

Final project report

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP FOR INSTITUTIONAL TEACHING AND LEARNING CENTRES: DEVELOPING A MODEL FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

March 2010

Lead institution

Deakin University
www.deakin.edu.au/itl/research-eval/projects/strat-lead.php

Partner institutions

Macquarie University, Monash University, RMIT University
The University of Newcastle, University of New England

Project leader

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Project team members

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(and previously University of New England)
Professor Stephen Marshall – Macquarie University
Dr Robyn Muldoon – University of New England
Dr Stuart Palmer – Deakin University
Associate Professor Ian Solomonides – Macquarie University





Promoting excellence in higher education

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- Directors of Australian teaching and learning centres who completed the online survey.
- Participants in the focus group discussions.
- Participants in the workshop at the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) 2009 conference.
- Contact persons at the institutions involved in arranging the interviews and focus groups.
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The project team (from left) Robyn Muldoon, Merryn Falk, Meaghan Walsh (visitor), Gail Huon, Stuart Palmer, Ian Macdonald, Dale Holt, Lorraine Bennett, Amgad Louka and Di Challis. (Absent: Ian Solomonides and Sandra Jones.)

2 Executive summary

This report documents the outcomes of the project 'Strategic Leadership for Institutional Teaching and Learning Centres: Developing a Model for the 21st Century' funded under the ALTC Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Program. The project was carried out over a two-year period by a team consisting of Dr Dale Holt (Project Director), Dr Stuart Palmer and Dr Di Challis, supported by the project partners (Dr Lorraine Bennett, Associate Professor Sandra Jones, Professor Gail Huon, Mr Amgad Louka, Professor Ian Macdonald, Dr Robyn Muldoon, Professor Stephen Marshall and Associate Professor Ian Solomonides) and the Project Manager, Ms Merryn Falk.

The project set out to identify common factors to be considered in the effective strategic leadership of central organisational structures to enhance long-term learning and teaching performance and to highlight how these factors are being dealt with contextually in a selection of contemporary university settings in Australian higher education. The outcomes of this project are based on progressively collected data where the findings of each phase were used to inform and shape the subsequent phases. In the initial stage the project team undertook a literature review that informed the direction and approach taken for the remainder of the project. The second phase involved interviews with 37 key stakeholders in learning and teaching from six Australian universities in the first quarter of 2008. In 2008 an online survey of centre directors was administered to 38 institutions and this was followed by 10 focus group discussions held at a representative sample of Australian institutions. The project's findings were also informed by a workshop on how teaching and learning centres can effectively contribute to enhancing the student learning experience and outcomes, conducted by eight members of the project team at the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) international conference in 2009.

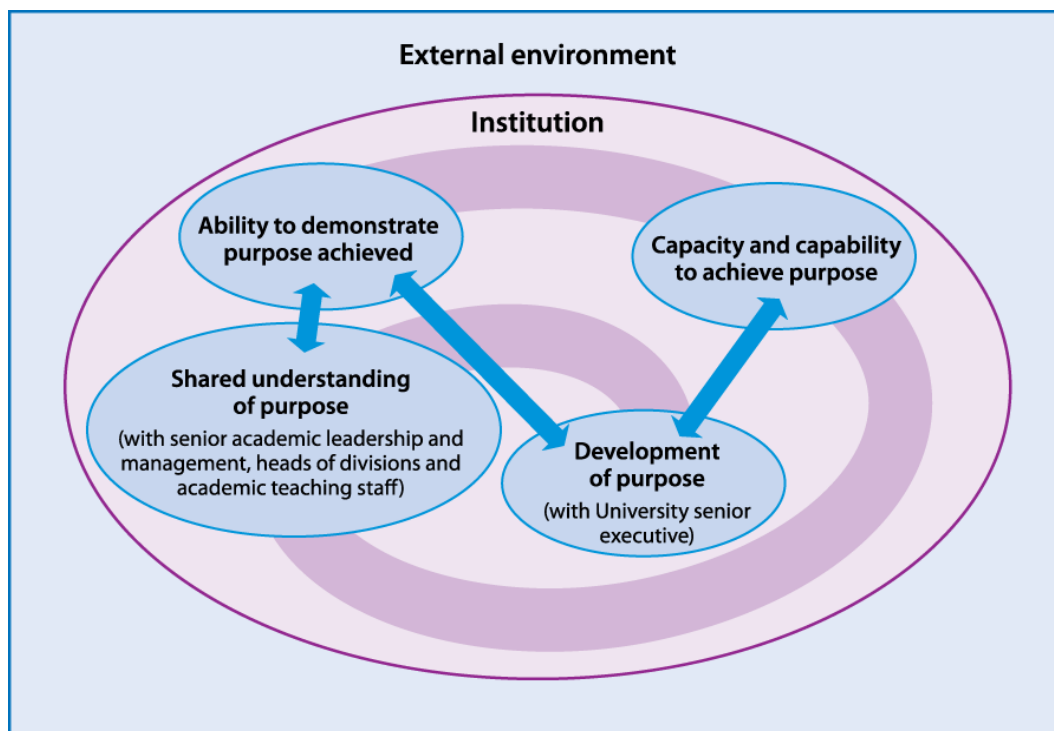
A strong assumption of this project was that strategic leadership is a major expectation of contemporary teaching and learning centres in Australian higher education and that the search for strategic leadership in response to institutional expectations and external forces was leading to significant reviewing, restructuring and repositioning of centres across the sector. Evidence of this trend was confirmed and intensified during the course of this project and is referred to as 'volatility of the sector'. The volatility of the sector first became apparent during the interviews with key stakeholders of centres. A significant proportion of those interviewed reported that they had been challenged by the level of change experienced by their centre in recent years, and change and uncertainty remained significant issues throughout the project. The project revealed that a majority of centres appear to have undergone, or are undergoing, significant change in the last three years.

The project examined key areas of centre performance in demonstrating strategic leadership in teaching and learning enhancement. The national survey of centre directors revealed that while most centres consider their work in the areas of 'Recognition and reward' and 'Professional development of staff' as their highest impact functions, and are pleased with their efforts in the former area, they wish to perform better in the latter. Centres believe that the greatest areas in need of improvement are professional development (PD) for casual teaching staff, PD for ongoing teaching staff and PD for faculty (or equivalent) teaching and learning leadership. The principal constraint identified by centres was a perceived 'lack of staff time', both in faculties and in the centre, to engage in teaching and learning improvement activities. Another major constraint identified was incorrect or outdated general perceptions of the role and function of the centre.

Key outcome 1

Strategic Leadership Teaching and Learning Centre Maturity Framework

Figure 1 The maturation cycle



The project investigated the expectation of strategic leadership of centres and identified four factors that seem central to effective thinking and practice of teaching and learning centres:

- 1 The importance of the relevant members of the executive and the centre director setting an appropriate and realisable role and direction.
- 2 A shared understanding and appreciation of the role and purposes of the centre.
- 3 The capacity (resources and opportunities) and capability (expertise) of the centre to fulfil its role and achieve its purposes.
- 4 The ability of the centre to demonstrate its value.

This cycle of stages can be worked through to achieve a maturity of operation. In practical terms, in order to provide strategic leadership centres need to address these dimensions by:

- ascertaining the key questions that need to be answered by the appropriate people and identifying and setting in place the most effective and efficient ways of achieving this;
- ascertaining who is responsible (and accountable) for each area/deliverable and ensuring this is understood and accepted;
- having systems and methods in place to ensure strong lines of communication across and between all relevant parties; and
- routinely monitoring and reporting on the internal and external environments.

Key outcome 2

A Guide to Support Australian University Teaching and Learning Centres in Strategic Leadership for Teaching and Learning Enhancement

To develop understandings of strategic leadership, and enhance centre performance, the project has constructed various elements, activities and perspectives in the form of a **Guide** to assist leadership working with and in centres to undertake an evidence-based approach to development.

The Guide is structured around five key aspects of undertaking a strategic leadership development program: conceptualising strategic leadership; framing staff capability development for teaching and learning; implementing strategies for enhancing performance; considering emerging and future developments of centres; and gathering evidence from relevant stakeholders on centres' roles, functions and effectiveness.

Project implications

This project has implications for university teaching and learning leaders at all levels:

- **Senior university management** need to consider carefully the purposes of their centres in demonstrating strategic leadership and in codifying this understanding through appropriate governance procedures.
- **The leadership and management of centres** must work closely with senior university management and faculty leadership in designing and implementing strategically focused operational plans, and in developing the effective relationships required through the network of key parties involved in enhancing teaching and learning performance through the organisation. This demands that the purpose of centres, as determined with and by university senior management, is articulated clearly and shared through a range of communication avenues across the organisational community.
- **The academic community** must see themselves as active participants in contributing to a distributed and networked approach to enhancing long-term teaching and learning performance working in collaboration with the institution's centre.
- **The student learning community** should be drawn into the work of centres systematically in order to offer more valuable and relevant learning and development for both staff and students.

The project has implications for the sector in relation to strengthening dissemination of findings and outcomes. The various methods of data collection used in this project, including the national survey of centre directors, could be re-used, along with other relevant ALTC leadership surveying instruments, to continue to track and assess developments in the sector. As related to the roles of directors of teaching and learning centres, and perceptions of their centre's performance over time, national bodies such as the Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development (CADAD) may wish to incorporate such trend surveying into their activities. It is suggested that such surveying would help inform ongoing efforts by CADAD to develop and implement appropriate benchmarking of centres in the sector. In relation to sponsoring the types of leadership development activities that have been developed from this and other ALTC leadership projects, the ALTC itself may wish to consider the best ways of supporting teaching and learning leadership development programs throughout the sector. Such programs should add significant new value to the ALTC's ongoing work in disseminating program funding opportunities, and project findings and outcomes through its various national workshops, forums, the ALTC web site and the ALTC Exchange.

As part of our dissemination strategy it is intended that key project documents, including the Guide, will be promulgated on the Deakin University Institute of Teaching and Learning ALTC project web site, the CADAD web site and the ALTC Exchange.

3 Introduction

The project was conceived in a bid to identify common factors that needed to be considered in the effective strategic leadership of central organisational structures to enhance long-term learning and teaching performance and to illustrate how these factors are dealt with contextually in a selection of contemporary university settings in Australian higher education. This project has been undertaken collaboratively by six universities of different organisational types (missions, visions, geographical make-up and educational profiles) that have some form of central teaching and learning centre to deal systemically with broad sectoral pressures and their own respective internal challenges. It was within this context that the project focused on 'strategic leadership'. We borrow from Viljoen and Dann (2003) and Blackmore and Blackwell (2006) in that we have been primarily concerned with parties operating in central groups or interacting with them, who have various degrees of formal authority and institutional influence and who are expected to enhance the long-term learning and teaching performance of an organisation. This includes responsibility to enhance the quality of student learning through building strong institutional teaching capabilities. In line with contemporary leadership theorising, we see effective strategic leadership as being situational and distributed. It is therefore contingent on a particular university's history, ambition, geographical configuration and perceived strengths in the sector. Strategic leadership suggests that strategic leaders have the capacity to set directions, and identify, choose and implement activities that create compatibility between internal organisational strengths and the changing external environment within which the university operates.

This project set out to identify the forms of leadership emerging in organisational teaching and learning centres and to determine whether or not they were responding to the 'organisational redesign' that Marginson (2000, p. 28) believed the sector required. Our primary aim was to develop a model of leadership that is anticipatory, innovative and creative, strategic and contingent that directs particular professional development and approaches in support of central groups as they confront the challenges of the 21st century.

Given that the key interest of the research lay in investigating the nature of leadership in central organisational groups, participants in the project were those:

- strategically responsible for creating and directing these groups, such as Pro-Vice Chancellors and Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Academic and/or Teaching and Learning);
- responsible for managing the groups, such as centre directors and heads;
- who contribute to their development on advisory boards;
- senior academic and general staff who work within these groups responsible for operational actions; and
- senior faculty teaching and learning leaders who interact most directly with these groups in representing their faculties' interests, such as Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning).

The needs of this collective leadership group are significant given the rapid change affecting their roles and operations both internally and externally. We set ourselves the goal of developing new insight into leadership as it is practically enacted in central organisational groups (henceforth, centres).

This project arose in response to a number of external environmental developments across the higher education sector, in particular the then Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) Learning and Teaching Performance Fund, the funding opportunities offered by the ALTC, and the influence of the Australian University Quality Agency audits. Concurrent with the project's commencement, a number of Australian universities had restructured and were restructuring their central academic teaching and

learning support operations. The remit of such centres appeared to be to enhance teaching quality to take advantage of the dynamic changes confronting universities in regard to internal strengths and external opportunities. It is important to note that the related policy discourses were embedded in the recognition and nurturing of 'excellence' and 'quality'. While some institutions re-engineered or re-structured their central support groups for teaching and learning, other institutions did not. What we saw anecdotally, regardless of a centre's 'newness', was the emergence of a growing interest in the constituents of 'leadership' in such centres that might generate sustainable improvement in teaching and learning and a concomitant interest in developing an evidence base in the area to help guide decision-making.

4 Project aims

The project had a dual purpose.

First, we set out to investigate the ways in which institutional organisational structures and distinctive organisational cultures were being shaped to lead the enhancement of staff capacity building for teaching and learning quality assurance and improvement.

The second aim of the project was to investigate the forms of leadership emerging in organisational teaching and learning centres and whether or not they were responding to organisational redesign.

5 Project outcomes

The original project proposal listed three outcomes:

Outcome 1

A **literature review** relating to central teaching and learning capabilities, leadership, the learning organisation, professional development and quality assurance and quality improvement in higher education.

Outcome 2

The project originally intended to develop **organisational case studies** as potential professional development resources for the project partner institutions. These cases were to show critical alignments and the role of more newly established teaching and learning centres in orchestrating advances in staff capacity building and teaching and learning quality. This analysis was also to include the development of a methodology for helping the strategic leadership groups of such centres gather and evaluate evidence on the effectiveness of their strategies and practices. Given the volatility of the sector, and sensitive strategic/political changes occurring in centres in the project, individual case studies could not be constructed. However, general points of relevance were drawn from the data collected, and from these sources a **Strategic Leadership Teaching and Learning Centre Maturity Framework** was developed. This framework embodied four strategic leadership considerations and a cycle of stages which could be worked through in order to achieve a maturity of operation (this along with validated data collection methods has become the 'methodology' we committed to develop above). Moreover, the data collection revealed a number of strategies to enhance performance, and conditions most conducive to their enactment. Cases of specific good practice were also volunteered by the partner institutions. The strategies and cases of good practice are outlined in the **Guide**. We believe they constitute a worthy alternative to the proposed organisational case studies.

Outcome 3

The original outcome was to establish **materials in an appropriate format** and an **online teaching and learning environment** to support the sharing of practices among the project partners and appropriate stakeholders in newly formed teaching and learning centres. As the project progressed, the findings were seen as of general relevance to all centres in the sector. Rather than establishing a separate online project report site, the team have circulated documents electronically through the CADAD community with the intent that the Guide will be published on the CADAD web site. It was also determined that all key documents will be published on a Deakin ALTC projects web site, with the report and Guide being published on the ALTC web site. Normal practice saw progress documents emailed directly to project partners, reference group members and other interested parties to avoid the need for them to visit a separate project web site to check updates.

6 Approach and methodology

The project was undertaken within the framework of mixed methods research (Creswell, 2003; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Mixed methods research allows the researcher to draw on data collection methods that are complementary to the purpose of the research and which may arise from qualitative or quantitative epistemologies (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Both may assist with the concurrent triangulation and convergence of project data, as well as developmentally building on data collected in the prior phases of the project (Marchel & Owens, 2007). The purposeful choice of mixed method design allows for the collection of 'multiple data using different strategies, approaches, and methods in such a way that the resulting mixture or combination is likely to result in complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses' (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 16). A mixed methods approach draws on the diverse expertise of the co-investigators and demonstrates their belief in the value of viewing and investigating the identified project aims from different perspectives (Yoshikawa, Weisner, Kalil & Way, 2008).

The approach to this study has drawn on hermeneutics. Hermeneutics accommodates an exploratory approach, acknowledging the research direction is propelled by a dynamic interaction between the researcher and the researched environment, and giving positive recognition to the subjective prejudice and tacit knowledge of the researched. The concept of the hermeneutic circle, or spiral, illustrates the concept that the part is always to be understood in relation to the whole (Grace, 1990). There is an established stream of research that is organised heuristically within an ethnographic tradition, with the researcher progressively focusing and refining in the light of accumulating experience and data. There is 'an emphasis on interpreting ... on discovering patterns of coherence and interconnectedness that usually go unnoticed' (Hamilton et al., 1977, p. 168). Incorporating different methods and techniques, listening attentively and on a number of occasions to the many voices that contributed to the research, and searching for disconfirmation and counter-patterns as well as convergence have contributed to what Parlett (1977, p. 40) termed 'recognizable reality ... a major means of validity testing in illuminative studies'.

In a research study that devoted considerable resources to face-to-face dialogue, it is important to recognise that 'humans in communication are engaged actively in the making and exchange of meanings' and that dialogue 'is not merely about the transmission of messages' (Evans & Nation, 1989, p. 37). Such conversation not only elicits information – attitudes, feelings, perceptions, descriptions, as well as more factual data – but the exchange of views can 'produce a level of intelligence higher than either participant could produce alone' (Metzler, 1977, p. 10). While eliciting data to increase understanding and inform the sector, the research approach also aimed to facilitate respondents' efforts to 'construct meaning from their own experience, develop a fuller and more adequate understanding of the own interests, and act more effectively to achieve their purposes' (Mishler, 1986, p. 119).

The specifics of the methods are outlined in detail in the project stages below. While the project phases are presented here in linear sequence for clarity, data collection, data analysis and data interpretation were iterative as the project unfolded.

Stage 1: Project orientation

- A Project Reference Group was established. Terms of engaging with the reference group were determined on the basis of individual contact and area of expertise.
- A critical and systematic literature review that built on the work of Marshall (2006) and Anderson and Johnson (2006) with a focus on the contribution of strategic leadership in improving teaching and learning and the development of question agendas for Stage 2 interviews was developed.
- Benchmarking exercise conducted comparing roles and functions of Australian university teaching and learning centres.
- Relevant planning documents from partner institutions (such as strategic plans, operational plans and teaching and learning development plans) were identified and secured in preparation for the Stage 2 interviews.
- Implications of Professor Geoff Scott's ALTC-funded project 'Academic Leadership Capacities for Australian Higher Education: Learning Leaders in Times of Change' (2008) were assessed to inform the project's data collection processes.

Deliverables

- Interview schedules for strategic leadership viewpoints for Stage 2 drafted and refined.
- Roles and functions of teaching and learning centres matrix developed.
- Draft critical literature review considered and refined by partner institutions.
- Literature review and draft occasional paper 'Strategic Leadership for Institutional Teaching and Learning Centres: Developing a Model for the 21st Century' reviewed and refined with input from the reference group.

Stage 2: Interviewing strategic leadership stakeholders (see also appendices A and B)

- 37 audio-recorded interviews of 60–90 minutes were conducted with members of five groups of staff providing strategic leadership perspectives in partner institutions.
- Interview audio files were transcribed and coded to ensure anonymity of participants.
- Qualitative interview data were analysed.
- Development of two papers drawn from the interview data: 'Notions of Strategic Leadership' and 'Teaching and Learning Centres: Towards Maturation'.
- Papers refined with input from partner institutions and the reference group.

Deliverables

- Interviews conducted; data transcribed and analysed.

Stage 3: Pilot survey with partner stakeholders (see also Appendix C)

- Survey questions developed.
- Pilot survey tool developed. The survey focused on key issues emerging from Stage 2 interviews and asked institutions to consider the importance of key developments relating to centres and institutes in their respective organisations.
- Feedback received from partners was compiled and considered.

- Survey instrument was reviewed by an independent expert in survey design and analysis.
- Survey tool refined.

Deliverables

- Web-based survey and online data collection system developed and trialled.

Stage 4: Survey administration

- Survey delivered online to directors/heads of all centres at the 38 (of 39) Australian universities with an identifiable centre of teaching and learning.
- Data analysed.
- Draft survey data report developed and reviewed by partners.
- Survey data report sent to directors/heads of centres who participated in the survey for their information and to assist them in preparation for the CADAD centres' benchmarking exercise.
- Project Leader provided CADAD members with a presentation on the project, with a particular focus on the survey outcomes, at the March 2009 CADAD meeting in Brisbane.
- Poster and A4 project summary/progress report prepared for ALTC Leadership project meeting in Tasmania in February 2009. The Project Leader attended event and shared experiences.

Deliverables

- Survey administered online to directors/heads of centres at the 38 (of 39) Australian universities with an identifiable centre of teaching and learning (response rate 82%).
- Final survey report completed and reviewed/endorsed by Project Reference Group.
- Paper entitled 'Teaching and Learning Centres: Towards Maturation' published in *Higher Education Research & Development*, 2009, 28(4), 371–383.
- Paper entitled 'Australian Teaching and Learning Centres, Through the Eyes of Their Directors: Characteristics, Capacities and Constraints' developed. (This paper has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*.)

Stage 5: Focus group discussions (see also Appendix D)

- Finalisation of focus group participants.
- Structure of focus group session developed including key questions and activities, letter of invitation and response template.
- Focus group schedule finalised.
- Focus groups conducted.
- Paper analysing the outcomes of the focus group discussions developed.
- Strategies for addressing key areas in need of improvement and key areas of constraint extracted from focus group data developed with relevant data from interviews and survey incorporated.
- Workshop proposal for HERDSA's 2009 international conference focusing on how teaching and learning centres can effectively contribute to enhancing the student learning experience and outcomes submitted and accepted. (The workshop was held in Darwin in July 2009.)

Deliverables

- Focus groups conducted at 10 institutions including five non-partner institutions.
- Written analysis of the outcomes of the focus groups prepared.

Stage 6: Finalising outcomes and external evaluation

- External evaluation of the project conducted.
- Post-project dissemination strategy agreed upon and implementation commenced.
- Development of the Guide.
- Development of final project report to ALTC.
- Online resources established.
- Final face-to-face meeting of partners held on 21–22 September 2009 at Deakin University, Geelong Waterfront Campus.

Deliverables

- Final project report to ALTC.
- The Guide.
- Online project material and resources.

7 Use and advance of existing knowledge

In the first stage of the project, we undertook a critical and systematic literature review that built on the work of Marshall (2006) and Anderson and Johnson (2006) with a focus on the contribution of strategic leadership in improving teaching and learning. The paper was aimed at providing a strong conceptual underpinning for the project in the following two areas:

- 1 Investigating the forms of leadership that are present and emerging in organisational teaching and learning centres and whether or not they are responding to the 'organisational redesign' which Marginson (2000, p. 28) argued that the sector required. This involved close consideration of the ways in which institutional structures and distinctive organisational cultures were being shaped by strategic leadership stakeholders to enhance teaching and learning quality.
- 2 Developing a model of leadership that is anticipatory, innovative and creative, strategic and contingent and which directs particular professional development and approaches in support of central groups as they confront the challenges of the 21st century. This involved the development of a Teaching and Learning Strategic Leadership Guide for professional development purposes for capacity building of leadership personnel of institutional centres for teaching and learning.

As previously stated, at the time the project received funding a number of Australian universities had been restructured and were reorganising their central academic teaching and learning support operations. As the project progressed, the rapidity of organisational restructuring/change in the sector saw many teaching and learning centres falling in the category of 'newly created'. The upshot of this was that the project would have a broader applicability in the sector than was envisaged at its inception.

With this in mind, we believed that it was timely to:

- identify the dimensions that needed to be considered in the effective strategic leadership of central organisational structures to enhance long-term learning and teaching performance; and
- illustrate how such dimensions could be applied contextually in a cycle of stages.

As our literature review explored, centres are expected to contribute to improving accepted performance indicators in teaching and learning quality in the face of downsizing, staff volatility, dispersed operations, financial pressures, the pervasive influence of information technologies, a rapidly changing and heterogeneous student population and the globalisation of higher education. While such pressures were reflected across the sector, organisational responses differed based on each university's own history, profile and desired directions. At the time of the initial application for funding, the ALTC had supported various leadership projects. However, none of those projects had specifically presented a structural or systemic view of 'leadership'. Our project has filled that important gap, because it has been conducted with a number of sector collaborators, and because it has investigated, specifically, the way in which institutional organisational structures and distinctive organisational cultures are being shaped to lead the enhancement of staff capacity building for teaching and learning quality assurance and improvement.

Our contribution to advancing knowledge of leadership in higher education has been to construct a Strategic Leadership Teaching and Learning Centre Maturity Framework to assist the leadership development of centres and their staff. This framework has been grounded in the methods of data collection used in the project. The framework encapsulates four key dimensions of strategic leadership of teaching and learning centres

which need to be understood and aligned in order to enhance long-term performance and moves towards maturity:

- development of purpose;
- a shared understanding of that purpose;
- the capacity (resources) and capability (expertise) to achieve purpose; and
- the ability to demonstrate that purpose has been achieved.

Moreover, the framework presents a cycle of stages which can be worked through to achieve a maturity of operation. The various methods, activities and resources in the Guide are designed to help interested parties to implement the cycle effectively in their own organisational contexts. Data collection also revealed a number of strategies to enhance performance, and conditions most conducive to their enactment. The partner institutions also volunteered cases of specific good practice. The strategies and cases of good practice are outlined in the Guide. The combination of the maturity cycle, supporting materials, strategies and cases represent the project's knowledge in application. Knowledge has been created through the Strategic Leadership Teaching and Learning Centre Maturity Framework, and know-how through the development of the Guide. We believe it meets the aim of advancing the knowledge of leadership that is anticipatory, innovative and creative, strategic and contingent and which directs particular professional development and approaches in support of central groups as they confront the challenges of the 21st century.

8 Selected factors influencing project outcomes

Success factors

The following factors contributed to the success of the project and its completion within the agreed timeline:

- Contracting an experienced senior researcher early in the project who has considerable knowledge of the higher education sector but is independent of any university.
- Using a senior research leader located within the institution who possessed exemplary skills in quantitative data analysis, knowledge of survey design and referencing.
- Employing a project manager for this project who worked full-time on two ALTC projects (for the first seven months) and who possessed a sound knowledge of relevant issues and advanced skills in project management.
- Exemplary leadership by the Project Director.
- Ongoing reference to detailed project plan.
- Having a clear understanding of the contributions which would be made by partner institutions.
- Clear roles and responsibilities assigned to project team members.
- Frequent meetings of the inner project team with quarterly meetings of the full project team and a final face-to-face meeting to bring closure to the project and explore ways forward.
- Ongoing sharing of information and provision of project updates via email.
- A supportive team environment.
- Carefully handling the various ethics applications associated with the project and ensuring a shared understanding of these and compliance with all requirements.
- Carefully developing interview/focus group schedules.
- The support of the staff involved in the interviews and focus group discussions.
- Timely provision of clear instructions to institutions regarding the organisation of focus group discussions.
- Appropriate testing of the survey tool prior to its launch.
- The support of centre directors for the online survey which allowed an 82% response rate to be achieved.
- Completing each stage of data collection, analysis and reporting in a timely fashion.
- Completing each stage of reporting in ways that meant deliverables could be used for wider dissemination of project outcomes.
- Support of the DVC(A) and centre director at the lead institution.
- The support received from key stakeholders; for example, Professor Denise Chalmers, President of CADAD, who promoted survey outcomes to centre directors.
- Involvement of high profile international scholars such as Associate Professor Gary Poole and Dr David Gosling.
- Opportunity to interact with Associate Professor Gary Poole face to face when he attended the 2008 Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education (ascilite) conference (hosted by Deakin University) as a keynote speaker.

- Creating opportunities to present project findings in forums like CADAD and the HERDSA international conference and discussing project progress with partner representatives in person.

Inhibiting factors

The project team experienced the following inhibiting factors:

- The high level of volatility within teaching and learning centres created various challenges. For example, due to staff changes, one of our partner representatives was replaced during the project and there were several changes in roles, responsibilities and location of members of the project team. We also experienced difficulty in finalising the list of survey participants and focus groups due to changed staffing arrangements at other institutions.
- It was difficult to schedule the focus group discussions at the 10 institutions given the need to have several senior staff available at the same time.
- There was a tendency for many participants to focus on constraints during focus group discussions in preference to sharing ideas and strategies for addressing these. Hence, it was difficult to draw out concrete examples of current and best practice in some cases.

9 Implementation of project outcomes

Throughout the project, the team received feedback from interview, survey, focus group and workshop participants highlighting the importance and relevance of our project to the sector. The outcomes of the project are highly amenable to implementation in a variety of institutions and locations as they provide solutions and strategies to address problems that, our research has revealed, are of a concern to a significant number of teaching and learning centres, both nationally and internationally.

As the project's key deliverable, a Guide has been developed to support Australian university teaching and learning centres in strategic leadership for teaching and learning enhancement. The Guide is structured around five key phases of undertaking a strategic leadership development program:

- conceptualising strategic leadership;
- framing staff capability development for teaching and learning;
- implementing strategies for enhancing performance;
- considering emerging and future developments of centres; and
- gathering evidence from relevant stakeholders on centres' roles, functions and effectiveness.

These phases are, in turn, supported by the specific questions asked and activities undertaken during the project, and the resultant data and findings. We wish to emphasise that the Guide is built on the project's processes and its evidence-based findings.

As part of our dissemination strategy it is intended that key project documents will be promulgated on the Deakin University Institute of Teaching and Learning ALTC project web site, CADAD web site and the ALTC Exchange.

10 Dissemination of project outcomes

The dissemination of project outcomes has occurred throughout the project and will continue beyond its formal duration. Details of our dissemination strategy are provided below:

- One-and-a-half page project summary included in Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching in Australian Higher Education: Review of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Program 2006–2008 prepared by Emeritus Professor Lesley Parker AM FTSE, July 2008.
- Poster presentation at ALTC Leadership Program meeting in Hobart, February 2009.
- Presentation on project delivered to CADAD by Project Director in March 2009.
- Distribution of survey report to all centre directors in May 2009 received strong endorsement from Professor Denise Chalmers, CADAD President, who recommended to members that they use the report widely within their institutions.
- Workshop delivered at HERDSA international conference, Darwin, July 2009. The workshop provided project findings to 29 attendees (including the project team leaders) from around Australia and internationally, with over 90% indicating they intended to share information from the workshop with other colleagues and that they intended to recommend actions arising from the workshop and/or engage in further discussions of identified issues with appropriate groups/colleagues.
- The project team will submit a project workshop proposal to HERDSA for the 2010 international conference.
- A summary report of focus group discussions was provided to participating institutions upon request.
- Project poster was distributed to around 80 key stakeholders in teaching and learning from across 10 institutions (those who were invited to participate in the focus group discussions).
- Partner representatives have fed the project outcomes back into their own institutions throughout the project.
- The project's key deliverable is a Guide entitled 'Strategic Leadership for Institutional Teaching and Learning Centres: Developing a Model for the 21st Century: a Guide to Support Australian University Teaching and Learning Centres in Strategic Leadership for Teaching and Learning Enhancement'. The Guide will be distributed to directors of Australian teaching and learning centres.
- Final survey report was distributed to internationally recognised experts in the leadership of teaching and learning centres, Associate Professor Gary Poole and Dr David Gosling. Dr Gosling commented that the information would be 'useful for the research he was currently undertaking into academic development units across the globe'. Members of the project team met with Associate Professor Poole in December 2008 when he was the keynote speaker at the Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education (ascilite) conference.
- The Project Leader, Dr Dale Holt, was a member of the Victorian Forum Group for the ALTC funded project 'Development of Academics and Higher Education Futures' led by Associate Professor Peter Ling of Swinburne University of Technology. This project was designed to identify challenges arising from anticipated higher education futures and to recommend responses. In particular it addressed challenges associated with:
 - demands arising from government initiatives to enhance and recognise university learning and teaching – e.g. Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF) and ALTC;
 - challenges in working with new learning and teaching technologies; and
 - challenges in working in a global context.

- In late 2007, Dr Holt facilitated a thematic focus group (Victorian Forum) as part of Peter Ling's project. Dr Holt also provided participants with our initial thoughts on the strategic leadership of institutional teaching and learning centres.
- A copy of the framework and key project documents were sent to Jean Hughes, Interim Deputy Director, National Distance Learning Centre (OSCAIL) and Learning Innovation Unit and Director of Strategic Innovation Fund Programmes, Dublin City University. The Dublin City University is one of eight Dublin-region universities and institutes of technology that are working together to create the Dublin Centre for Academic Development (DCAD) – see www.drhea.ie/enhancement.php. This connection was initiated by Dr Elizabeth McDonald, Director International, ALTC, while she was in Europe in August 2009 exploring links and lessons that might be relevant to Australia and the ALTC.
- Following a face-to-face discussion about the project between the Project Leader and Professor Mark Israel, 2008 ALTC Teaching Fellow, at the ALTC Promoting Excellence Colloquium in Adelaide (September 2009), copies of key project documents were forwarded to Professor Israel to assist him in his Fellowship program. One of the major goals of Professor Israel's Fellowship Program is to disseminate better practice through the sector, building on work achieved by and integrating lessons from three excellence-related schemes – the Awards for Teaching Excellence, the Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Program, and the Promoting Excellence Initiative.
- As part of our dissemination strategy it is intended that key project documents will be promulgated on the Deakin University Institute of Teaching and Learning ALTC project web site, CADAD web site and the ALTC Exchange.

Conference papers and journal articles arising from the project

Paper entitled 'Teaching and Learning Centres: Towards Maturation', published in *Higher Education Research & Development*, 2009, 28(4), 371–383.

Paper entitled 'Australian Teaching and Learning Centres, Through the Eyes of Their Directors: Characteristics, Capacities and Constraints'. (This paper has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*.)

11 Evaluation of project outcomes

An independent evaluation of the project was carried out by Ms Mary Rice. In line with ALTC reporting requirements, a copy of the independent project evaluation report is included in Part 2 of the final report to the ALTC.

In summary, the independent project evaluation found that:

- thorough planning underpinned the overall achievement of the key project objectives;
- a revealing and important snapshot of the state-of-play in respect to centres of teaching and learning has been produced;
- where slight variations to aims have occurred, as in online community and case studies, they have been made for sound professional and necessary ethical reasons;
- project processes were clear and served their purpose well;
- participants at other institutions always felt included and consulted, though some felt they hadn't contributed very much because of the other responsibilities they had in a volatile environment; and
- project deliverables have been produced within the specified timelines and have been judged as being valuable and very useful for the sector.

In addition to the independent project evaluation, in line with the project's evaluation framework, formative evaluation was also undertaken at multiple points throughout the project including the following:

- the Project Reference Group was provided with regular project updates and documentation and encouraged to provide feedback;
- periodical review by the project team of project progress against stated outcomes;
- feedback invited and received from various groups and individuals; for example, Chair, CADAD working party on centre benchmarking and Professor Owen Hicks, ALTC consultant examining projects related to academic development;
- evaluation of survey tool by independent expert in survey design and analysis;
- participants had the opportunity to provide feedback on the project during focus group discussions; and
- HERDSA workshop participants were requested to fill in an evaluation form.

12 Links between this project, other ALTC projects and ALTC strategic priority areas

This ALTC-funded project was approved under the Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Program that supports systematic, structured and sustainable models of academic leadership in higher education at the disciplinary, cross-disciplinary and institutional levels. Since the project's inception, we have aimed to ensure that our work builds upon and enhances other projects funded under the leadership program. Our initial project proposal highlighted findings from Geoff Scott's (2008) major study of leadership in higher education. Also funded by the ALTC, Scott's work aimed to establish the capabilities that may be vital 'for effective performance in each of the learning and teaching leadership roles studied' and one of these included centre directors. His research built on a capability framework for school leaders and has influenced the direction that our project has taken in a number of ways. At several points throughout the project, we compared and contrasted our findings with similar research observations published by Scott in his 2008 study of leadership in teaching and learning. In February 2008 the Project Director provided Professor Geoff Scott with an overview of the project and later forwarded him copies of the survey report and discussion paper.

At the 2006 Carrick Institute Leadership Colloquium, in response to the question, 'What is understood by effective leadership for learning and teaching in Australian higher education?', the context-dependent or contingent response was observed again in the discussion summary which suggested that the 'relationship between different levels of leadership is important and any understanding should encompass the political as well as the structural' (Carrick Institute, 2006, p. 3). Many of these questions were asked subsequently at the 2007 Carrick Institute Leadership Forum; 'Where do institutional centres or units for promoting teaching and learning fit in?', 'How should the role for the "director" or "head" of such a centre and the staff of the centre relate to the actual teaching activities of the institution?', 'How effective can such entities be if they appear to be set apart from the mainstream action?' (Dow, 2007).

The ALTC has supported various leadership projects, for example those related to online teaching and learning, those promoting diverse forms of learning and teaching communities, improvements in the learning and teaching quality cycle and the use of student feedback to enhance student learning and teaching practice. However, as previously mentioned, none of those projects has specifically presented a structural or systemic view of 'leadership' in the way that this project does.

The design of our survey of directors took into account the Survey of Directors of Academic Development Centres carried out by Dr David Gosling between September and December 2007 to ensure that the two didn't overlap. Gosling's research 'collected data on the size, function, and priorities of ADCs and the perceptions of directors of academic development of their place in their institution, the security of their centre and issues that they faced in managing their centre' (Gosling, 2008). The results of Gosling's research have been cited in our paper 'Teaching and Learning Centres: Towards Maturation'.

As mentioned, the Project Leader, Dr Dale Holt was a member of the Victorian Forum Group for the ALTC-funded project 'Development of Academics and Higher Education Futures' led by Associate Professor Peter Ling of Swinburne University of Technology. This project was designed to identify challenges arising from anticipated higher education futures and to recommend responses. In particular, it addressed challenges associated with:

- demands arising from government initiatives to enhance and recognise university learning and teaching (e.g. AUQA, LTPF and ALTC);

- challenges in working with new learning and teaching technologies; and
- challenges in working in a global context.

In late 2007, our project leader, Dr Dale Holt, facilitated a thematic focus group (Victorian Forum) as part of Associate Professor Ling's project. Dr Holt also provided participants with our initial thoughts on the strategic leadership of institutional teaching and learning centres.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Notes on describing participants in interviews, surveys and focus groups

Appendix B

Interview issues

Appendix C

Australian Teaching and Learning Centre Directors' Survey

Appendix D

Focus group letter of invitation and response template

Appendix A: Notes on describing participants in interviews, surveys and focus groups

Project background

The project, supported by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, seeks to identify common factors that need to be considered in the effective strategic leadership of central organisational structures (centres) to enhance long-term learning and teaching performance and illustrate how these factors are dealt with contextually in a selection of contemporary university settings in Australian higher education.

Interviews

The first phase of project data collection was interviewing a range of key stakeholders. This involved conducting structured, audio-recorded interviews with five groups of staff providing strategic leadership perspectives in a representative range of Australian tertiary institutions:

- 1 University senior executive member with strategic leadership responsibility across institution (DVC(A)/PVC equivalent).
- 2 Directors of centres.
- 3 A representative sample by discipline of faculty Associate Deans, Teaching and Learning or equivalent.
- 4 Senior operational leadership/managers in academic or general staff positions in central centres.
- 5 Members of either external or internally composed centre advisory boards or equivalent.

Interviews were conducted at six institutions, yielding 37 interviews of 60–90 minutes duration, with good representation of all five identified target staff groups.

Survey of directors

The second phase of project data collection involved the development of an online survey, which the directors/heads of centres at all of Australia's 38 centres were invited to complete (38 of 39 Australian universities have identifiable centres of teaching and learning). The survey was focused on the key issues emerging from interviews conducted in Stage 1 of the project. Respondents were asked to consider the importance of key developments relating to centres in their respective organisations. The respondent group included 31 out of the 38 centres invited to participate, and was a highly representative sample of the generally recognised institutional groupings in Australian higher education.

Focus groups

The third phase of project data collection involved conducting facilitated and audio-recorded focus groups with a range of key stakeholders, including:

- 1 University senior executive member with strategic leadership responsibility across institution (DVC(A)/PVC or equivalent).
- 2 Directors of centres.
- 3 A representative sample by discipline of faculty Associate Deans, Teaching and Learning or equivalent.

- 4 Senior operational leadership/managers in academic or general staff positions in central centres.
- 5 Members of either external or internally composed centre advisory boards or equivalent.
- 6 A student representative.
- 7 An additional institutional representative nominated by the university.

The focus groups further explored the key issues arising from interviews conducted in Stage 1 of the project and from the survey conducted in Stage 2 of the project.

In addition to five of the original university sites that participated in the interviews, five additional university sites were included in the focus group phase to expand the representativeness of the data collection sample. A total of 66 respondents participated in the focus group stage, providing a diverse range of positional and institutional perspectives to illuminate and enrich the project data collection.

Appendix B: Interview issues

- 1 The leadership role of the individual being interviewed and notions of strategic leadership.
- 2 Key stakeholders and key relationships.
- 3 Organisational redesign/(re)structuring.
- 4 Enhancement of long-term learning and teaching.
- 5 Purposes of a teaching and learning centre.
- 6 How the centre is responding to national and international developments in higher education.
- 7 How the individual being interviewed will judge the effectiveness of their centre over time.
- 8 Constraints (if any) on the achievement of their vision and how they respond.

Appendix C: Australian Teaching and Learning Centre Directors' Survey

Background

The project, for which the survey formed the second major phase of research data collection, was specifically conceived to have a mixed methods research approach to purposefully draw in data from complementary sources (qualitative and quantitative) that would both assist with the concurrent triangulation and convergence of project data, as well as developmentally build on data collected in the prior phases of the project. Following an extensive literature review which framed the research project, interviews with a large group of teaching and learning leaders produced a rich qualitative data pool, from which key issues were identified for further exploration, both more broadly and in more detail. This further exploration incorporated a broadening of the data collection base by targeting all directors of teaching and learning centres in Australian universities as the potential respondent group, as well as increasing the level of depth of the data collected by seeking detailed quantitative responses to the identified key issues.

Development

The development of the survey sought to balance the desire to keep the instrument as compact and quick to complete as possible, so as not to deter potential respondents, while at the same time delivering the level of detail and coverage desired for the project data collection. The survey sought a range of **background information**, including:

- university classification (Go8, Australian Technology Network, etc.) to permit testing of the representativeness of the respondent sample group;
- time since last centre restructure;
- information about the status and incumbency of the centre director; and
- information about the staffing of the centre.

Based on a survey of publically available information regarding functions of Australian centres and participation of project members in the development of a centre benchmarking schema by the Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development (CADAD), an inventory of 36 **centre functions** (grouped into 10 broad areas) was developed. The survey asked respondents to rate the importance of each function for their centre and to rate their satisfaction with the performance of their centre in that function. Respondents were asked to rate the **capacity** (resources and opportunities) and **capability** (staff expertise) of their centre to achieve success for each of the broad function areas. Based on key constraints on centres identified in the initial interview phase, respondents were asked to rate a list of 10 identified centre constraints. Based on **key positional relationships** for centres identified in the initial interview phase, respondents were asked to rate the importance of the relationship their centre had with nine key teaching and learning leadership positions, and to rate their satisfaction with the effectiveness of those relationships. Respondents were asked to indicate on a continuum of one to 20, the degree to which centre staff were **recognised and included** in relevant university activities related to teaching and learning. Finally, respondents were invited to optionally include any other information, as open-ended text, that they considered relevant to the survey.

For all survey items requiring a rating response, a four-point scale was used without a mid-point, requiring respondents to select something other than a default middle rating. For all survey items requiring a rating response, a 'not applicable' (N/A) rating point was

included to avoid contrived responses where that item did not apply to a particular centre. For all survey sections based on lists (functions, constraints and relationships) derived from prior project research, a section was included where respondents could identify up to four additional items and provide ratings for them. For all survey items requiring a rating response (except for centre constraints, which were simply ranked), two dimensional ratings scales were used (importance-satisfaction, capacity-capability). This allows what would otherwise be uni-dimensional response data to be plotted as a two dimensional grid, permitting a richer analysis and classification of respondent data.

Following initial drafting of the survey instrument, the wider project team and the Project Reference Group were employed as a pilot expert group to assess both the content and the format of delivery of the survey instrument. Based on feedback from the pilot group, refinements were made to the survey instrument, with the intent of improving its content and face validity. The final director's survey instrument used in the second phase of data collection for the project is included as an appendix in the Guide document.

Ethics

In this project, the lead institution administered human research ethics approval for all phases of data collection. The human research ethics committee of the lead institution meets to consider applications on a relatively infrequent basis (approximately every six weeks), and has a deadline for submission of applications approximately six weeks in advance of the meeting. This required careful planning of timelines to manage the completion and submission of ethics applications, taking into account the possibility of amendments to the research process being required by the ethics committee before research could commence. A deliberate strategy of making separate applications for ethics approval for each of the three project data collection phases was used. While this required three applications for ethics approval, it meant that each one was comparatively simple and straightforward, avoiding having to place a large and complicated application before the human research ethics committee for consideration. It is believed that this approach facilitated timely ethics approval for the project, including for the survey of centre directors phase. For the purposes of simplicity of participant consent, and to encourage the maximum number of respondents, the survey was anonymous. Respondent consent to participate in the survey was indicated by their completion of the survey. No specific record of consent was required.

Delivery

For the survey of directors, even though the complete respondent pool is comparatively small (fewer than 40), an online survey process was employed. This decision was made for a number of reasons, including:

- the online survey system was hosted by the lead institution – no external third party was involved, ensuring the integrity and security of the data;
- all survey transactions were completed online via email and web forms – no postal costs or delays were incurred;
- the online system did not require any specific action by the respondent to return their completed survey, other than the click of a submit button;
- the key dates for the administration of the survey could be programmed in advance; the initial invitations, necessary reminders and final close off of the survey were all managed automatically;
- the system managed participant identity anonymously, tracking those who had responded, and periodically sending reminders to those who had not; and
- data from the completed surveys was stored electronically and no additional keying of data (with potential for transcription errors) was required prior to data analysis.

For the survey of directors reported in this project, it is the belief of the project team that the excellent response rate obtained (greater than 80 percent) was in part due to the use of the online survey process.

Analysis

At the completion of the survey period, the respondent data was exported from the online survey system as a comma separated variable formatted data file. This data file was then imported into the SPSS statistical software package for detailed analysis. The data collected were quantitatively analysed using a range of descriptive, parametric and non-parametric techniques. The specific forms and results of the statistical analysis performed can be found in detail in the report of the survey of directors.

Descriptive statistics computed:

- sum;
- minimum;
- maximum;
- frequencies;
- histogram plot;
- mean; and
- standard deviation.

Parametric statistics computed:

- Pearson correlation coefficient;
- confidence intervals;
- analysis of variance (ANOVA); and
- least significant difference post-hoc ANOVA test.

Non -parametric statistics computed:

- Chi-square test of proportions.

Follow-up actions

An electronic copy of the full survey report (2008) can be obtained from the project leaders. The full report was circulated to all directors of Australian teaching and learning centres via CADAD and has been a valuable comparison data set for benchmarking between centres in Australian universities, and internationally.

Appendix D: Focus group letter of invitation and response template

Dear <insert name>

I am writing as Project Manager for the ALTC funded project 'Strategic Leadership for Institutional Teaching and Learning Centres: Developing a Model for the 21st Century' which is being led by Dr Dale Holt. The project is being undertaken in partnership with UNE, Monash, RMIT University, Newcastle and Macquarie. So far we have undertaken interviews with the strategic leadership of Australian Teaching and Learning Centres and completed a survey of Centre Directors. Our final stage of data collection involves undertaking focus group discussions with our partners and four additional universities.

We are hoping to conduct a focus group at <insert institution> in February/March 2009. The list of staff who should be invited to participate in the focus group is as follows:

Director of the Academic Development Centre; two other senior staff connected with your area; the DVC or equivalent; two faculty-based staff in leadership positions (e.g. Associate Deans, Teaching and Learning / Academic Development, HoS); a student representative (e.g. the President of the Student Association) and another person you consider would be in a position to provide a constructive additional perspective (e.g. faculty-based Academic Developer or Head, Planning Unit).

It would also be very helpful if you please indicate a few dates which would be suitable for us to conduct the focus group at your University. We are hoping to have the focus groups completed before <insert date>. It is envisaged that the focus group would run for up to 90 minutes and the whole exercise would be completed within a day at your institution.

The focus group discussion will have a dual focus:

- What makes centres successful in today's climate?
- What role in making centres successful does strategic leadership play?

I would be very grateful if you could confirm that you would like to take part in the focus group.

I am attaching a one page summary of the project and a copy of our First Year Report to the ATLC for your information but should you require any further details, please do not hesitate to contact <insert name> by telephone on <insert number> or email <insert email address>.

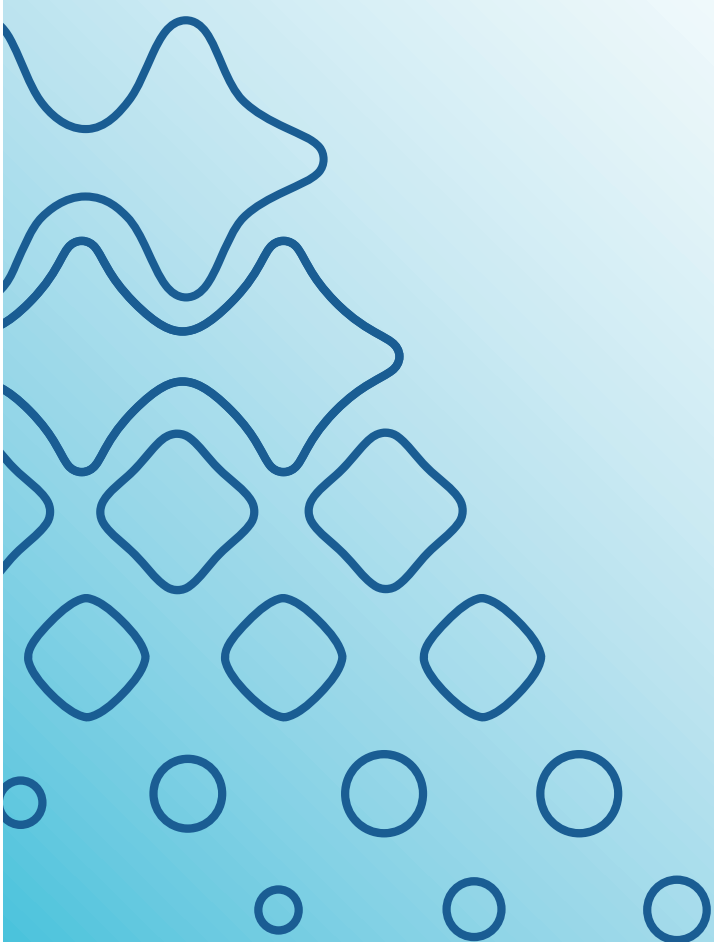
Could you please complete and return the attached template by <insert date>.

Thank you very much for your assistance.

Kind regards

<Insert name>

Project Manager



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