

# Professional Staff Function Design & Organisational Design Principles

## Purpose

The principles detailed below describe *how we do things here* regarding the design of the professional staff functions and organisation design at the University of Auckland. These principles should be considered by Function Leads and Line Managers in partnership with HR Advisory when making changes to the organisational design and operating model, in conjunction with the [‘Review and Restructure Policy and Procedures’](#).

## Goals

To set the direction for ongoing function improvement focus, by:

1. Planning for workforce capability and effectiveness of all professional staff across the University, regardless of what organisational unit they sit in. A good example of this is General Administration, a function which is spread across Faculties, LSRI, Service Divisions and other units.
2. Providing career pathways and organisational structures that enhance staff experience.
3. Enhance the effectiveness of our services across the University, including enabling academic staff and supporting students.
4. Considering the overall function staffing against UniForum benchmarks. These benchmarks are by function, not by organisational unit. This makes it easier to consider function effectiveness, to set FTE targets by function, and for the function lead to engage across the university with respect to function performance.

## Context

The University of Auckland has a strong reputation internationally for efficient and effective Professional Services Operations. We have undertaken significant professional-service reviews to provide strategic capacity and a future focus. Based on best-practice principles, these reviews have often involved consolidating transactional activity as a first step that has enabled standardisation of processes and the use of technology to reduce transactional effort.

A ‘whole-of-institution’ approach to process, service, and job design enables consistent measurement of service levels, continuous improvement programmes, communities of practice, and career pathways. Given that we are in the process of ongoing organisational design, it is important that we validate and maintain these principles over time.

The University seeks to apply the service- and organisational-design and operating-model principles outlined below to address these challenges, resulting in more efficient and more-effective functions, as well as improving the staff experience.

## Overarching Design Guidelines

The following guidelines give focus to ensuring that services are customer-centric, able to embrace modern practices such as Agile and human-centred design and support our desire to deliver services that are mana enhancing for everyone involved. The Professional Services Leadership Team has endorsed these guidelines for the development of Service Design. What we do should be designed and delivered in a way that is:

- Aligned to the University Values and Te Ao Māori Principles
  - Sustainable and caring for our resources, kaitiakitanga
  - Supports our desired culture and staff experience (mana-enhancing, trust-base, active development)
  - Focused on service to our people and their needs
- Clearly connecting what we do to why we do it (our strategy, goals, values)
- Creating an inclusive and engaged governance structure with clear lines of sight for decision making and accountabilities
- Measured in meaningful ways (can demonstrate how it upholds the principles and other goals)
- Purposeful (design thinking that is intentional, universal, and human centred)
- Forward-looking (built to change, attuned to trends and feedback, embraces new ways of thinking)
- Data-driven and digitally-enabled

## Function Design Principles

Each section below details the expectations of specific principles that shape the design and ongoing improvement of the professional services operating model at the University of Auckland:



### Nature Of the Role

Services are provided by roles that can be classified as having a principally-transactional nature or a principally-advisory nature. Quite-different opportunities exist to optimise a transactional role than an advisory role, versus a hybrid role, and depending on our adoption of technological advancements.

#### *Transactional Activity*

*Transactional activity should be centralised and standardised.*

Seeking to centralise and standardise transactional activity so that it is more efficient and effective, and services can be designed optimally. This approach allows the value of specialisation to be maximised, and improves the overall support capabilities available to the University. Consolidating transactions also realise the greatest benefits from technology-based improvements such as automation where possible, reducing operational costs, and potentially improving staff experience.

### *Customer-Facing Activity*

*Advisory activity should be distributed into close customer proximity, in some cases.*

Roles of an advisory nature are inherently more relational and strategic, and should be deployed in close proximity to the customers they serve. Advisory roles differ from transactional roles in their core logic, critical success factors, and the skills and capabilities necessary for them to deliver well. In general, advisory roles require specialist knowledge or technical expertise from a particular discipline, and the ability to adapt to customer needs. Note, taking the whole-of-institution view, this principle must be balanced against the benefits of creating centralised teams with specialist advisory capability. Generalised advisory is more likely to be distributed and closer to the customers.

### *Encapsulation of Activity*

*Delivery teams should be structured to encapsulate a primary activity type.*

Teams should be primarily focused on either transactional and process work, or on customer-service, advisory, and strategy work so that capabilities are aligned and measures of success are clear.

## Design Integration

*Functions are designed in an integrated context.*

The structure of the teams and roles will be designed so that services can operate in an integrated and cohesive fashion. For example, enabling clear decision-making rights and autonomy and minimising handoffs.

### *“Whole of Institution” View*

*Professional services should be designed and optimised for the University as a whole.*

Considering the service model from the perspective of what is most effective for the University as a whole, rather than favouring localised variations.

### *Reducing Isolated Roles*

*Roles are established within the context of functions and communities.*

This addresses the risk of single points of failure across our professional staff services. Reducing isolated roles also improves compliance, improves communication, professional development and career paths.

### *Economies Of Skill and Scale*

*Skills and capabilities planned and managed across functions and communities.*

Ensuring that skills are aggregated into teams and communities and reducing isolated roles. Defining the skills and capabilities required across functions (i.e., across all staff contributing to the delivery of function, regardless of where they reside within the University organisational structure). Working in the Ngā Taumata Tutukinga strategic capability framework in partnership with Human Resources.

### *Span of Control*

*Organisational structures should be designed so they are flat and wide.*

Designing structures that have an effective span of control and reducing one-on-one hierarchical relationships to those where highly-specialised roles and disciplines are involved. An effective span of

control generally looks like 7 to 10 people. Deeper hierarchies require more people to be trained in line management and also impact effective communication. There is good research indicating that the more layers in a hierarchy, the less customer centric the service.

#### *Role-Based Workflow*

*Business processes should be designed with clear roles and responsibilities.*

Business processes that have standard roles and responsibilities are easier to automate, and easier to adjust when approvals and delegation privileges are changing and support future Artificial Intelligence techniques.

#### *Service Governance*

*Service improvements should be customer-centric*

Function Leads support prioritisation of service improvements based on the needs of priority customer groups. For example, improvements to our Research Platforms should be driven by the needs and feedback from Principal Investigators. There is a need to facilitate forums that connect key customer groups, functions, and service partners for effective service governance to take place. Service design and process design should seek to reduce and remove manual effort from high-volume and low-value transactions for all stakeholders involved in the service, as well as the customer.

## Job Architecture

#### *Standardisation of Positions*

*Position descriptions should be created from standardised building blocks.*

Aligning staff into professional practices allows greater focus on the provision of standards and provides more opportunities for professional development. Consolidating roles reduces the number of staff who participate in a process and lowers the number of handoffs, increases the quality of process compliance and ultimately the ability to deliver quality service. This enables us to streamline workflow with clearer roles and responsibilities, and improve career prospects for staff.

#### *Career Pathways*

*Position descriptions should stand in relation to one another and have clear pathways between them.*

Enhancing career pathways and internal mobility across the University. This principle is important for developing careers and capability across the University.

### *Skills and Capability Mappings*

*Develop a mapping of skills prioritised by strategic capability framework*

Mapping our skills to our current workforce and future workforce will open up career pathways for our staff, and support implementation of the priority areas of Ngā Taumata Tutukinga, our professional staff strategic capability framework.

## Functions and Communities

### *Professional Staff Reporting to Professional Staff*

*Staff contributing to professional services should report to other professional staff.*

Following on from the above, minimising the number of Professional Staff that report to Academic Staff. This enhances the support and development of Professional Staff.

### *Staff have a Primary Function*

*Professional staff are assigned to a primary function.*

This is important for individual contributors so they know how their work affects the business outcomes of the University, and so they know the functions and communities to which they belong, understanding career development options. Historically, roles supporting multiple functions have led to a higher number of staff participating in a process, thereby increasing the training and support requirements, increasing handoffs, lowering the quality of process compliance, and ultimately affecting service performance.

Note that 'functions' are mapped to Job Family Groups and Job Families in Hono | Workday HCM.

### *Professional Practice Management*

*Professional practices should be defined and should be managed actively.*

The Practice Manager supports the quality of the practice services, and the capability and performance of team members. Team members sit with their customers, and work to their priorities. They have greater specialisation, and therefore improved career prospects. Examples of these practices include Human Resources Advisory, Finance Business Partners, Project and Change Managers, and IT specialists.

### *Communities of Practice*

*Communities of Practice should support and develop professional staff.*

Communities of Practice (CoPs) provide valuable pan-University staff networks that facilitate the identification and recommendation of opportunities for continuous improvement and innovation; good practice; collaborative communication; and learning and development. CoPs connect staff across the University to meet and use shared experience to improve and enhance performance. The University operates many successful CoPs for roles as diverse as Group Services, Directors of Faculty Operations, and Project Managers.

## Frameworks and Methodologies

Several frameworks and methodologies are applicable to and guide the design work of the University as applicable to its professional-services functions. These include:

- Business Capability planning based upon the Higher Education Reference Models = <https://library.educause.edu/resources/2021/9/the-higher-education-reference-models>
- Industry Benchmarking based upon UniForum = <https://www.cubaneconsulting.com/uniform>
- Business Process Optimisation and, in due course, Process Mining
- Service Management and Service Effectiveness
- Customer Journey Mapping and Customer Experience Mapping
- Voice of Customer understanding, including customer-satisfaction survey results from the Staff Service Centre and the Shared Transaction Centre, inputs from the Employee Engagement Survey and the UniForum Service Effectiveness Survey, and other sources

# Appendix

## Further Information

### Gartner

- Finance Research Team (2023) *Finance Organizational Structure Playbook*, Gartner Research, Article ID #G00414106, available at <https://gartner.auckland.ac.nz/document/3919920> — *Despite making multiple changes to their finance functions' organizational structures, many CFOs are struggling to organize Finance in a way that supports its efficiency and value-creation mandate.*
- Finance Research Team (2023) *The Future of Finance: Organizing Around Finance's Enduring Comparative Advantages*, Gartner Research, Article ID #G00748551, available at <https://gartner.auckland.ac.nz/document/4004491> — *External trends are altering finance's core comparative advantages, invalidating many aspects of its future transformation plans. Finance leaders must rethink their 2025 finance transformation plan and chart a course for the future built around the enduring value their function can uniquely provide.*
- Lacheca, D. (2022) *Quick Answer: How Is Human-Centered Design Changing Government Services Design?*, Gartner Research, Article ID #G00779348, available at <https://gartner.auckland.ac.nz/document/4020503> — *A clear understanding of stakeholders' needs is essential to contemporary government service design and is increasingly achieved through the use of HCD. CIOs must understand the implications of HCD in the context of government service design in order to guide their organizations' adoption plans.*
- Moyer, K., Scheibenreif, D., Furlonger, D., & Paulman, T. (2025) *2025 CEO Survey: AI Opportunities to Delay Middle Management*, Gartner Research, Article ID G00828340, available at <https://gartner.auckland.ac.nz/document-reader/document/6494771> — *Sticky inflation combined with the rise of game-changing technology makes productivity an attractive growth tool. CEOs want to increase manager span of control and delay significant chunks of middle management through the use of AI.*

### Other Sources

- Kamal, H. (2021) *Support Services Role Redesign: Getting It Right: University of Auckland Case Study*, UniForum Insights, available at <https://insights.uniforum.co/uniforum-insights/support-services-role-redesign-getting-it-right-university-of-auckland-case-study/>
- Rytberg, M., & Geschwind, L. (2021) *Organising professional support staff at higher education institutions: a multidimensional, continuous balancing act*, *Tertiary Education Management*, 27, 47–58, available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-020-09064-y>
- Agrawal, A., Eklund, S., Waite, J., & Woodcock, E. (2020) *Finance 2030: Four imperatives for the next decade*, McKinsey & Company, available at <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/operations/our-insights/finance-2030-four-imperatives-for-the-next-decade> — *Over the past decade, finance departments reduced costs by almost 30 percent. The next decade's focus: achieving even higher levels of effectiveness.*

- DeVine J, Lal, S., Zea, M. () *\_The human factor in service design\_*, McKinsey & Company, available at <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/operations/our-insights/the-human-factor-in-service-design> — *Focus on the human side of customer service to make it psychologically savvy, economically sound, and easier to scale.*
- Kwan, A., Schroeck, M., & Kawamura, J. (2019) *\_Architecting an Operating Model: A platform for accelerating digital transformation\_*, Deloitte Insights, available at [https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/5078\\_architecting-an-operating-model/DI\\_architecting-an-operating-model.pdf](https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/5078_architecting-an-operating-model/DI_architecting-an-operating-model.pdf), includes these three principles with associated “ways to execute”:

### **Three principles to continually strengthen operating models**

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Ways to execute</b>
<b>Democratize information across the organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leverage technology designed to drive community and support communications</li> <li>• Collect, index, and host information on a user-friendly and widely accessible platform—a “digital library”</li> <li>• Host digital town halls to socialize executive and functional priorities, keep employees engaged, and solicit real feedback</li> </ul>
<b>Zero in on value-generating activities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design effective processes that drive transparency and continuous reprioritization</li> <li>• Factor in the role of a coordinator, manager, and customer-focused leader—a “product manager”—on all teams</li> <li>• Have clear and singular ownership of tasks, outcomes, and deadlines</li> </ul>
<b>Empower individuals and teams to own change</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify decision rights at every level</li> <li>• Celebrate wins to build on successes, build momentum, and lift engagement</li> <li>• Tie incentives to expected behaviors</li> </ul>

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