a membership model. Schools were required to sign a Memorandum of Commitment to ensure the necessary staffing and funding could be transferred from the member school to the Online Learning Community. The annual fee was 0.075 full-time teacher equivalent in the form of staffing, plus \$2000 (plus GST). Member schools also had to commit an additional 0.2 full-time teacher equivalent in the form of an e-teacher, or the financial equivalent for the provision of an e-teacher, to deliver a course online. Finally, member schools were “responsible for actioning in-school pastoral support for their students studying online. Each school is required to designate a staff member to act as an e-dean. The e-dean is the key liaison with the Online Learning Community e-principal, and between their students and their e-teachers.”¹

Programming

According to the “How the Online Learning Community Works” page on the programme’s former website:

Each class usually consists of around 15-20 students. The classes are run using an online class ‘space.’ These class spaces include the use of a video conferencing platform and an area for curated coursework.

[Online Learning Community] e-teachers use *Zoom* for their video conference meeting with their class. The related coursework is developed, stored and shared using an online tool (e.g., *Google Classroom*, *Google Sites*).

For 1 hour every week, the e-teacher runs their face-to-face video conference with their class. Students join the class at the appropriate time from their home school, using an internet capable device and *Zoom*, a free internet-based video conferencing application. During the conference, students see each other and their e-teacher, which provides an opportunity to build strong relationships, create a sense of community, while engaging in an environment conducive to quality learning.

Even though students only see their e-teacher and fellow students once a week, through the online environment and a range of different communication tools, students are able to make contact with their e-teacher as often as need be. Completed assignments, assessments and activities are shared with the e-teacher mainly through *Google Docs* and *Google Drive* so e-teachers are able to provide feedback in a timely way

¹ Taken from the Internet Archive version of olc.school.nz/About/How-To-Join

In addition, each affiliated school designates a teacher to provide in-school pastoral support – an e-dean – for students studying online. The e-dean is responsible for ensuring students meet their coursework obligations, attend their online meetings and communicate regularly with their e-teacher.

Activity 2019

Overall, during the 2019 school year the Online Learning Community provided virtual learning for 959 course enrolments (184 were from students of Māori descent), which represented 903 unique students who attended 65 different schools. The programme offered 66 courses and utilized 14.5 full-time equivalent teachers.

Course	Number of students	Number of Māori students
Accounting Level 1	19	5
Accounting Level 2	16	4
Accounting Level 3	16	0
Art History Level 3	17	1
Biology Level 2	15	4
Biology Level 3	11	2
Business Studies Level 1	1	0
Business Studies Level 2	10	4
Chemistry Level 2	24	6
Chemistry Level 3	10	3
Chinese Beginners	16	2
Chinese Intermediate	7	2
Chinese Level 1	8	3
Chinese Level 2	17	0
Chinese Level 3	29	0
Classical Studies Level 2	10	1
Classical Studies Level 3	20	3
Computing Level 1-3	8	1
Computing Level 3	5	0
Digital Technology Level 2	6	0
Digital Technology Level 3	7	1
Design & Visual Communication Level 2	1	1
Economics Level 1	19	3
Economics Level 2	16	3
Economics Level 3	19	1
Education for Sustainability Level 2	8	1
English Level 2	9	7

Course	Number of students	Number of Māori students
English Level 3	10	5
French Level 1	13	0
French Level 2	8	0
French Level 3	9	0
Geography Level 1	5	1
Geography Level 2	14	0
Geography Level 3	17	1
German Level 1	17	1
German Level 2	8	0
German Level 3	16	0
History Level 1	9	3
History Level 2	11	5
History Level 3	22	3
Hospitality Level 3	4	2
Japanese Beginners	26	5
Japanese Level 1	21	5
Japanese Level 2	5	1
Japanese Level 3	13	1
Mathematics - Calculus Level 3	7	1
Mathematics - Statistics L3	7	3
Mathematics Level 2	14	13
Mathematics Year 9	31	7
Media Studies Level 2	6	0
Media Studies Level 3	18	2
Photography Level 2	12	0
Photography Level 3	6	3
Physics Level 2	14	5
Physics Level 3	8	-
Physics Level 3	6	3
Psychology Level 2	32	9
Psychology Level 3	35	6
Religious Studies Level 1-3	2	0
Samoan Level 1	19	1
Samoan Level 2	7	0
Samoan Level 3	23	0
Social Studies Level 3	7	0

Course	Number of students	Number of Māori students
Spanish Beginners	37	9
Spanish Intermediate	4	1
Spanish Level 1	27	6
Spanish Level 3	5	0
Te Reo Maori Beginners	15	4
Te Reo Maori Intermediate	2	2
Te Reo Maori Level 1	8	5
Te Reo Maori Level 2	5	4
Te Reo Maori Level 3	10	8
Tongan Level 2	8	0
Tourism Level 3	4	1
Young Enterprise Scheme	8	0