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CARRICK INSTITUTE FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION LTD SCHEME, 2007

DBI Stage 2 Consultation Report

An initiative of the Australian Government Department of
Education and Workplace Relations

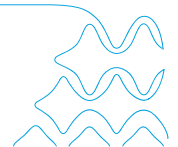


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THE CARRICK
INSTITUTE FOR
LEARNING AND
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HIGHER
EDUCATION LTD

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1. ABOUT THE DBI STAGE 2 CONSULTATION

The Discipline-Based Initiatives (DBI) Scheme was identified as a key priority in the Institute's foundation document "Carrick Institute Strategic Directions 2006-2008". The DBI Scheme aimed to encourage greater sharing of quality practice and learning within and across discipline communities and provide for discipline-specific development.

The first stage of the Scheme, which is nearing completion, has entailed providing funding opportunities (DBI Studies) to encourage discipline and institutional leaders to generate a long-term vision for their discipline. The DBI Studies, funded under the first stage of the DBI Scheme, are now incorporated within the Grants Scheme.

It was envisaged that the second stage of the Scheme would involve the establishment of an infrastructure to support ongoing enhancement of curriculum and of learning and teaching. It was proposed that this infrastructure comprise a set of networks in five broad disciplinary groupings.

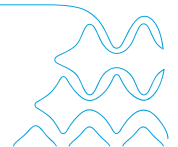
A discussion paper "[DBI Development Stage 2 Plan](#)" outlining the proposal for development of Stage 2 of the DBI Scheme was released on Monday 29 October 2007. Feedback was invited from:

- Vice-Chancellors and Heads of eligible providers (to respond on behalf of their institution);
- The Chair of the Committee of Deputy Vice-Chancellors and Pro-Vice-Chancellors (Academic);
- Chairs of the Councils of Deans (to respond on behalf of their Discipline Council); and
- Leaders of projects funded under the Carrick Institute Discipline-Based Initiatives Scheme (to respond on behalf of their project team).

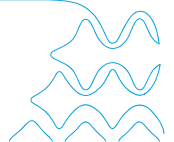
The proposal was also made available on the Institute's website and open feedback welcomed. The closing date for feedback was 14 December 2007. The proposal was discussed at the Universities Australia Committee of Deputy Vice-Chancellors/Pro-Vice-Chancellors (Academic) on 29 November with Professor Richard Johnstone.

Feedback and comment was sought on the concept in general and specifically on:

1. The notion of establishing a distributed infrastructure comprised of discipline networks, and the system of clustering these into five broad disciplines;
2. The function and activities of the discipline networks;
3. The proposed phased approach;
4. The role of the discipline networks and their Heads; and
5. The ways in which the higher education sector could be involved in the evaluation process for Stage 2.



A report on the outcomes of the consultation process is now being prepared for consideration at the next Standing Committee meeting of 2008. A summary of the feedback received is provided here.



2. CONSULTATION OUTCOMES

Forty three submissions were received regarding the DBI Stage 2 discussion document. The responses clearly indicate a high level of support for initiatives which will assist the sector in providing an optimal learning experience for students and a willingness to contribute to the success of these initiatives.

It is important to note that the discussion document, and the submissions made in response, did not explicitly take into account other aspects of Carrick work that may address issues raised by respondents.

The majority of responses (over 75%) supported the principle of continuing to work within and across disciplines as an essential component of the Carrick Institute's strategy. Support for the proposal focused on the likely productivity of the networks in supporting institutions and disciplines in enhancing education in the higher education sector. Respondents also commented positively on the apparent collaborative nature of the networks and their potential in supporting the improvement of learning and teaching.

While many respondents are in favour of the Institute continuing to provide support for the disciplines, there is considerable divergence of opinion on whether the proposed Discipline Networks are the appropriate means of providing this support and, if we proceed, what these Networks should look like.

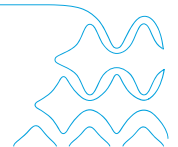
In addition to the submissions, feedback given to Professor Richard Johnstone at the meeting of the Committee of Deputy Vice-Chancellors/Pro-Vice-Chancellors (Academic) indicated that there is no longer a strong sense that the DVCs and PVCs support the implementation of a distributed model. It was felt that such a model comes with significant operational challenges.

While a minority of those responding formally to the proposal challenged the principle underlying the proposal (that a disciplinary approach is the optimum way to ensure improvement in learning and teaching), there was wide-spread support for maintaining a focus on national sector-wide issues to do with learning and teaching and to allow for a cross disciplinary approach. A significant number of respondents suggested the addition of an interdisciplinary aspect to complement the disciplinary nature of the networks which can stimulate interdisciplinary innovation and foster fledgling disciplines that do not fit the framework for mature disciplines.

Many respondents felt the proposal is a major undertaking and that risks will need to be adequately explored and addressed before implementation. Others commented that, while the plan has merit, its success will depend upon comprehensive engagement with stakeholders and on being adequately resourced.

There was considerable divergence of opinion on key design elements of the proposal. Namely:

- The framework for clustering the disciplines, the location of disciplines in these clusters and the number of clusters;

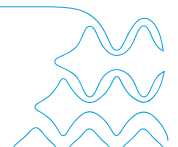


- What the functions of the networks should be;
- How the networks should be managed and funded;
- The location of networks and the links between the networks and institutions, and with other Institute schemes and grant holders.

A summary of the key points is provided below.

2.1 Overall Concept and Proposed Discipline Networks Clusters

- Fewer than half the submissions explicitly support establishing a distributed infrastructure of discipline networks in five broad discipline clusters.
- There is considerable divergence of opinion about elements of the proposed approach, particularly evident in relation to:
 - The appropriateness of the disciplinary approach;
 - The level of aggregation of disciplines and the number of clusters;
 - The ability of clusters to foster inter-disciplinarity; and
 - The geographic location of the networks.
- Many respondents value the disciplinary approach but differ on what this should look like.
- Opinions vary on the value of grouping disciplines into broad clusters. Given the large number of individual disciplines, some respondents believe it is sensible to group these into clusters united by similar interests and procedures. In contrast, others maintain that the value of disciplinary-based approaches is within individual disciplines, not in clusters of disciplines.
- The issue of inter-disciplinarity and clusters was a common theme but one where respondents came to different conclusions. Supportive comments related to the clustering of disciplines which would allow common issues across similar discipline areas to be addressed and to provide opportunities for cross-fertilisation within and between the clusters. In contrast to those who thought clusters would support and encourage interdisciplinary work, others maintain the proposal should include establishment of an interdisciplinary centre to provide critical support for the new areas of university study that are forming at an increasing rate.
- Many respondents acknowledge the significant challenges of classifying and grouping disciplines into clusters. While some felt that the proposed groupings are logical, others thought that particular disciplines should be located in different clusters. Others suggested changes to the names of clusters.
- Some respondents thought that the point of synergy may not be discipline-based. Alternative frameworks for, or methods of, allocating the disciplines to clusters were suggested by some respondents.
 - Around the work of Fellows;
 - On an epistemological basis of the disciplines rather than simple teaching techniques;
 - (conversely), On commonality of teaching/learning processes rather than research outputs; and
 - On a philosophical basis, regardless of discipline.



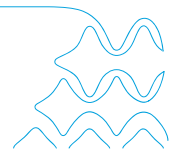
- There were differing opinions regarding the optimum number of clusters. Some respondents commented that five clusters would be a good number with which to start as these could be further disaggregated following the evaluation phase. Conversely, others felt that limiting the number to five would present some problems and may result in some disciplines being inadequately represented and/or marginalised within their Network. There were also questions about whether five is sufficient to effectively engage with the nuances of the discipline. In addition, it was felt that this clustering will inevitably mean that some disciplines will experience a less supportive context because their cluster leader is from a discipline that they consider to be “quite different”.
- There were diverse views on the geographical distribution of the networks and their location within institutions. For example, the ‘distributed centre’ seems to offer prospects for engaging more university staff more deeply in the activities of the Institute. However, respondents felt that we will need to ensure that academics do not feel constrained within a silo and that there is encouragement to exchange resources developed within one discipline and other discipline networks. Others commented that the Networks would be better placed within the Institute.
- Other suggestions and comments relate to how the clusters would operate, with some requesting more information on management and operational sub-structures. Others emphasised the need for effective involvement of stakeholders/end users from the outset.

2.2 Function and Activities of the Discipline Networks

- Significantly fewer submissions indicate clear support for the proposed functions and activities of the Discipline Networks.
- Positive comments emphasis support for the function and activities as stated, although some felt that the proposed functions of the discipline network appear overly ambitious in scope.
- Some suggest inclusions in the remit of the Networks.
- Some commented that it is not easy to see what the business of the Networks would be. The list of activities as outlined in the proposal fails to suggest how these networks might support and enable the building of capacity within institutions.
- Some respondents emphasised that care should be taken to ensure there is no duplication with other associations or bodies. Furthermore, clarification is needed on linkages to other Institute schemes and initiatives and how holders of Carrick project grants and fellowships relate to the discipline network heads.

2.3 Proposed Phase Approach

- More than half the submissions support the proposed phased approach.



- Those in support thought the phased approach was appropriate given the significance of the initiative, the range of disciplines and the scope of the undertaking and that this approach offers the opportunity to evaluate the networks' success in engaging academics with improvement in teaching and learning.
- A significant majority of the respondents commented that, given the ambitious nature of the initiative, the Institute needs to be realistic about what systemic change can occur in a two-year period, suggesting that this implementation period should be longer.
- The need was also identified for an appropriate quality assurance framework to be developed before the roles and duties of Heads are confirmed (how success of the initiative will be measured and how it will be sustained).

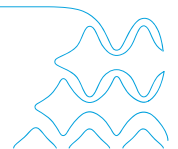
2.4 Role of the Discipline Networks and their Heads

Many respondents included their comments on the role of the Network and their Heads under element 2.2 (above).

- The main comments relate to the necessary leadership capabilities of the Head and aspects of their appointment. Other comments were also made about the relationship between the Head, their disciplines and their institutions, and the ambitious scope of the task facing the Head.
- Respondents felt that identifying appropriately qualified Heads will present some challenges. The Heads will need to be respected in the broad discipline area and recognised for individual achievements in learning and teaching. They should not be too narrow in their discipline focus, as the Network will represent a large number of individual disciplines, and it was thought that to be an effective leader of such a network the Head will need specialised knowledge of one or more of the disciplines within the cluster along with demonstrable skills in management, research and teaching.
- Finding someone suitable willing to step aside for two years will be a challenge, suggesting that incentives or adjustments to the proposal will be required. Many commented that there seems to be a strong case for the Heads to remain active as academics, particularly in research, and that they should maintain links with their institution.
- There were conflicting opinions on the nature of the relationship of the Head with their institutions and how this should be managed. While some thought this would be an independent role with employment by Carrick (as proposed), others thought it would be important to maintain a functional relationship within the university to maximise outcomes in the sector.

2.5 Evaluation Process for Stage 2

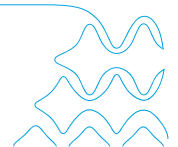
Respondents were asked to suggest ways in which the higher education sector could be involved in the evaluation process for Stage 2. Of the comments on evaluation, all were



suggestions as to how to structure the evaluation process or suggestions for improvement.

2.6 Other Feedback

- Many commented on the positive work of the Institute and Stage 1 of the DBI Scheme.
- Other comments related to the need to increase the level of engagement with the Institute in the sector.
- A small number of submissions included alternative proposals for supporting the disciplines and for establishing Discipline Networks



3. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

While the feedback indicates that there is wide-spread support for the Institute continuing to provide discipline-based development, there is considerable variation of opinion on key elements of the proposed devolved disciplinary network model. Given this divergence, the Institute will rethink how to best encourage sharing of quality practice and learning within and across discipline communities without the creation of rigid discipline-based structures.

The Institute will look anew at how improvements in learning and teaching take place and how to best transmit good practice across different communities of practice, whether they be discipline- or issues-based. The Institute will also continue to explore how existing programs, such as the Fellowship Scheme, can assist in achieving this.

