From distance learning to connected learning:

Open Polytechnic's new student journey

"I enjoy the mental challenge of studying, but I couldn't do it without the flexibility I get from distance learning."

Open Polytechnic Student

The Student Service Strategy (SSS) was developed in 2012. The intent was to design a new customer journey, and to wrap the educational provision with a comprehensive and highly effective customer care package.

As a specialist provider of distance learning, Open Polytechnic aims to inspire success through providing the most flexible, accessible and motivational learning experiences in the world.

The strategy has been described as a complete service shift to turn 'distance' learning into a 'connected' learning community.

The new student journey

■ Wow welcome

Open Polytechnic's website now allows students to easily engage at a time and place that suits them, and via a range of devices. An interactive qualification planner and My Open Polytechnic App enable students to track their progress.

■ Breaking down isolation

The online platform is strengthening student engagement by providing open access for students. Informative videos are embedded throughout the website and cover what to expect when studying, stories of student success and the different types of learning support available.

The next step is an online open community where students can interact with other students across qualifications. Live Chat is being investigated to enable students to talk directly to Open Polytechnic staff.

■ Responsive design

Easy access at a time and place that suits the learner, regardless of the device they are using.
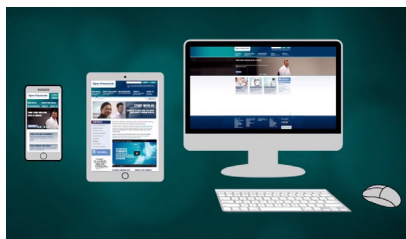
VISION
A New Zealand that's continually learning to succeed

PURPOSE
To inspire success through the most flexible, accessible and motivational learning experience in the world

SERVICE STRATEGY CORE IDEA
Motivating success

SERVICE STRATEGY CORE IDEA

Accessible as	Motivate me	Build community	Create flexibility
• Design a complete online world of learning • Revolutionise customer research • Get closer and consistent • Get tech to all • Create physical spaces	• Create the 'Wowest' welcome • Pump up the learning • Connect to learning world class (wherever they are)	• Break down Isolation • Build great industry connections	• Make time irrelevant • Flex to key groups • Champion flexible teaching

Council role

"The ITP 2010 governance reforms have resulted in a more effective strategic council with increased ownership and involvement in strategy development," Chair Open Polytechnic.

The initial idea to improve students' experience at Open Polytechnic came from the council and management strategy planning sessions. A push for stronger service provision emphasised the need to develop a comprehensive framework for students to start and finish their educational journey. The focus was on addressing the relatively low rates of student retention and progression that the polytechnic faced as a distance learning institution.

Open Polytechnic engaged a design company to develop a new student services strategy. To understand how Open Polytechnic could improve the whole learner experience, design company staff enrolled as students, ran workshops with 40 key staff, engaged with student focus groups and conducted research.

This resulted in Open Polytechnic's vision and purpose being rewritten, which provided new impetus to develop the core idea underpinning the SSS – **Motivating Success**. Tangible outcomes and projects relating to the SSS were also developed. Staff described the process as a valuable 'progressive journey'.

Implementation

The council agreed to the new vision, purpose and SSS, and management set up teams to implement the projects identified in the SSS, coordinated by a steering group.

The Chief Executive reports on the progress of the SSS at every council meeting, and includes regular project reports against the strategy, using dashboards to provide an update on all SSS measures and targets.

As the SSS is being adopted throughout the organisation, the services provided are evolving to better meet learners' needs.

"As Chair of Open Polytechnic, I am looking for the experience of our students to be at the heart of our SSS. It needs to work as an innovative strategy that reflects what will serve the student best. In particular, in the rapidly evolving 21st century learning environment, how new technology together with strong support systems can better connect, inspire and motivate distance learners. I'm delighted with the way our team are taking the principles and concepts of the SSS and applying them across our organisation," Chair Open Polytechnic.

At the end of 2013, the management team provided the council with a comprehensive update on the SSS. This included a progress report on all the work streams, connecting each one back to the vision and purpose that sets out what they are aiming to achieve.

Impact on learners

Strong signals suggest that the new student journey is making a positive impact on the student experience. Student satisfaction surveys show a steady increase in rates of satisfaction since 2011, particularly in the advice and assistance provided during enrolment and in ongoing tutor support.

"Everything we do is through the lens of the strategy and we are looking at ways to engage with the student across the whole experience to motivate them to improve student success", Executive Director Strategy and Analysis.

The four indicators used by the Tertiary Education Commission to assess the performance of each tertiary education institution are: successful course completion, qualification completion, student retention and student progression. The need to reduce the student attrition rate and increase student progression in distance learning was an important driver in the development of the SSS. This has been achieved and Open Polytechnic's educational performance indicators have been steadily improving in recent years.

Other changes made over the same period have included adjustments to the range of provision and removing poorly performing programmes, so the improvement in EPIs cannot be entirely attributed to the SSS.

EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE INDICATORS	ITP SECTOR	2010	2011	2012	2013
Successful Course Completion	79%	64%	73%	80%	80%
Qualification Completion	70%	33%	59%	78%	79%
Student Retention	60%	30%	30%	40%	50%
Student Progression L1–4	37%	20%	18%	25%	32%

Video everywhere

To help connect students with academic support by providing a human face.
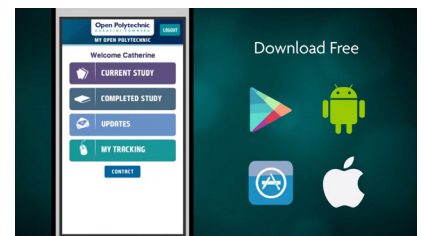

Flexible learning

Policy that promotes flexible working hours and workplace for teaching staff to enable:

- 24/7 technology support
- After hours tutoring shifts
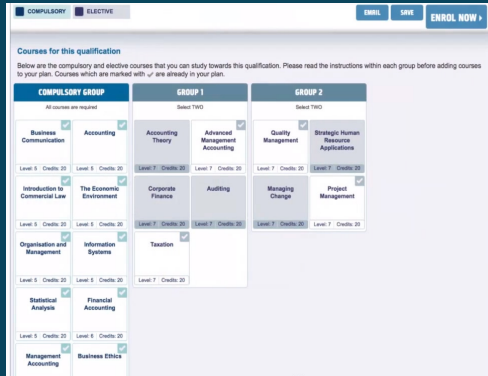- 24/7 Facebook and social media response.

My Open Polytechnic app

The app enables students to keep track of their study, providing them with 'information on the go'.

■ Qualification planning tool

This interactive tool enables students to plan their own qualification.

"I like that it tells you how many you are doing at the moment, the progress bar. I love that it shows you what you are enrolled for and what's achieved."

Open Polytechnic Student

A key challenge of the SSS is how to measure value, which is a complex task. How do you measure the impact of a service shift?

The service shift

From:		To:
'Distance' learning	→	'Connected' learning
Isolated student body	→	A connected learner community
Lower Hutt base, reaching NZ	→	A world of learning
Departmental silos	→	Cross-functional task forces
Resistant to change	→	Embracing new tools
DIY Courses and Tools	→	Open sourcing the best
Paper-based, pizza boxes	→	Default is online
Slow, bureaucratic	→	Rapid development & refinement
'Education of last resort'	→	'A credible first choice'

Evaluations and reviews are planned to help Open Polytechnic continue to be highly responsive and to invest where the perceived value is highest. These will include gaining regular feedback on services and other initiatives from learners, employers and the wider community.

"Our focus is on continually improving our student experience, and developing measures to capture return on investment from the SSS will be an ongoing process. There are early indicators of the benefits of the service to student satisfaction and EPIs – if the right student is on the right course and has the right experience this leads to better EPIs", Chief Executive.

www.openpolytechnic.ac.nz

Tertiary Education Commission
Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua