



Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia Inc

April 22, 2016

Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham
PO Box 6100
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister Birmingham,

The Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) is the preeminent professional society in Australasia focused on higher education teaching, learning and research. For academic and professional staff engaged in higher education, HERDSA provides an accessible opportunity for them to be involved in activities to improve their teaching practice and to engage in the scholarship in teaching and learning. HERDSA has a membership of approximately 900, the majority of whom work as academics or professional staff across the disciplines and at all levels of higher education in Australia.

I write on behalf of the members of HERDSA with respect to the imminent closure of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) and the lack of action by the Government on the plans for its successor. Professor Ross Milbourne, who conducted a commissioned Review of the OLT in late 2015, consulted widely and took on board the view across the sector that maintaining the OLT or funding a replacement body for it was critical to support educational excellence. We have heard nothing about the plans for a national body since that time.

Without a properly funded national body to fund and administer the programs currently supported by the OLT, Australia risks losing its reputation and competitive edge of being at the forefront of innovative teaching and learning based on sound evidence of best practice. This is in addition to the effect on the student experience in our higher education institutions. HERDSA is a member network of the International Consortium for Educational Development (ICED) and as a member of the ICED Council I know first-hand that other networks and countries including those in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas look to Australia as a leader and innovator in higher education teaching and learning practice and policy. This reputation is at stake.

The research and development projects that the OLT (and its predecessors) have funded through the Grants Scheme and the Fellowship Scheme have led to strategic, high profile research that has enhanced teaching and learning policy and practice in higher education across the sector. These enhancements benefit hundreds of thousands of students who go on to be contributors to the economic and social wellbeing of the Australian community. The outcomes of these projects more broadly enhance the quality of Australia's higher education sector and Australia's international reputation as a trusted provider of quality education services. In addition, those teachers and professional staff recognised through the Australian Awards for University Teaching for their excellence as teachers, providers of support programs and as outstanding contributors to student learning are inspired and funded to further develop and disseminate their good practices across the sector.

HERDSA – ABN 89 341 252 166
PO Box 6106, Hammondville NSW 2170 Australia
Telephone: +61 2 9771 3911 – Fax: +61 2 9771 4299
Email: office@hersda.org.com.au – Web: <http://www.hersda.org.au>

I am sure you are aware of the significant advances that OLT funded research and development projects and fellowships have made to evidence-based best practices in teaching and learning policy and practice in areas such as employability and Work Integrated Learning (WIL), retention, transition and the first-year experience, English language proficiency, the education experience and well-being of diverse cohorts of students including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and international students, and the incorporation of innovative technologies to improve teaching and learning and access to higher education.

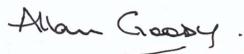
While the grants and fellowships schemes are competitive, the highly collaborative nature of teaching and learning in higher education sees those successful applicants applauded and supported by their colleagues because we all know that the work will be of value to us all. I believe that this is a significant consideration in evaluating the importance of a national body like the OLT and its programs. With the inequity of financial standing of institutions across the sector, many individual institutions cannot afford to mount the kinds of large scale investigations into best practice in teaching and learning policy and practice that a funded national body can do. Through the highly collaborative nature of the work funded by the OLT, project outcomes are disseminated and adapted to local contexts across a range of institutions and disciplines. HERDSA provides opportunities for some of this dissemination through our very highly regarded international journal *Higher Education Research & Development* and our annual conference.

The investment of a modest amount of money into enhancing innovation and quality in teaching and learning pays handsome dividends for students, higher education institutions and the community at large, particularly when placed in the context of the more than \$1billion committed to the national innovation agenda. One could argue that an innovation agenda that does not include a focus on innovative evidenced-based quality teaching and learning in our higher education sector is incongruous with the aims of the innovation agenda.

As the President of HERDSA and on behalf of the members of HERDSA, I ask you Minister to secure adequate funding to maintain the OLT or a replacement body to ensure the reputation of Australia's higher education is maintained and that our teachers in higher education are recognised and supported in their endeavours to provide the best quality educational experience for their students.

Yours sincerely

Yours sincerely



Dr Allan Goody, President
Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia
Vice President, International Consortium for Educational Development
agoody56@gmail.com