

Australian Learning and Teaching Council
Promoting Excellence in Australian Higher Education

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS 2008 – 2012

The document builds on the Strategic Directions for 2006 – 2008 approved by the Board in 2005 and on the achievements of the Carrick Institute over the past three years. It sets out for discussion the Australian Learning and Teaching Council's **Strategic Commitments** (as stated in 2005), a set of proposed **Strategic Priority Areas 2008 – 2012** and **Estimated Budget Allocations** for each of the priority areas.

1. Strategic Commitments of the ALTC

Mission Statement

To promote and advance learning and teaching in Australian higher education

Objectives

The Australian Learning and Teaching Council will:

- promote and support strategic change in higher education institutions for the enhancement of learning and teaching, including curriculum development and assessment
- raise the profile and encourage recognition of the fundamental importance of teaching in higher education institutions and in the general community
- foster and acknowledge excellent teaching in higher education
- develop effective mechanisms for the identification, development, dissemination and embedding of good individual and institutional practice in learning and teaching in Australian higher education
- develop and support reciprocal national and international arrangements for the purpose of sharing and benchmarking learning and teaching processes
- identify learning and teaching issues that impact on the Australian higher education system and facilitate national approaches to address these and other emerging issues.

The above Mission and Objectives have been designed to ensure that the ALTC fulfils the following seven **designated responsibilities**:

- Management of a major competitive grants scheme for innovation in learning and teaching
- Liaison with the sector about options for articulating and monitoring academic standards.
- Improvement of assessment practices throughout the sector, including investigation of the feasibility of a national portfolio assessment scheme.
- Facilitation of benchmarking of effective learning and teaching at national and international levels.
- Development of mechanisms for the dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching.
- Management of a program for international experts in learning and teaching to visit Australian higher education providers and the development of reciprocal relationships with international jurisdictions.
- Coordination of the Australian Awards for University Teaching (AAUT), including the Awards presentation event.

The ALTC is established as a public company limited by guarantee, with a Board appointed by the Minister. In terms of its proposed functions, the Council is able to build on the sound basis provided by the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC) and its predecessors, as well as over three years of successful operation as the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. Over the period 2005 – 2008 the Institute developed an organisational framework that has positioned the ALTC during the period 2008 – 2012 to achieve its Mission and Objectives and deliver on its designated responsibilities, in ways consistent with an ethos grounded in the following values and principles for action:

- *Inclusiveness* - by assisting the development of networks and communities which support higher education staff who have a direct impact on the advancement of learning and teaching.
- *Long term change* - through a focus on systemic change.
- *Diversity* - by recognising and valuing institutional and discipline differences and similarities, by ensuring an appropriate balance between generic and disciplinary approaches to the enhancement of learning and teaching.
- *Collaboration* - through the programs it funds and in its work practices, respecting the existing strengths of the systems and of the people within the higher education sector nationally and internationally
- *Excellence* - through the recognition of quality in its programs and awards, through its encouragement of such recognition in all higher education institutions, and through building the reputation of the Council as a leading-edge, prestigious organisation.

In addition, the following principles of sound business conduct underpin the ALTC's culture:

- ethical business conduct, based on honesty, integrity, justice, transparency, and appropriate levels of confidentiality
- efficiency in resource utilisation, demonstrating maximum value for money with respect to the funding available
- maximising the confidence of the stakeholders
- encouragement of creative thinking amongst all involved.

The ALTC aims for its organisational culture, work practices and communication strategies to support its impact on the enhancement of the scholarship and practice of teaching in higher education. It aims to be a responsive and dynamic organisation, generating and sustaining a sense of creativity, innovation and excitement about learning and teaching in higher education. Strong elements of professional sharing underpin all activities undertaken by and through the ALTC, and the establishment of extensive networks, both nationally and internationally, is fundamental to its work.

2. Strategic Priority Areas 2008 – 2012

To achieve its Mission and Objectives and deliver on its designated responsibilities during the period 2008 - 2012, the ALTC will undertake activities in collaboration with stakeholders, within a number of Strategic Priority Areas, as outlined below.

(i) ALTC Grants Scheme

The Grants Scheme has three programs:

- Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Program
- Priority Projects Program
- Competitive Grants Program

The *Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Program* supports systematic, structured and sustainable models of academic leadership in higher education.

The *Priority Projects Program* addresses, in the first instance, priorities emanating from the Council's designated responsibilities (including benchmarking, assessment, standards and related aspects of good practice in learning and teaching). It also includes the newly-approved category of *curriculum renewal* which provides continuing opportunities for discipline-focussed projects. *Priority Projects* may also focus on good practice in higher education in terms of creative and effective use of teaching and learning spaces, and collaborative, cross-institutional projects which examine the role of peer review in the enhancement of learning and teaching in higher education.

The *Competitive Grants Program* supports:

- Research and development focussing on issues of emerging and continuing importance
- Strategic approaches to learning and teaching that address the increasing diversity of the student body
- Development of robust methods of identifying and rewarding excellence in teaching (excluding awards schemes)

- Innovation in learning and teaching, including in relation to the role of new technologies

It is proposed that there be no major changes to the Grants Scheme for the 2008, 2009 and 2010 grant years, although minor changes to take account of feedback and possible changes in Board priorities may be made during that period. In mid-2009 it is planned to undertake a broad external evaluation of the Grants Scheme, as there will be a substantial set of completed projects by that time. Decisions made by the Board towards the end of 2009 after consideration of the results of the evaluation could be applied to the Grants Scheme for the 2011 grant year.

(ii) ALTC Fellowship Scheme

The aim of the ALTC Fellowship Scheme is to promote and support excellence in learning and teaching in higher education by supporting individuals who have the educational expertise and leadership skills to:

- devise and undertake a significant program of activities that will advance learning and teaching in Australian higher education;
- identify educational issues across the higher education system and to facilitate approaches to address these issues;
- stimulate strategic change in higher education institutions;
- raise the profile of learning and teaching in higher education and the prestige associated with the pursuit of excellence in teaching;
- establish and build on national and international partnerships in learning and teaching in higher education; and
- foster national and international collaboration and collegial networking for sharing research, innovation and good practice in learning and teaching.

The Fellowship Scheme is relatively new and has not yet reached a stage where there is a substantial group of Fellows that either have completed their activities or are well into their planned program. It is planned that, for the period 2008 – 2012, attention be focussed on

- revising the present guidelines, as a result of some feedback from the present group of Fellows and staff involved in operating the Scheme
- concentrating on building a community of Fellows
- facilitating relationships between the Fellows and international visitors to the Carrick Council, as well as encouraging Fellows to foster international links
- delineating the distinctiveness and potential synergies between “funded grant projects” and “proposed activities by Fellows”.

(iii) ALTC Awards Scheme

The Awards for Teaching were introduced by the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC) on behalf of the then government and developed further by the Carrick Institute during 2005. The Carrick Institute received specific funding for the Awards and was required to administer the Scheme on behalf of the government. At present there are five types of awards:

- Citation Awards
- Program Awards
- Teaching Awards
- Prime Minister's Award
- Career Achievement Award

There is also funding provided by the ALTC for winners of Australian Awards for University Teaching and ALTC Citation Awards to present their work at conferences. These funds provide opportunities for the dissemination of good practice in learning and teaching across the Australian higher education sector.

By the end of 2009 the present system of Awards will have been in operation for four years. It is proposed that an external evaluation of the Awards Scheme be funded in late 2009 or early 2010, to provide a basis for any changes in the ALTC Awards Scheme that the Board may wish to implement

for the 2011 calendar year. More immediately however, the ALTC needs to establish whether the present Australian government wishes to retain the present system of Awards as “government awards” that are administered for the Australian Government by the ALTC or whether they would wish the ALTC in the future to be totally responsible for the Awards Scheme.

(iv) Learning Networks

The 2006 – 2008 Strategic Directions document identified **Discipline-Based Activities** as one of the five Strategic Priority Areas. During 2007 the funding of grants in discipline areas, that had commenced during 2006 and early 2007, was transferred to the Grants Scheme and an additional Strategic Priority of *curriculum renewal* was included as part of the Grants Scheme. Also, in the second half of 2007 a proposal for a structure for Discipline Networks was developed by the Carrick Institute and comment and feedback on the proposal was sought from the sector. As a result of this feedback, which was substantial and varied in its support for parts of the proposal, it is proposed to establish and support sets of **Learning Networks** across the Australian higher education sector. (A detailed proposal for the introduction of the Learning Networks is being developed at the present time.)

The proposed learning networks will be *networks of interest groups that include disciplines or groups of related disciplines*. These networks will be supported by the staff of a **Learning Networks Unit** within the ALTC and by a modest source of funding to support the activities of each of the networks. The aim is to assist in establishing up to eight (8) network groups across the sector, based in the main on those discipline groups that have been developing over the past two years as a result of the work of the Carrick Institute.

The Learning Networks Unit will have a small continuing coordinating staff supported by up to 4 mid-career academic staff, denoted as **Network Leaders** and seconded for one year to the ALTC from Australian universities. It would be possible to provide a “two-year cycle of support” for each of the proposed network discipline/interest groups. In the first year of the cycle there would be support by both the continuing staff in the unit and by the seconded academic staff member with expertise and standing in that network group. In the second year of the cycle there would be support by the continuing staff in the unit. In the third year the cycle would commence again with the secondment of another mid-career academic with expertise and standing in the group.

The Network Leaders would be, in the main, from academics with a growing reputation and standing in their discipline/interest group and the potential to move into leadership positions in their university, and for whom there would be definite career benefits in being seconded to the ALTC. In addition, it should be advantageous for universities to grant a secondment opportunity if the staff do not already have high-level leadership positions in their home university, but have the potential for such positions and would benefit from experience and exposure on a national scale. To ensure a reasonable geographical spread across the sector it is likely that the ALTC would need to provide some additional financial support for staff seconded to Sydney from another Australian city.

The Learning Networks Unit will support the Mission of the ALTC by

- Engaging and supporting the proposed network groups through the provision of **academic expertise and leadership**, as well as some funding to support the activities of the various network groups
- Hosting **discipline and issues-based forums** to bring together discipline and other leaders to explore issues and set priorities
- Linking the members of the network groups with appropriate completed **ALTC-funded projects, ALTC Fellows** and the **ALTC Exchange** to build a body of knowledge related to learning and teaching issues in each network group
- Encouraging network groups or sub-groups to develop **proposals for ALTC Grants funding** for issues that are related to the funding priorities of the Grants Scheme

ALTC Exchange

The ALTC Exchange is a new online service to support those who teach, manage and lead learning and teaching in Australian higher education. It will provide:

- Access to quality resources that support teaching and learning by searching and browsing;

- Access to learning materials available for sharing and repurposing;
- Information about new technologies that impact on teaching practice and student learning experiences;
- Ideas about learning and practice;
- Opportunities to network with other academics with similar interests in group spaces and/or through creating networks of colleagues;
- The ability to save resources and search results;
- The ability to comment on and exchange ideas on the relevance and usefulness of particular teaching resources and to view the comments of others;
- The ability to participate in discussions, debates and dialogue about teaching in higher education.

The ALTC Exchange is an integral part of the ALTC's strategy for disseminating and embedding change and development in learning and teaching across the Australian higher education sector. The introduction of the software (Stage 2 of the planned development of the Exchange) commenced in early 2008. It is planned that this software will be made available to approximately 1000 registered users during the 2008 – 2009 financial year. These users will be drawn from Australian higher education staff that have been involved with the Carrick Institute programs over the past three years. The ALTC Exchange will be hosted by *Education.au* during this period and this company will be responsible also for providing enhancements to the software if user feedback indicates a need for enhancement. Consideration will be given to putting this role of hosting to tender for the period 2009 – 2012. The ALTC will support these initial users of the Exchange with additional staff able to provide content, technical and quality control assistance.

During the period 2009 – 2012 it is proposed to

- Expand the user base across the Australian higher education sector and explore links with this sector in other countries
- Introduce a Stage 3 development of the software that will make it possible to integrate the ALTC Exchange with the Australian Access Federation (that has a substantial number of Australian universities as members) and provide services such as web and video conferencing, wiki capability, Skype or VOIP integration, and e-portfolios.
- Employ additional ALTC staff to support the expanded user base, as needed.

(v) Administration and Operations

This area includes the Finance and Central Administration and overall infrastructure support functions of the ALTC as well as the Executive Director's communication and Board-support units. Although it may not be a Strategic Priority Area in the same sense as the five areas described above its effective operation and support are crucial to the overall achievement of the Mission of the ALTC.

During the period 2006 – 2008 the major functions and infrastructure support have been established. It is proposed that during the period 2008 – 2010 the area will enhance the Records Management capability of the ALTC and continue to work with the internal auditors in refining policies and procedures and ensuring adequate risk management in all areas of the Council's operations. As a result of recent changes to the CAC Act, introduced in January by the Australian Government, there may need to be some additional consideration of the ALTC's policies and procedures as well as some additional reporting requirements. It is likely that these changes will require some increase in the level of administrative support.

(vi) ALTC Initiatives

During the period 2006 – 2008 the Carrick Institute initiated a number of major projects that have been directed by its own staff. These projects will continue into 2009 and later, and will require funding. In addition, similar initiatives may be identified over the next few years as a result of possible changes in the external environment, results of the major projects already funded, and results of some of the Priority Projects funded under the Grants Scheme.

The present set of ALTC Initiatives is as follows:

- **International Links Establishment** has focussed on encouraging and recording links with international groups and individual academics. Some have been invited speakers while others have been international visitors seeking information on the work of the ALTC. However, there have also been a number of links with international academics as part of the funded project teams under the Grants Scheme. Up to 20% of project teams have some international links as members or consultants.

It is proposed during the period 2008 – 2012 to provide explicit encouragement to applicants for funded projects, where appropriate, to seek international links with their teams and also to strongly encourage ALTC Fellows to seek international links. Overseas experts in appropriate areas will continue to be invited to the sector by the ALTC and it is planned to explore links with the UK Subject Centres through the UK Higher Education Academy. In addition, it is proposed to fund an international conference during 2009 that builds on the work of the completed ALTC-funded leadership projects, tentatively titled *Leadership for Change in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*. Operational responsibility for the conference would be put out for tender by Australian higher education institutions and applicants for this responsibility will be encouraged to seek links with appropriate international bodies as part of the conference.

- The **Promoting Excellence Initiative** has provided \$220K to most eligible higher education institutions in the sector over a period of two or three years. Some additional funds will be required during the period 2008 – 2010 for maintenance of the initiative and for its evaluation.
- The **Teaching Indicators Project** will complete its planned investigations by the end of February 2009 and will provide a final report for consideration by the Board by mid-2009. It is likely that the report will include recommendations for further work in this area and the Board may decide to fund a further ALTC Initiative in a related area.
- Initiatives related to issues such as e-portfolios, academic standards, teaching spaces and other issues identified as a result of completed Grants Scheme projects or issues identified by the Learning Networks or ALTC Fellows could be the basis of further ALTC Initiatives during the period 2008 – 2012.

3. Estimated Budget Allocations

The estimated budget allocations are based on the estimated annual grant for the period 2008 – 2011. They cover the period 2008 – 2011 (at this stage there are no approved forward estimates for 2011 – 2012) and are based on the Strategic Priority Areas identified above. The estimated annual grant from government over the period 2008 – 2011 is of the order of \$27.5M per year.

At this stage the allocations are quoted as broad estimates as detailed examination of the costs of the proposed initiatives may involve some adjustments, and there may be some changes as a result of the preliminary considerations by the Board and further consideration by members of the senior executive.

Proposed Estimated Budget Allocations 2008 – 2011

	2008 – 2009	2009 – 2010	2010 – 2011
ALTC Grants	\$12M	\$12.1M	\$12.2M
ALTC Fellowships	\$2.6M	\$2.7M	\$2.8M
ALTC Awards	\$4M	\$4M	\$4M
ALTC Exchange	\$1M	\$2M	\$1.5M
Learning Networks	\$2.3M	\$2.4M	\$2.5M
Administration and Operations	\$3.1M	\$3.2M	\$3.3M
ALTC Initiatives	\$2M	\$1.1M	\$1.7M
TOTAL	\$27M	\$27.5M	\$28M