



Title of Report: Postgraduate Certificate and Masters in TESOL/Applied Linguistics at Griffith University

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1. Identify and describe the Professional Development Opportunity (PDO).

The PDOs described in this case report are three interlocked programs in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and Applied Linguistics (AL) at Griffith University, Queensland, Australia: the [Graduate Certificate in TESOL](#) (GrdCert in TESOL) and the [Master of Arts in TESOL/Applied Linguistics](#) (MA-TESOL/AL). All three programs, which comprise both core and elective courses, can be undertaken either on-campus or off-campus (online mode).

2. Describe the target audience for the PDO.

The programs are open to postgraduate students at Griffith University. They are intended for both pre- and in-service teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The programs' participants come with a range of teaching experiences and range in age from 20 to nearing retirement.

Students may take the programs from anywhere in the world, as long as they have a reliable internet connection. In the past, students have been located primarily in China, Eastern Europe, India, Japan, and the Middle East.

3. Describe how you recruit students for your PDO.

Students are recruited via the [Griffith University website](#) and the University's accredited agents operating in different countries of the world. University 'Open Days' also attract a large number of prospective students.

4. Describe the curriculum choices made.

The programs' curricula were developed by the late Dr. Gary Birch, the previous programs' Convenor, who was an experienced language teacher and teacher educator. Dr. Birch and his team taught the same course in face-to-face (ftf) mode (on-campus) for many years before converting it to the online format in 2002. The student-teacher ratio in the online course offering is the same as it was in the earlier ftf format (i.e., between eight and twenty five students to one lecturer).

Online delivery of the programs was chosen to meet the increase in demand for these programs by those practitioners who wish to upgrade their qualifications and skills but are not able to attend the programs in person. The University's commitment to flexible learning also supported offering these programs online.

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5. Explain the PDO's over-arching goals and specific objectives.

The over-arching objective of the programs is to prepare the participants to be responsible teachers of ESL/EFL. The programs have the following objectives:

- (1) to help participants understand different philosophies and models of second or foreign language teaching;
- (2) to help participants become contextually responsive practitioners;
- (3) to help participants understand the evolving role of English in different geopolitical contexts;
- (4) to help participants understand the theory practice nexus in second or foreign language teaching; and
- (5) to provide participants with resources and strategies to promote their own ongoing professional development through research and reflection.

6. Describe the teaching and learning activities used in the PDO and what online applications are used to support these activities.

The program participants accomplish the programs' goals by doing independent reading, contributing to discussion forums, listening to recorded lectures (either as podcasts or videos), and receiving feedback from the relevant course convenors.

Blackboard, a virtual classroom web-conferencing tool, is the major Learning Management System (LMS) for teaching and learning. Students log-on to this interface to access course readings, recorded lectures, lecture resources, and to interact with other students and lecturers.

7. Describe how the PDO helps students understand the local context in which they are studying so that they can work together with other students in the global context of your online PDO.

Participants who are in diverse geographic locations get to know one another through introductions and interactions facilitated on the web-conferencing tool. Relevant course convenors make special efforts to build a sense of community among all participants. In addition, all the participants are made aware of their classmates' contexts and possible needs, and where possible, participants help one another in locating and sharing resources and materials. For those students following the programs on-campus, students in remote locations are invaluable contacts for additional and rare course-specific ethnographic information.

8. Describe how the PDO helps prepare students for the local contexts in which they will work.

Participants in the programs may be physically situated in the context where they teach (or plan to teach). Others, especially pre-service teachers, may not know what their teaching contexts will be; they will work in a wide range of developed or developing nations.

As part of their PDOs, participants work to understand contextually responsive practices that will enable them to adapt their pedagogy to suit the contexts in which they work (or will work). For example, program assessment tasks are situated within different geographical contexts in which students may eventually find work. The online web



conferencing tool also facilitates the sharing of views amongst the participants from different geographical contexts.

9. Explain the characteristics of the teacher educator(s) working in the PDO.

The lecturers involved in the delivery of the PDOs have doctorates (PhDs/EdDs) in TESOL and Applied Linguistics, as well as considerable ESL/EFL teaching and teacher training experience. They have also published widely on language teacher education. All lecturers have been specifically trained in the use of online technologies and they attend professional development activities and workshops organized by Griffith University.

10. Describe the non-teaching support staff in the PDO.

The lecturers and the course participants are supported in their use of the technology by the Library and IT Helpdesk at Griffith University. Further support is offered to the programs' participants by Griffith's Student Services.

11. Explain the learning assessments used in the PDO.

Each course in the PDOs has assessment items to suit the course objectives, which are made clear in the course profiles. Each course usually has two assessment items totalling five thousand words. The first assessment item is shorter (about 1,500 to 2,000 words), and it usually leads into the second assessment. Assessment items comprise oral presentations, data-based (research) essays, reflective journals, and case studies. Case studies can take different forms. Participants either conduct a study on themselves, their peers, or their own students. Completed assessment items are received electronically or by mail, depending on where the participants are undertaking the PDOs. Considerable constructive feedback is provided to each participant on completion of the assessments for each course. Apart from these assessments, participants are also encouraged to participate in online discussion forums. Some courses within the PDOs allocate marks/grades for efficient participation in discussion forums.

In addition to the assessment items described above, the participants need to engage in a compulsory teaching practicum, which is assessed on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis. It is the participants' responsibility to find a suitable establishment (usually a language school) where suitably qualified personnel are available to supervise their teaching and provide a written report to the University.

12. Explain the mechanisms used to evaluate the PDO.

The courses offered within the PDOs are regularly reviewed via the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) and Student Evaluation of Course (SEC), which are conducted using a University-wide online evaluation system. In addition, the programs undergo external reviews every five years.

13. Discuss the challenges involved in offering this PDO online.

The major challenge to the offering of PDOs online stems from participants' lack of knowledge about technology, especially online delivery. Mature students who return to study



later are more technologically challenged than the younger participants who are more technologically capable.

Participants who are new to studying online take some time to get used to a different mode of delivery. Participants in some geographical locations, especially in developing countries, find online delivery challenging because they do not have access to optimum bandwidths for internet connections.

14. Describe the successes of the PDO and explain how they are documented.

The SEC and SET reports usually present an above average to extremely satisfied rating from program participants. The lecturers have been nominated for and have received teaching awards based on student evaluations. The SET and SEC reports are closely monitored by the School's Executive, and any SEC or SET item that is responded to negatively is usually discussed with the relevant course convenors.