

Organising a "Spotlight" on Teaching & Learning

These notes are provided as a guide to those interested in organising a "Spotlight" on Teaching and Learning at their home institution. Spotlights range from local events with participants from just one institution, through to regional and national gatherings.

The observations below are based on the experiences of Academy members in Christchurch (Eric Pawson and Rua Murray), working with the Southern Hub of Ako Aotearoa. However, both the Central and Northern Hubs have extensive experience with Spotlights, and Academy members are encouraged to make contact with Hub managers to discuss their ideas and establish how the relevant Hub can support any given event.

1. Definition

A Spotlight is a regional event, jointly organised by Academy members and an Ako hub. Its purpose is to provide an opportunity to share good teaching practice amongst colleagues from tertiary teaching institutions. Presenters need not be - and are often not - Academy members.

2. Scope of the event

Depending on where participants are drawn from (and thus travel requirements to/from the venue), both full and half day events are possible, though half-day events are more common, typically starting in the early afternoon, and, depending on the size of the programme, ending around 4-5pm.

One Christchurch Spotlight, with around 250 participants, required an offsite venue with conference facilities, enabling more social aspects such as an opening finger food lunch and closing bar. Smaller events (50-100 participants) using institutional rooms/resources can have numbers capped to suit.

Depending on the capability of the host venue, video-linking to other institutions (both for presentations and "attendance") can be done. This may be particularly useful for half-day Spotlights where willing participants outside the host region may not be able to travel.

Any tertiary educator is welcome. Ako Aotearoa staff often attend.

3. Roles of the Hub and Academy members

Academy members: organize the programme and host the day.
Successful Spotlights can be organised with varying levels of input from Academy members: simpler events have been managed by just two members.

Hub: administration (initial circular, registration, receipts, finished design of the brochure, liaison with the venue over rooms, facilities and refreshments).

Shared tasks: initial discussion of the programme and theme/s, contacting presenters, discussion of text for the initial circular and programme brochure.

Expectations with respect to organization can vary if there are changes in Hub personnel, so it is best to clear these matters well in advance.

4. Costs

Variable, depending on the venue(s) required, scale of catering etc. Cost recovery is the general principle, with smaller events charging as little as \$25 per participant, which covered administration (including publicity), catering, and travel for presenters who came from out of town. Events within members' host institutions can often secure venues without charge.

5. Timing

Events in Christchurch have always been on Friday afternoons. The 2010 event was held just before the Easter break; those in 2013 and 2016 at the end of the first semester and to coincide with the end of the University of Canterbury's annual teaching week. This has given a wider organizational umbrella for Spotlights to sit within, although attendance from beyond UC has often been greater than from within.

6. Catering

Requirements will clearly vary with the scope of the event. Two observations of note. Post-event catering can be under-utilised as participants often leave quickly at the end of the formal programme. For half day events, a format of two sessions of four or five talks each, separated by a half hour refreshment and discussion break has been successful.

7. Programme

Hubs can provide useful input on topics/themes for which there is a need/interest in the local area, or is a priority focus for Ako Aotearoa. Themed and unthemed events can both be successful. Programmes can be filled with only invited speakers, or calls for presentations can be made. Presentations need not be limited to Academy members. Single or mixed format presentations (talks, workshops, panel discussions) have been successful. Keeping presentations short is preferable, whilst allowing sufficient time for discussion.

8. On the day

Participants are provided with a programme, but handouts are otherwise kept to a minimum. Sessions need good chairs, who in turn need to formulate questions in case there are initially none from the floor. Questions are best taken after each presentation. Ensure technical assistance is on hand.