

# Clouds gathering over OLT

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Concern is mounting over the future of the Office of Learning and Teaching with its June 30 funding deadline looming and no word from Education Minister Simon Birmingham over its campus-based replacement.

Senior administrators say they are increasingly concerned the OLT will be sacrificed in the May budget and that no university appears to have been approached to host the new OLT from July 1.

Margaret Gardner, vice-chancellor of Monash University and chairwoman of the expert panel on learning and teaching, said gutting the OLT would run counter to the "government's commitment to innovation and improvement in the quality and performance of teaching and learning".

"That is fundamental to the ongoing success of the sector, particularly one that is the third largest export sector in the country," Professor Gardner said.

A report on creating a new centre by former vice-chancellor Ross Milbourne was handed to the department last November, but has not been released.

That report, which has been seen by the HES, says the OLT is widely viewed as "facilitating systemic change in learning and teaching" across the sector.

Shirley Alexander, deputy vice-chancellor at University of Technology Sydney said she was also very concerned about the silence on the new centre.

"Even if an announcement

was made today, it would be very difficult to have the new centre up and running within that time frame," Professor Alexander said.

Sally Kift, deputy-vice-chancellor at James Cook University, said with money being poured into research it seemed "inconceivable" the OLT would be defunded.

"At a time when the government is pouring \$1.1 billion into research and research infrastructure to support its innovation agenda, it seems inconceivable to suggest that not even \$1 will be invested in the teaching and upskilling of the next generation of innovators and entrepreneurs," Professor Kift said. "Quality teaching goes to the reputational heart of our sector and its competitiveness internationally."

In last year's budget, then education minister Christopher Pyne allocated \$28 million across three years for the new institute.

Professor Gardner said over the past three years OLT funding has gone to projects on graduate employability skills, improving tertiary pathways, improving access and equity, assessment practices, bolstering academic standards and integrity, the use of technology, internationalising the curriculum and professionalising teaching. In his report, Professor Milbourne said a 1.9 per cent increase in university completion rates leads to a 1 per cent increase in GDP per person," the Milbourne report says.

A spokesman for Minister Simon Birmingham would only say: "These matters are still under consideration."