Siobhan Lenihan, Director, Grants and Fellowships, Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT), presented information about OLT grants and fellowships programs in an event hosted by WAND at Notre Dame University. This event brought together grant holders, current and prospective applicants and nominees and professional support staff from the five W.A. universities. We would like to share with our regional colleagues the insights we gained from the event.

In her introduction, Professor Shelda Debowski, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Notre Dame University, highlighted how research into teaching and learning has grown in its sophistication and how the role of the ALTC and now the OLT continues to promote excellence in higher education and a broader acceptance of scholarly approaches.

Siobhan confirmed that the continuity of the grants, fellowships and awards programs and the 10 continuing staff had assisted in the transition to a small branch within a very large government department of DIISRTE (“Innovation”). OLT staff had maintained a strong relationship with the sector and this has been further enhanced with new initiatives such as the Secondments, in response to Alison Johns’ recommendations in her consultation report http://www.olt.gov.au/search/apachesolr_search/Alison%20Johns.

OLT grants have become more competitive with a higher number of applications (410 in the last round with 385 eligible) and an increasingly higher standard. In the future, with listing on the Australian Competitive Grants Register (Category One status), OLT grant programs are likely to attract a high number of applications and researchers who are more familiar with ARC requirements than OLT selection criteria and the characteristics valued by OLT assessors and Standing Committees. Siobhan made the point that what had changed with the Category One status of OLT grants was the way in which learning and teaching research is perceived by the sector and being on the register is affirmation that ALTC/OLT research has always set a high standard. The field of the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching has matured and is now of a very high standard.

**Tips for Grant Applicants**

**#1 In addition to engaging with the literature your application needs to position the project in relation to work which has been funded by ALTC/OLT.**

In arguing the value and need for a project, the proposal should address how you will use and advance existing work. The Standing Committees’ knowledge of the large body of work (500 projects and 61 Fellowships) funded under each program is extensive and they will be aware if your project has not addressed this work relevant to your topic. Assessors are directed to the summaries of all projects funded and she emphasized the diligence of the members of Standing Committees, who with limited funds available ensure the best fellowship nominations and grant applications go forward in terms of sector point of view. To assist you with positioning your project, Siobhan strongly advised becoming familiar with the resources accessible from the OLT website:


1. These are not called Guidelines due to the specific meaning of this term in the department.
2. There is a separate report for each program based on assessors’ generic comments and should be read as advice from the Standing Committees about what makes a good application. Sometimes these comments don’t form part of the guidelines but provide excellent information about each program.
3. These 10 reports provide a good synthesis of projects funded up to 2011. (This will be updated in 2013).
Summaries of projects funded by year:

|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|

The OLT site’s search function can be sorted by relevancy, title or type and using the filters search for institutions, discipline or keywords for topics. The A-Z search is also useful.

#2 Keep in mind who the audiences are for your proposal. Be aware that in addition to the two assessors who read the application, a Standing Committee also reads and make recommendations to the Strategic Advisory Committee who in turn advises the Minister in making the final decision.

Siobhan explained the process of inviting a pool of assessors (800), the matching process to find two suitable assessors for each application (disciplinary and T&L or curriculum perspectives and conflict of interest are accounted for) and how this successful peer-review process is now supported by an electronic assessment system (which it is hoped will enable longer feedback for unsuccessful applications). The Standing Committee may review less highly rated applications for topics of current importance. A significant project which may have a competent proposal but be missing one or two elements maybe reconsidered and invited to resubmit a revised application.

The Committee may consider how many projects have been funded in the particular area before making a decision. If there is a choice between two similarly-rated proposals, the Committee is likely to choose the one in an area where there have been fewer projects funded in the past.

She stressed the importance of knowing who was on the Standing Committees and being mindful of this audience and directed us to where you can download biographies of the Strategic Advisory Committee members and see a list Standing Committee members [http://www.olt.gov.au/about-governance](http://www.olt.gov.au/about-governance). Siobhan also advised that it was never a good idea to criticize your own or another university in your proposal.

#3 Key differences between OLT and ARC Grants

All applications to the OLT must be about teaching and learning. The impact will be on student learning and, potentially, the whole sector. These projects will involve tangible outcomes that will be shared with the higher education sector. Evolving priorities are identified as we address the changing issues in the sector and build to 40% by 2025 of Australians holding a bachelor degree or above.

Deliverables such as learning resources and teachers’ guides generated by projects are disseminated freely across the sector under a very broad Creative Commons licence.

Dissemination is a key component of OLT grant proposals and builds engagement across the sector throughout the project. The D-Cubed Project explored the effectiveness of dissemination for ALTC Grants Scheme projects in the period 2006 to 2009 and has developed a range of resources to support future applicants. These resources as well as other key reports on dissemination are available via the OLT website, [http://www.olt.gov.au/grants-and-projects/dissemination](http://www.olt.gov.au/grants-and-projects/dissemination).

Applicants are advised to work with their institution’s ICO as only applications listed by the ICOs and advised a week prior to submission will be accepted. The DVC Academic or equivalent in each institution is required to certify applications.
Siobhan indicated that re-submission in subsequent rounds was common and that feedback was designed to develop better proposals. A good score is 3.5 – 4 and if not funded at this level it could be that the Standing Committee, whose role is different from the assessors’, made this judgment against other proposals in the similar topic area.

Where the first criterion (Project Outcomes and Rationale) is assessed at 2 or less, it is expedient not to score the remaining criteria. Therefore the “Approach”, Value/Need”, “Project management and Budget” and “Capacity of the project team to deliver the proposed outcomes” will appear as zero or one scores even though they may have been well argued or prepared.

In such cases, you should read the comment carefully and also refer to the assessment report for that program to make a judgment about re-writing and re-submitting your proposal. It can be very helpful to debrief with your Institutional Liaison Officer or Institutional Contact Officer (ICO) or a successful colleague. A list of ICOS is available on the OLT site: http://www.olt.gov.au/ico-list

Another thing to remember if resubmitting is that there will be different assessors if an application is resubmitted.

**Tips for Fellowship Nominees**

# 5 The above points are also relevant to fellowships however, a fellowship is NOT a project.

Whereas a project progresses from a ‘good idea’ that is then investigated by the project team often involving research and the design and trialing of resources to arrive at an end product, the opposite is the case with fellowships. A prospective fellow will already have the ‘product’ and the fellowship is an ‘engine for dissemination’. There was a discussion about a range of Fellowships and Siobhan highlighted David Hill’s fellowship work which was referenced in Ken Henry’s white paper “Australia in the Asian Century”, Beverley Oliver (benchmarking partnerships for graduate employability) and Dawn Bennett (The TILE Approach enhances student engagement and the Fellows’ Network http://www.altf.org/)

There were 20 nominations in the last round and institutions are now checking these closely before allowing them to be put forward to the OLT. The OLT is currently planning an event similar to the 2009 event for Fellowships in Melbourne, which was attended by 70 people and led to a spike in nominations.

Siobhan described fellowships as ‘life changing’ and said that many Fellows reported how the fellowship had lifted their profile in the sector. She related how she had worked with a group at QUT wishing to nominate for a fellowship and they had found it useful to articulate:

- What their fellowship would be building upon
- What they wanted to do in the fellowship
- What their dissemination plans were and how they would engage the sector in the fellowship

As teachers know thinking aloud can be a good way to develop and refine a concept. **Siobhan suggested that nominees be provided an opportunity to talk through their Fellowship Nominations to distil their ideas verbally prior to writing the application; teachers often find this process helpful as they are used to verbal presentation.**

Summaries of completed and continuing fellowships:
Secondments

Secondments have a dual purpose. Firstly, they are driven by a project and the seconded person will work part time within the OLT with their work engaging with people in the sector. Secondly, this sector contact guarantees another link for the OLT with the higher education community. Secondments are designed to enhance ties and build understanding between the sector, OLT and DIISRTE. Tilly Hinton is the first under this program and has been researching Influence factors, studying this as a mechanism for extracting value from completed projects. Her secondment aimed to maintain relationships with project teams and articulate the benefits of national T & L grants to a range of stakeholders. The results indicate that grant projects have had a wide impact, however, the model Tilly was investigating from the OLT’s counterpart in New Zealand will not fit the Australian context. This program is developing a lot of interest this year. For further information go to: http://www.olt.gov.au/fellowships-and-secondments/secondments

Announcements

Since 2009, there has been a consistent upward trend in the number of academic staff being reported as teaching-only. The paper Teaching-focused academic appointments in Australian universities: recognition, specialisation or stratification?, commissioned by the OLT, and authored by Professor Belinda Probert, former Deputy Vice-Chancellor, La Trobe University, examines the possible motivations for the trend, and can be downloaded at: http://www.olt.gov.au/march2013-olt-releases-discussion-paper-teaching-focused-appointments

General Clarifications

Under the current “Enhancing the Training of Mathematics and Science Teachers Program” an institution is eligible to lead a project where it has an ERA Rating of 4 or 5 in either two-digit or four-digit FoR codes in the relevant disciplines for this program. As some people have read this in relation to the recent announcement that OLT have been granted Category One status on the Australian Competitive Grant Register wondering if this is the future, this needs clarification. This was a one-off: this program’s design was heavily influenced by the Chief Scientist.