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ALTC Promoting Excellence Initiative: major themes identified in completed institutional project reports

Summary paper prepared by the project 'Sustainable leadership of teaching and learning initiatives: lessons from the promoting excellence initiative'

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ALTC Promoting Excellence Initiative: major themes identified in completed institutional project reports

Summary paper

Introduction

The Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) established the Promoting Excellence Initiative (PEI) in 2007 to provide funding to build and/or consolidate the capacity of institutions to engage constructively with the programs of the ALTC. As the individual programs funded at 42 institutions near completion, a team led by Deakin University in collaboration with Queensland University of Technology, Swinburne University of Technology and Murdoch University commenced a project known as 'Lessons from the Promoting Excellence Initiative' ('Lessons from the PEI'), to distil the key lessons about teaching and learning leadership that have emerged from the sector's engagement with the PEI. 'Lessons from the PEI' was funded by the ALTC under the Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Program and will report in early 2012. The project will review how the structural positioning of teaching and learning initiatives impacts on the ability of institutions to secure broad engagement with teaching and learning enhancement and the forms of academic leadership that are most likely to promote such engagement.

Each institution that has participated in the PEI has had the outcomes from their PEI project evaluated and has reported to the ALTC at the completion of the project. The final reports and evaluation reports from a sample of institutions have been examined as part of the first stage of 'Lessons from the PEI'. Drawing on a conceptual framework designed as part of the 'Lessons from the PEI' project, this summary paper reports on the major themes identified from the examination of reports from a sample of universities.

Key findings

Overall, the PEI projects were effective in raising awareness about ALTC programs and in furthering the values and aims of the ALTC within universities around Australia. Specific experiences and impacts varied depending on the institutional context as well as on the ways in which the PEI was designed and implemented within an institution.

Most universities reported positive impacts in the following areas: heightened scholarship of teaching and learning; improved dissemination of findings from such scholarship; and increased alignment between institutional grants and awards and ALTC grants and awards.

The examination of final and evaluation reports found that the PEI worked most effectively within an institution when:

- alignment with the strategic directions of the university occurred;
- high-level leadership was evident;
- there was distributed involvement through faculty structures;
- challenges inherent in the culture of an institution were well managed;
- there was additional institutional investment to the initiative; and
- a range of enhancement and implementation approaches were employed.

The points are not hierarchical or listed in any particular order of importance. They represent summarised data and highlight observations distilled during the thematic analysis.



Background to the 'Lessons from the PEI' project

The advent of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) in 2004 saw substantial funds allocated to promote learning and teaching in the Australian higher education for the first time. In 2006 the ALTC implemented its full range of programs. With this roll-out came the need for universities to rapidly set in place governance, policies and infrastructure to enable staff to engage with the ALTC opportunities. To assist universities with the organisational and operational change required for institutions and their staff to engage in a meaningful way with the ALTC programs, \$9,420,000 was committed by the ALTC to 42 institutions under the PEI.

As the ALTC notes, the PEI:

... was established to provide one-off funding to build and/or consolidate the capacity of institutions to engage constructively with the programs of the ALTC. The PEI aims to foster a climate of collaboration and the valuing of diversity and inclusiveness across the sector. The funded strategies are consistent with the objectives and values of the ALTC and support the priorities for teaching and learning of individual institutions. By supporting institutions the ALTC seeks to act as a catalyst for the sustainable, long-term enhancement of learning and teaching and the maximisation of opportunities for effective dissemination and adaption of innovation and good practice (<http://www.altc.edu.au/promoting-excellence-initiative>).

In October 2010, the project 'Lessons from the PEI' was funded by the ALTC under the Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Program. The project involves a number of data collection stages with the first stage comprising the review of a sample of institutional and evaluation reports submitted to the ALTC by completed PEI projects.

This summary paper highlights *institutional perspectives* about the extent to which the PEI has promoted engagement with teaching and learning excellence.

The framework for analysis

To ensure effective alignment with the objectives of the broader 'Lessons from the PEI' project, this summary report was informed by an overarching framework for our research depicted in the diagram below.

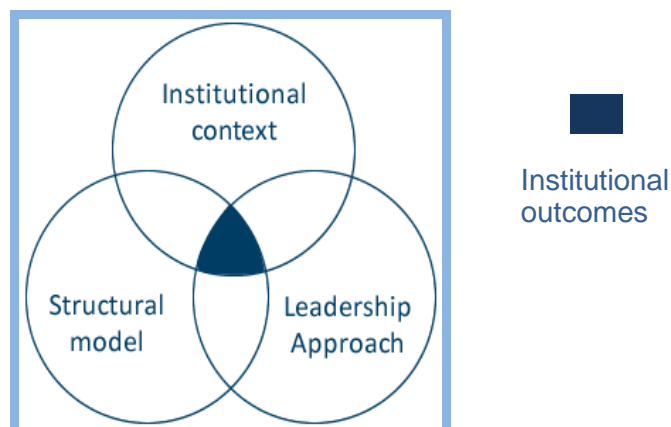


Figure 1: Major factors impacting leadership in the promotion of excellence in teaching and learning

As noted by Fullan and Scott (2009) in relation to leadership,“(t)he context of change is of key importance. This relates not only to how universities keep in step with a rapidly changing environment but, more important, how universities as knowledge organisations evolve and change within this environment” (p. x). The PEI



reports were examined from the point of view of a contingency theory of leadership that Marshall (2006) suggests "... is as much a process of developing the organisation as it is one of developing the professional knowledge and skills of those called to leadership positions" (p.3). The project team take the view that where there is intersection between the institutional context, the structural positioning of PEI and leadership approaches enacted, the potential for positive institutional outcomes is greater. The components of Figure 1 are not hierarchical in any sense, with many of the recurring themes noted in this report relevant to more than one, and sometimes all three, components.

Method of analysis

A thematic analysis of a sample of the available PEI final and evaluation reports was undertaken to identify the benefits and challenges that were commonly experienced within the university-based projects. Eighteen of the 34 available final PEI reports (53 per cent) as well as 13 (38 per cent) corresponding PEI evaluation reports were analysed, making 31 reports in total as the data base. The analysis of reports identified particular themes that may have appeared in either PEI final reports or in evaluation reports. Evaluators are generally external to the institution being evaluated, and thus may have provided different perspectives from those reported by institutions. Therefore it is possible that comments identified in evaluation reports did not feature in the report of the related institution, as the two documents are from different sources.

The framework outlined above was utilised to code and analyse the PEI reports, using NVivo9 software.

The sample endeavoured to include a selection of different types of universities with an emphasis on ensuring geographical representation where possible. The sample is depicted in the following table.

Type of university	Sample Number*
Group of Eight (Go8)	5
Innovative Research Universities (IRU)	4
Australian Technology Network (ATN)	2
Rural and Regional	3
Other	5

*one university is represented in two categories.

Figure 2: Represented university categories

Throughout this paper a selection of verbatim phrases from individual reports has been used but to protect anonymity, these phrases are not referenced to the institution. It should also be noted that a range of titles (positional labels) was used within the data, and generic labels have been adopted for simplicity and to protect the anonymity of participating institutions; i.e., the descriptors associate dean – teaching and learning (T&L), teaching and learning centre and deputy vice chancellor cover a range of related variations.



Discussion of findings

PEI alignment with university strategic direction

The majority of reports analysed indicated that the intended outcomes of PEI projects worked alongside or contributed to the institutional priorities or strategic direction of their university in some way. Some universities deliberately aligned their PEI with the strategic plans of their institution. Those that did so reported that this led to:

- substantial progress on desired PEI outcomes;
- sustainability through embedding the PEI into systemic, evolving structures, processes and strategies;
- gave momentum to curriculum, teaching, learning improvement and cultural change; and
- engagement of senior staff.

In many cases, the PEI became an important way for universities to enact aspects of their strategic plans, particularly around the area of promoting high achievement in students and staff. PEI funds were sometimes used to further key university priorities such as work integrated learning (WIL). In some cases, those involved with the PEI had input into strategic planning in their university through representation on committees and working groups related to curriculum renewal. Many institutions recognised the value in alignment between strategic priorities, such as internationalisation, and the PEI.

Key ways of achieving such alignment were identified, including:

- involvement with institutional priority programs in relation to curriculum and scholarship;
- formation of high level university and faculty selection panels for nomination and application review purposes; and
- PEI involvement with institutional curriculum and teaching and learning reform processes.

High-level leadership

Nine (50 per cent) final PEI reports and three (23 per cent) evaluation reports made reference to the impact of executive portfolio involvement in the PEI. (The evaluation reports came from different institutions from the PEI reports where leadership comments were identified.) In some institutions, the responsibility for PEI was absorbed within a central teaching and learning unit. In others, a specifically nominated project leader was assigned with the task of PEI implementation. This was with the support and/or oversight of a relevant deputy vice chancellor (DVC) and their office (education, academic, students, or teaching and learning).

In one university, engagement with the ALTC became the responsibility of the DVC during the PEI project, and this was interpreted as an indication of the increased profile of the ALTC in that university. In another context, university restructuring led to the decision to embed the PEI as the responsibility of an executive portfolio, ultimately leading to increased stability and sustainability for its endeavours.

Some PEI final reports included statements indicating that the involvement of an executive portfolio had been critical to the success of their PEI. This was due to the message or reinforcement provided by this involvement regarding:

- the importance of teaching excellence in career advancement;
- the prestige of ALTC's initiatives, leading to improved recognition of teaching and learning in higher education;
- embedding of policies and levels of governance, including providing the platform



for progressive middle leaders to engage with new opportunities in schools and faculties; and

- promoting and supporting strategic change aimed at the enhancement of teaching and learning.

Two universities mentioned that obtaining more support from upper and senior management would serve to raise the status of ALTC grants and awards at their university.

The involvement of other high-profile or senior staff outside the executive level was mentioned in nine PEI final reports (50 per cent) and six evaluation reports (46 per cent) as providing valuable leadership. Ten separate references were made to the involvement of ‘other’ staff in promoting and leading PEI goals and activities. Two reports referred to visits by external scholars who:

- a) served to amplify the voice of teaching and learning at key committees in the university, and
- b) engaged senior staff on national teaching and learning agendas.

Such visits were perceived as having an impact on the perspectives and planning occurring in some schools. Two reports discussed the involvement of high-level faculty and senior education leaders in review and ranking of citation nominations. With regard to the former, this approach was credited with keeping the ALTC on the radar of key university decision-makers. An enthusiastic senior project leader and director of teaching and learning were acknowledged as having a significant impact on the success of their PEIs in two instances. In another PEI, a professor in higher education was acknowledged for their “strong and enthusiastic” leadership of a significant community of practice that was influential on the development of teaching scholarship and research. Finally, two PEIs reported the employment of senior staff as PEI leaders, and these senior appointments were perceived to highlight the importance that the university placed on maintaining ALTC activities, and to add value to the projects through their extensive experience, networks, skills and wisdom.

Distributed involvement through faculty structures

Twelve PEI final reports (67 per cent) and six evaluation reports (46 per cent) referred to the importance of ensuring faculty, department and school involvement in the PEI. Structurally, in the larger or multiple campus university contexts, this could take the form of each faculty having an associate dean (teaching and learning), a director of teaching and learning, and a faculty teaching and learning committee where every department or school has representation. A number of universities reported having a governance structure that included associate deans (teaching and learning), but not all.

The advantage of this kind of involvement is that it may facilitate all aspects of teaching and learning across the university. Overall, the broad alignment of faculty-based processes with university-wide processes is likely to promote streamlining of information and consistency, as well as higher quality of applications and nominations for awards, citations or grants. Engagement with faculties was considered to have the potential to promote better informed staff, the support of topics of particular relevance to the faculty or division, and good practice innovations across faculty staff.

The importance of balancing faculty initiatives with central teaching and learning centre or grants and awards offices was considered important, particularly in the identification of applicants and projects in areas of need or priority. In one institution with no associate dean (teaching and learning) positions, heads of school were identified as the group “pivotal” to influencing staff to change and sustain good practices in teaching and learning.



The involvement of associate deans (teaching and learning) in PEI provided leverage in ways that ...*significantly exceeded previous internal attempts to engage academics in scholarly and reflective practice...*(PEI final report), and contributed to the recognition within universities of innovation in teaching practice. However, one university reported the challenge of capacity building with new associate dean appointees, who had varied backgrounds in the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Fifteen PEI final reports (83 per cent) and eight evaluation reports (62 per cent) referred to the importance of developing teaching and learning roles and relationships with associate deans and heads of school as part of promoting quality teaching and learning within their institutions. A range of associate dean roles identified were:

- forming a teaching and learning steering committee to ensure cross-institutional representation and communication;
- focusing on promoting quality in teaching;
- overseeing the identification of ALTC applicants or nominees;
- oversight of ALTC engagement;
- sitting on awards and grants committees;
- forming a community of practice leadership group in the area of peer mentoring; and
- having oversight of a faculty awards and grants mentoring program.

Setting up a community of practice comprising heads of school was considered to be a potentially useful way of encouraging information sharing on teaching and learning issues. Another strategy involved the PEI coordinator leading regular sessions on teaching awards and grants support with associate deans T&L across the university. This served to strengthen the links between central and faculty-based thinking and practices, and provided a further integration for the support given to applicants and those supporting applicants.

Managing challenges inherent in institutional culture

A range of challenges was inherent within the changes experienced by institutions attempting to put PEIs in place. These challenges included:

- struggling to maintain relevance in a rapidly changing higher education context;
- leading cultural change around funding opportunities in teaching and learning at the same time as a restructure of the university was occurring;
- balancing the tension between celebrating the work of teachers and the promotion of a 'performance culture' for external surveillance of teaching;
- addressing the clear differential in prestige between research and teaching and learning;
- inconsistent project championship at senior levels; and
- initiating, coordinating and sustaining projects that involve staff from within the teaching and learning centre and from across the university, given ever-increasing workloads for both academic and support staff.

One institution found the context of change or reform useful in creating an environment where the PEI's goals were possible to implement, whereas another found their PEI impeded by "a highly conservative mentality" (PEI evaluation report). The remainder were somewhere in the middle, whereby there were both challenges and benefits to their PEIs. Two institutions reported that their PEI projects provided just-in-time funding and impetus for their institution's newly-identified reform priorities.



Eight PEI final reports (44 per cent) and six evaluation reports (46 per cent) documented challenges related to research having higher status in their university context. One of the key issues in this area appears to be that involvement in ALTC programs is not considered “real” research by many institutions. As one evaluation report pointed out, *The ALTC is not a registered research institute and therefore its funded programs do not automatically contribute to an institution’s recognised research effort.* Therefore involvement in ALTC projects does not constitute Category 1 research income, and whether involvement constitutes Category 2 research income is left to the discretion of individual universities. Two universities commented that the lack of Category 1 Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) status was a continuing challenge with regard to establishing parity with other research grants, and that this had the potential to discourage individuals, departments and universities from engaging in pedagogical research and development.

Three PEI reports discussed the long-standing culture of their universities as “research-intensive,” and identified this as impacting upon the willingness of faculties and staff to engage with the PEI. One report suggested that more PEI-like initiatives would be needed to shift research-oriented institutions toward giving teaching more and consistent attention. A related issue is whether the research office at universities is involved in supporting or administering ALTC grants. Two reports noted that their projects were challenged by the lack of support or services provided by the research office as well as the conflict between the research office requirements and those of the ALTC. Also related was the identification within two reports that collaboration was not a well-established practice in their university context, or at least not for ALTC grants. One went on to say that there was not a great deal of recognition about the kind of rigour required to produce evidence of excellence in teaching and learning. Another report discussed challenges of having the PEI interpreted differently in various discipline areas, and their response of collaborating with Deans to focus on grants that would deliver tangible benefits for those disciplines. Overall, schools and faculties that had experienced success in ALTC grants or awards were most open to the idea of scholarship or research in teaching and learning.

Additional institutional investment

Eight PEI final reports (44 per cent) and three evaluation reports (23 per cent) referred to the provision of institutional funding support in addition to their PEI funds. The institutional support mainly took the form of internal awards, grants, fellowships or seeding grants, and one institution provided funding for a yearly teaching and learning conference.

PEI reports identified two main outcomes which resulted from internal funding and support. One was that this kind of institutional commitment sent a clear message that the university values teaching and learning; the other was that the funding encouraged staff to develop their skills and their projects in preparation for ALTC grant applications. Policy in two institutions stipulated that awardees would be required to work toward an ALTC grant with support from the central office. In one report it was mentioned that the office responsible for administering internal grants and awards was also responsible for managing ALTC grants and awards, and this seemed to provide the opportunities for nurturing this kind of development. In another university there was the expectation of collaboration and sharing of learning both during and after the internally-funded project.

Nine PEI final reports (50 per cent) and four evaluation reports (31 per cent) referred to the existence of institutionally funded internal awards for educational excellence or teaching enhancement. These award structures were fertile ground for many PEIs, and were often established by or integrated into PEI activities.



Approaches to implementation

High-quality individual support

Six PEI final reports (33 per cent) and eight evaluation reports (62 per cent) referred to the high quality one-on-one support provided by PEI or teaching and learning personnel in support of ALTC grant applicants and award nominees. Assistance included:

- brainstorming a general idea;
- critical advice at the early stages of developing an application;
- help in understanding which program to apply to and how to interpret the ALTC guidelines;
- budgeting, evaluation and dissemination strategies;
- technical aspects of completing the application, including desktop publishing;
- providing feedback and advice to applicants and nominees and fine-tuning proposals and nominations;
- development of teaching and learning portfolios, including e-portfolios;
- connecting academics with colleagues in other academic units; and
- provision of project management support as required.

At least six institutional reports expressed the “overwhelming” staff appreciation or satisfaction with the “excellent” quality of the support and assistance received. The reasons for such appreciation included the exceptional commitment of PEI support staff, the timeliness of their involvement or feedback, and their being consistently thorough and helpful. One evaluation report commented that “getting the right people for the job is always a critical success factor in any project”. The outcome of such high level support for ALTC applicants and nominees included:

- enhancing PEI project aims;
- increased interest in ALTC projects across the university;
- improvements in the quality of applications and nominations;
- improving morale;
- teaching staff to be reflective and providing them with insights about themselves; and
- nurturing quality teaching and learning.

A key element of providing effective support appears to be ‘the personal touch,’ including personal encouragement and moral support contributing to both the quality and volume of applications and nominations. A report noted high-quality support in place:

In the view of the evaluator, these (PEI) staff are exceptional in their commitment to the project specifically, and more generally, to enhancing learning and teaching outcomes at [name of university]. It is difficult to quantify these characteristics in a way that could be recognised as what is commonly understood to be ‘good practice’. Ensuring that staff involved in such projects have strong credibility with academic staff in the University to facilitate engagement, and a clear understanding of how to work collaboratively to contribute to the enhancement learning and teaching outcomes are, however, two such characteristics. (Evaluation report)

Related to the provision of high-quality support for ALTC applicants and nominees was the availability of mentoring to nurture their skills and professional development. Ten PEI final reports (56 per cent) and five evaluation reports (38 per cent) discussed the development of mentoring relationships or an ongoing mentoring program as part of implementing their PEIs.



Mentoring as part of the PEIs took a variety of forms (formal and informal) and involved a variety of staff members acting as mentors. In some institutions, mentoring was offered from the central teaching and learning centre or grants and awards office, at others, mentoring was offered at the faculty or school level. One institution appointed faculty-based mentors as part of its PEI, with Associate Deans acting as mentors to the faculty-based mentors. Mentoring was occasionally limited to being available earlier in the process or to later in the process, but more commonly it was offered as an ongoing support throughout the development of an ALTC application or nomination. Support throughout the application or nomination development process was considered to be a critical success factor by one institution and another commented that mentoring could not be underestimated in the process of achieving successful grant and award outcomes. Individual mentoring was considered useful in reassuring participants and motivating them to overcome confidence issues or issues related to demonstrating leadership. A situation of mutual trust was cited as the best way to deal with sensitive issues.

It was noted that those who had been successful as ALTC grant holders or award winners were considered able to provide a high level of mentoring support. One institution reported that mentoring had “blossomed spontaneously” in faculties and schools. Another institution developed a peer-review panel comprising teaching and learning leaders, and this included the provision of individualised mentoring support for applicants and nominees. Others reported that leadership capacity-building gave staff the confidence to mentor and coach others within their networks, and developed formal mentoring policies or arrangements for every ALTC applicant or nominee.

Internal and external systems of review were mentioned as providing important feedback as part of the ALTC application or nomination development process in 38 per cent of PEI final and evaluation reports. In one case this was linked to the provision of a critical friend (paid) service involving those with extensive experience in teaching and learning. The main advantages of the critical friend service were that the applicant could obtain more than one round of feedback from the same reviewer, and that they were able to access to the extensive experience of that reviewer. Another university mentioned that they needed more reviewers to adequately support ALTC applicants and nominees, and that the biggest challenge was reviewer availability (time).

Information sessions, workshops, forums and seminars on ALTC awards or grant opportunities, or the provision of support with the application process, were often offered as part of many PEIs. These comments were noted in 12 reports (67 per cent) and six evaluation reports (46 per cent). In terms of providing information on ALTC opportunities, the presentations were intended to broaden the reach of communications and to encourage more staff to apply. One university offered a forum designed to give participants opportunities to explore possibilities for developing ALTC grant submissions within a university priority area. Assistance with applications and nominations together with regular workshops provided staff with information and skills to prepare and improve their submissions; supported staff with writing and reviewing drafts; and offered information on how to document and present evidence about teaching and learning quality and effectiveness. Such programs and initiatives helped staff to stay on-track with their application through the completion of set tasks.

Four of the six evaluation reports specifically commented on the provision of these resources with staff finding the workshops relevant and useful. Reports demonstrated increasing attendance at workshops designed to support applicants.



Sharing interests and expertise

Eight PEI final reports (44 per cent) and seven Evaluation reports (54 per cent) referred to collegial activities where past ALTC award and grant winners assisted current applicants to mentor and share knowledge of the evidential requirements for successful submissions.

Past award winners were able to share their expertise through:

- offering their services as peer reviewers;
- making their successful nominations available to applicants;
- contributing to staff development activities;
- being observed teaching and observing and providing feedback on the teaching of others; and
- mentoring and advising those intending to make an application.

Various benefits or advantages of the impacts of the peer leadership by previous ALTC award or grant winners were identified. Such leadership was able to:

- provide valuable input into information sessions;
- promote and enhance support and mentoring of colleagues;
- provide a stronger case for those seeking promotion through peer review;
- raise ALTC applications and nominations to a higher standard; and
- develop a sense of community among staff working in teaching and learning.

Two PEI reports identified significant recognition that was given to award winners and grant recipients through invitations by the ALTC to take part in peer review for the next round of applicants. Another two reports highlighted the value of expertise of past project leaders in the implementation of their PEIs.

Eleven PEI final reports (61 per cent) and one evaluation report (8 per cent) referred to the development of PEI networks amongst PEI coordinators. Eight universities reported an increased involvement in regular PEI coordinator meetings within their geographical region. Three universities reported sporadic engagement with other PEI coordinators due to distance, clashes in timetables, or incompatible university arrangements for their PEI staff. In these cases it was more likely that individual connections with PEI coordinators were formed, both within-State and inter-State. The following benefits were identified as a result of participation in PEI coordinator networks:

- challenges and successful strategies could be shared;
- opportunities and connections were developed;
- a national research project was initiated;
- goodwill and the exchange of information and ideas was enabled;
- a community of scholarship and practice was developed;
- a forum to discuss and share experiences and insights on a variety of issues was provided;
- sharing of resources across institutions occurred;
- credibility was provided to the roles of PEI leader, PEI coordinator and project manager;
- the leverage to mobilise broader and deeper engagement with teaching and learning across the sector was established;
- benchmarking and maximising the efficiency of processes was enabled; and
- collaboration across universities on proposals or projects occurred.



Eight PEI final reports (44 per cent) and four evaluation reports (31 per cent) referred to the establishment of communities of practice as part of their PEIs. Wenger (1998) suggests that communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion (in this case teaching and learning) for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. As Wenger's definition implies, communities of practice can be established for varied purposes and they have varied memberships. Within some PEIs, the plan to establish communities of practice, or to strengthen already existing communities of practice, were identified in their final reports. However, in six universities, communities of practice were newly developed or redeveloped during their PEI projects.

The purposes for forming communities or practice were stated as:

- the development of networks of teaching and learning leaders within and outside the university;
- to encourage collaboration, exchange and engagement around teaching and learning;
- gathering a group of staff interested in the scholarship of teaching, research into teaching and learning and the area of higher education more broadly;
- to connect, build relationships, and develop partnerships in schools, faculties, and across the university;
- the use of the expertise of the Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning) as a community of practice, particularly in the area of peer mentoring;
- drawing together academic and professional staff from across faculties and other areas who are formally and informally leading teaching and learning practice, to discuss hot topics and produce good practice guidelines for wider dissemination; and
- engaging staff with an interest in ALTC activities.

Within the PEIs, communities of practice developed through:

- invitations to network meetings;
- associate dean (teaching and learning) meetings;
- a project managers' group;
- previous ALTC award winners;
- scholar meetings;
- expertise developed within an ALTC project on communities of practice;
- research supervisor forums; and
- mentoring systems between academics.

Other outcomes

Heightened scholarship of teaching and learning

Nine PEI final reports (50 per cent) and six evaluation reports (46 per cent) referred to the heightened scholarship of teaching and learning within their university context and amongst academic staff resulting from their PEIs.

Eight reports focused on the broader institutional scholarship of teaching and learning impacts that resulted from their PEIs. These included:

- a university culture where scholarship of teaching and learning are visibly recognised and acknowledged to be of importance (two institutions);
- improvements in teaching and learning within pockets of the university;
- increased engagement across the faculties, including reciprocal hosting arrangements between faculties and the teaching and learning centre;



- increased staff engagement in leadership and scholarly activities associated with teaching and learning;
- academics embracing T&L as a valid and important component of their work;
- staff working in a more collaborative and consultative way, drawing on the existing strengths of T&L practices; and
- bringing together of a committed and enthusiastic group of excellent teachers with a strong desire to move teaching forward at their university.

Eleven reports referred to individual benefits for teachers resulting from increased scholarly activities following on from the PEIs. Impacts included:

- becoming more alert to thinking about the link between their own teaching and student outcomes (two institutions);
- a shifting perception about teaching towards a student-centred approach;
- being able to look closely at their teaching and reflect upon strategies that would assist in the development of their teaching to the benefit of students;
- being able to explore and adopt innovative practices that raised the quality of teaching and the student experience;
- recognition of the primacy of the contribution of sound tertiary teaching and student learning outcomes;
- the opportunity to reflect on your own teaching and to move past the “am I a good teacher?” stage to “what is it about my teaching that is good, if in fact it is good?”
- increased awareness of the connection between being an active researcher and a committed teacher;
- insights that the skills required to undertake research also underpin those required to be a thoughtful teacher;
- the opportunity for academic staff to recognise their expertise in T&L and to collect evidence of their contribution to education;
- the support to participate in the ALTC programs;
- improving morale;
- encouraging higher levels of performance; and
- encouraging academic staff to be reflective and providing them with insights about themselves.

More effective dissemination

Successful approaches to the PEI included a focus on dissemination in various forms. For example, showcasing staff recognised for excellence in education was a dissemination strategy referred to in 11 PEI final reports (61 per cent) and three evaluation reports (23 per cent). Staff recognised through internal grants or awards and through ALTC grants and awards (internal recipients and external visitors) were often invited to contribute to dissemination through activities such as the following:

- presentations at conferences or colloquiums where their initiatives, good practice and expertise can be shared;
- presentations at networking or dissemination events to discuss the impact or outcomes of their award or grant;
- the development of videos or podcasts on their award or grant project;
- funded visits to present in a related faculty in another institution on their project;
- grant-writing workshops where presentations are made about the application, challenges encountered and how these were addressed;



- input into online resources and professional development events through the provision of case studies or exemplars;
- peer support or mentoring;
- committee representation; and
- publishing their work.

Some reports referred to public acknowledgement activities in relation to internal or ALTC award or grant successes. A range of acknowledgement activities were evident, including:

- celebratory events;
- internal and external communication about award and grant winners;
- invitations for winners to contribute to showcase events;
- invitations for winners to join relevant committees, subcommittees and/or panels or to become institutional teaching fellows; and
- integration of ALTC awards or grants into university promotion criteria.

Celebratory activities were undertaken to inform the university community about the schemes and outcomes and to increase public recognition of and engagement with award recipients. One institutional report identified that these kinds of activities were examples of increasing institutional recognition of the value of making an ALTC application.

A range of rationales was offered in relation to the importance of showcasing excellence in teaching and learning. For example, four institutions expressed the intention of raising the profile of teaching and learning, or encouraging good practice within their institutions, by advancing curriculum and teaching and learning priorities. One institution expressed the importance of including all nominees and not just winners in activities to validate and recognise the significance of being nominated and to increase the value of the award process. In a university where there was little awareness of their own award, grant or fellowship successes, showcases were conducted to raise awareness and encourage networking.

Increased local and national award and grant alignment

Ten PEI final reports (56 per cent) and five evaluation reports (38 per cent) referred to developing alignment between internal grants and awards and ALTC grants and awards as an impact of their PEIs. Ten institutions reported aligning their already established internal grants and awards to the same procedures and guidelines as those of the ATLC. Nine reports referred to the involvement of faculties in the process of aligning awards or grants. Impacts in the faculty domain ranged from full alignment of faculty awards/grants with internal awards/grants to alignment within the majority of faculties. One report identified that alignment at the faculty level was their next goal. A range of benefits or outcomes of internal alignment with ALTC awards and grants were identified, including:

- the identification of potentially successful candidates;
- greater participation in the grants/awards process;
- an increase in success with national nominations and applications for awards and grants (two institutions);
- the progressive development of educational portfolios and projects;
- envisioning the development of education-focused activity over time and over a career;
- ALTC grant applications or award nominations from all faculties for the first time; and



- PEI grant/award activities becoming embedded within the teaching and learning centre, along with associated budget allocations.

Conclusion

The Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) established the Promoting Excellence Initiative (PEI) in 2007 to provide funding to build and/or consolidate the capacity of institutions to engage constructively with the programs of the ALTC. Using both final reports submitted by institutions to the ALTC and independent evaluation reports, the investigation on which this summary paper reports identified the recurrent themes that were considered important to institutional outcomes across the sector.

The thematic analysis provides a structured view of the most prevalent themes that were discussed in considerable detail. The general impressions distilled from the data suggest that most universities took their PEI seriously, and reported positive institutional outcomes within the categories of: heightened scholarship of teaching (individual's leadership development); showcasing staff recognised for excellence in education (dissemination); and, alignment between institutional grants and awards and ALTC grants and awards (sustainability).

The findings identified contain many lessons learned about what approaches and leadership qualities were most commonly useful and effective in furthering teaching and learning priorities and endeavours within the higher education sector in Australia.

Sustainability is a key area where the broader *Lessons from the PEI* project aims to make a contribution to the sector. How well initiatives have been embedded within institutions and the scale of mainstreaming for activities will be the legacy of the PEI. There is a need for a continuing sharp focus on institutional commitment to teaching and learning initiatives and support through appropriate infrastructure in order to maintain and improve the quality of teaching and learning. Not the least because, “(o)ne of the richest research laboratories of the university of the future will be the *research on the practice of teaching and learning* and its central role in achieving beneficial social, economic and environmental change” (Fullan and Scott, 2009, p. xi, emphasis in original).

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