

WHAT DO ACADEMIC DEVELOPERS NEED TO KNOW?

Outcomes of the CAULLT Academic
Development Workshop

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Supporting Academic Developers	1
Key Skills for Academic Developers	2
Essential Knowledge Areas for Academic Developers	3
Building Relationships: The Core of Academic Development	4
Conclusion	5
About the facilitators and writers of this report	6

SUPPORTING ACADEMIC DEVELOPERS

Academic developers play a crucial role in higher education by supporting educators, enhancing teaching quality, and ensuring alignment with institutional and regulatory frameworks. Their work involves translating policy into practice, facilitating professional learning, and fostering collaborative and interdisciplinary relationships. To be effective, academic developers require a blend of pedagogical expertise, policy awareness, technical proficiency, and strong interpersonal skills.

This report synthesises insights gathered from the CAULLT Academic Development Day workshop, where participants discussed the key competencies, academic developers need to succeed. The discussions centred on three core areas: (1) essential skills, (2) critical knowledge, and (3) relationship-building capabilities. This report presents these themes in detail, offering a structured framework for supporting new academic developers in their roles.

KEY SKILLS FOR ACADEMIC DEVELOPERS

Academic developers must be proficient in multiple areas to effectively support teaching and learning initiatives. The following skills are essential:

Teaching, Coaching, and Advocacy

- Apply pedagogical knowledge and soft skills in practice.
- Facilitate professional learning for educators.
- Act as an advocate for quality teaching and student-centred learning.

Policy Translation and Curriculum Development

- Interpret and implement institutional and national higher education policies.
- Align curriculum with graduate capabilities and standards such as the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and Higher Education Standards Framework (TEQSA).
- Conduct curriculum mapping and ensure constructive alignment in course design.

Professional Learning Design and Facilitation

- Design and deliver workshops, training modules, and tailored resources for tertiary educators.
- Integrate innovative approaches, including generative AI and emerging technologies.

Building Relationships and Institutional Influence

- Engage with academics, professional staff, leadership, and students to foster an inclusive learning culture.
- Develop strong networks to enhance collaboration and knowledge-sharing.
- Gain leadership support to strengthen the impact of academic development work.

Adaptability and Continuous Learning

- Remain open to new ideas, educational trends, and pedagogical research.
- Continuously refine skills and knowledge through professional development.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AREAS FOR ACADEMIC DEVELOPERS

In addition to skills, academic developers must possess a comprehensive understanding of the higher education sector and its evolving landscape.

Institutional and Sector-Specific Knowledge

- Understand the identity, culture, and operational structure of their institution.
- Navigate higher education governance, policies, and funding models.
- Stay informed on national and international higher education trends and strategies.

Educational Frameworks and Learning Theories

- Apply theories of learning, including cognitive, social, and psychological aspects.
- Utilise frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), feedback literacy, and principles of constructive alignment.
- Recognise and address biases in teaching and learning.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

- Engage in SoTL to ensure research-informed practice.
- Promote reflective and reflexive teaching approaches among educators.

Technical Proficiency and Data Utilisation

- Develop expertise in learning management systems and educational technologies.
- Leverage data analytics to inform curriculum improvements and teaching innovations.
- Utilise data for securing grants and institutional funding opportunities.

Cross-Institutional Networks and Partnerships

- Build collaborative relationships across institutions to share best practices.
- Engage with external bodies and professional networks for continuous learning and support.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS: THE CORE OF ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

Strong relationship-building skills are essential for academic developers to create effective, collaborative environments within their institutions.

Clarifying Role and Scope

- Clearly define the role and contributions of academic developers to key stakeholders.
- Set realistic expectations and boundaries while remaining a supportive resource.

Interdisciplinary Engagement and Inclusion

- Value diverse disciplinary perspectives and treat all expertise equally.
- Foster inclusive practices that respect different backgrounds and experiences.

Navigating Power Dynamics

- Approach interactions with patience and a commitment to building capacity.
- Advocate for equitable teaching practices that level power hierarchies in academia.

Emotional Support and Active Listening

- Establish trust through empathy, active listening, and constructive feedback.
- Provide a safe space for educators to share challenges and co-develop solutions.

Professional Networking and Institutional Influence

- Engage in both formal and informal networking opportunities to build credibility.
- Increase the visibility of academic development work to gain institutional support.
- Secure leadership endorsement to enhance the effectiveness of academic development initiatives.

Leadership and Change Management

- Exercise leadership skills to gain commitment from faculty and administration.
- Facilitate innovation by advocating for best practices and continuous improvement in teaching and learning.

CONCLUSION

The workshop highlighted the multifaceted nature of academic development, emphasising the need for a combination of pedagogical expertise, policy literacy, and relationship-building skills. To thrive in this role, academic developers must continuously evolve their skills, engage in professional learning, and establish strong networks within their institutions.

Institutions should recognise and support the contributions of academic developers by providing opportunities for professional growth, fostering collaborative environments, and integrating their work into broader institutional strategies. This report serves as a foundation for ongoing discussions on how to best support academic developers, ensuring they have the necessary tools and recognition to drive meaningful educational change.

ABOUT THE FACILITATORS AND WRITERS OF THIS REPORT

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