

Collaborative Promotion of Learning and Teaching: the UTAS Communities of Practice Initiative and the Tasmanian Institute of Learning and Teaching

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In 2011, the Communities of Practice (CoP) Initiative began at the University of Tasmania. This initiative includes funding opportunities to support organic, bottom-up CoPs, as well as university-wide CoPs around strategic priority areas in learning and teaching. Evaluation of the CoP Initiative at UTAS has included qualitative data collection by staff at TILT, including participant observation of CoP activities and the hosting and evaluation of annual CoP workshops for leaders and participants. The Tasmanian Institute of Learning and Teaching (TILT) 'houses' the strategic priority programme of the CoP Initiative. Each year one to two strategic priority areas are determined by TILT, with applications called for from academic staff interested in working in those identified areas. Teaching fellows, seconded to TILT for a period of 12 months, are expected to catalyse and facilitate a University-wide CoP around their fellowship topic, for the purposes of wide engagement and uptake of their work. Following the fellowship year, TILT continues to support the CoP, and outcomes from the fellowship, where possible, are incorporated into on-going TILT activities. The placement of the CoP Initiative within TILT has enabled reciprocal benefits for TILT staff and CoP members across the University. Among those advantages is the promotion of learning and teaching scholarship, and collaborative professional learning as priorities in academic life. A major outcome of this collaboration has been that participation in strategic CoPs, as well as the award of a TILT teaching fellowship have been incorporated into the 'Teaching Performance Expectations' of the UTAS Strategic Plan.