

24 June 2015

learningandteaching@education.gov.au

Submission on the Promotion of Excellence in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education Redesign consultations

I respond to the invitation to Vice-Chancellors from the former Associate Secretary of the Department of Education, Robert Griew, to submit written feedback on the consultation process and issues relating to the Promotion of Excellence in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PELTHE) redesign.

Given the importance of teaching and learning to the universities in the Regional Universities Network (RUN), the need to continue to raise higher education participation in regional Australia, and the distinctive profile of our students (a high proportion of low SES, regional, first in family, mature age and distance), we have chosen to provide a group response.

Issues which we consider are important include:

- **Governance** – The new entity must have a national focus and a separate identity from any host.

Much is good about the governance of the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT), including the role of expert and specialist panels, and the use of peer review of applications. We consider that it is essential that independent panels and peer review processes are maintained in any new structure to ensure robust governance and that that quality projects are supported.

The new body must be governed by and act for all the sector. National priorities for funding should be agreed by this body. These priorities should have a long term time horizon and act to build capacity in the sector.

The OLT expert and specialist panels are relatively small and do not adequately represent regional Australian universities. There is almost no representation from regional universities (and none from the RUN members) on the current panels. We propose that, under any new arrangement, there should be broader representation from the regions and that the chairs of various panels should be rotated to ensure representation from a range of universities.

CQUniversity
Southern Cross University
Federation University
Australia
University of New England
University of
Southern Queensland
University of the
Sunshine Coast

- *Strategic priorities for the new fund* – The future strategic priorities need to reflect the diversity of the Australian higher education sector in a massified system. A systematic analysis of existing work and identification of current and anticipated areas of need should guide the setting of strategic priorities and be leveraged for the future granting of funding. We would suggest the foci should be on the 21st century student learning and wider experience; the capability and capacity of higher education teachers from a range of backgrounds and with a range of qualifications and experience; and the university environments that facilitate success for the maximum number, range and breadth of students. We also suggest that strategic priorities in learning and teaching that affect the regions should be included e.g. distance education/online education and multiple disadvantage in the student body. This would help ensure that regional universities and the large number of students studying at them are included in the national effort to enhance university learning and teaching.
- *Citations and Awards* – The current activities of the OLT which RUN members have found particularly valuable include the Australian Awards for University Teaching, the grants and projects support and the fostering of networks. These funded activities have made an enormous contribution to the national conversation around the significance of teaching in higher education, and we believe need to be continued within the new body. For RUN members, supporting our staff to engage in national collaborations designed to improve our pedagogy and networks where knowledge can be shared is of critical importance.

The Awards play a vital role in benchmarking quality teaching across the sector. Recognition at the national level, based on peer assessment, is important on two fronts. For those who are successful, this is valuable input to institutional promotion processes as evidence of esteem, while for those who aren't, they gain the benefits of the learning from colleagues from across the sector. The role of the peer review process in providing constructive feedback to the ongoing development of staff is recognized and appreciated as an important outcome from the OLT awards and grants processes. To this end we strongly support the continued recognition of the Citations for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning; Awards for Programs that Enhance Learning; Awards for Teaching Excellence; Award for Australian University Teacher of the Year; and Career Achievement Award, as well as ongoing support for the grants and projects.

- *ALT Fellows* – we confirm the value of a fellowship scheme in bringing disciplines and expertise together across the sector. We

suggest that an inclusive and developmental fellows scheme be established under the new arrangements to build sustainable capacity in higher education learning and teaching for the sector and that this scheme be distinct from the granting of funding scheme.

- *The impact of the \$16.1 million cut on the range of programs that will be able to be offered under the new arrangements -* Adequate funding for projects in teaching and learning will help ensure that our universities are able to address the issues of importance to our student cohort. The magnitude of cash and in-kind contribution that individual institutions are able to provide should not negatively impact on any support or projects they receive under the PELTHE redesign.
- *Cost savings measures –* We suggest that the new arrangements maximise the use of tele- and video- conferencing, minimise the travel and related costs associated with face-to-face meetings, and focus on other cost saving measures.
- *Information and communications management –* AARnet should be invited to be a partner to the host institution, to ensure that there isn't a potential monopoly over the new arrangements. There should also be attention to cataloging and making available – through the use of metadata - an organised searchable repository of the resources (including websites and other digital resources) and reports already available to the sector through previous Carrick, ALTC, and OLT funded work.

Further, we note that you have advised that webinars will be held through the two weeks of the face-to-face consultation process, which commences on 21 July. While representatives from our universities will make every effort to attend focus group discussions in the capital cities, we request that a webinar is set up for the RUN universities in the second week of the consultations so that a network-wide perspective can be provided.

The contact officer for this matter is Dr Caroline Perkins, Executive Director, RUN, (email: execdir@run.edu.au; phone 02-6169-4090) until 3 and after 27 July, and Heather Dyne, Project Officer, RUN, (hdyne@home.com.au; phone 02-6231-3681) from 6-27 July.

Yours sincerely



Professor Peter Lee
Chair

CQUniversity
Southern Cross University
Federation University
Australia
University of New England
University of
Southern Queensland
University of the
Sunshine Coast