Final Report

PRODUCTION OF A PROTOTYPE ONLINE LEADERSHIP LEARNING TOOL AND SYSTEM FOR AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Report Contents

1. Executive Summary

This ALTC project has involved more than 600 experienced leaders in higher education within and beyond Australia in the production of a comprehensive Online Leadership Learning System (OLLS) for our universities. The project actions the outcomes and key recommendations from the earlier ALTC project 'Learning Leaders in times of change' (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008). It provides Australian higher education with a distinctive, user-developed, university-specific and comprehensive option for systematically and proactively addressing the leadership succession crisis currently faced not only by Australian universities but also by universities internationally.

OLLS provides practical strategies for ensuring that the identification of prospective leaders from within a university, along with leadership selection, promotion and development are focused, relevant, feasible and productive.

It shows how the active, situated, experiential, just-in-time and just-for-me approaches to learning, development and support known to optimise university student engagement and retention in productive learning can be applied to the selection and support if its leaders. In this way the system enables our learning leaders to learn through first-hand experience what needs to be done with their students.

The project has attracted widespread interest and support both within Australia and internationally. Indicators of its impact include:

- Project leader Professor Geoff Scott delivered a keynote on this work at the UNESCO-Microsoft HE Leaders Conference in Paris in July 2009 (Scott, 2009b). The conference was attended by ministers and staff from 130 countries.

- The project team has been requested to run whole-of-institution development programs on how to use OLLS in a range of Australian, South African and New Zealand universities.

- The project team has received requests to adapt the OLLS system for use by associated groups, including a version for Australasian members of the Association of Tertiary Education Management and another for leaders in vocational education and training (VET).

- The OLLS system and its precursor, the 'Learning Leaders in times of change' study are featured in the Jossey Bass/Wiley book *Turnaround Leadership for Higher Education* (Fullan & Scott, 2009) which recieved a US Colleges Bellwether Award for 2010.

The report below outlines the project's outcomes, approach and methodology; indicates its contribution to the field; identifies key factors assisting and constraining success; summarises its achievements in terms of dissemination and linkages; and evaluates its quality and impact.

The report concludes with a set of recommendations on what needs to be done to scale up and sustain the initiative and apply it to other related leadership and teaching contexts.

Specifically it is recommended that:

- The ALTC, in partnership with Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) and the L H Martin Institute, investigate the use of OLLS to develop a:
  - national workshop on the results contained in this report and the associated OLLS system guide
  - university-specific, institution wide approach to leadership identification, selection development and review, using the findings from the 'Learning Leaders in times of change' study and the outcomes of the OLLS project.

- The ALTC considers adopting the proven approach developed in the 'Learning Leaders in times of change' and OLLS projects to the production of new, situated more Field of Education-specific, and IT-enabled approach to teacher training in higher education

This is a timely, distinctive and appropriate response to the call for action in this area identified by the then Deputy Prime Minister, the Hon. Julia Gillard, in December 2009. Such an initiative would systematically use demonstrably successful full-time and sessional university teachers in different FOEs as a key data source. It would also enable learning to be delivered using best practice in 'just-in-time' and 'just-for-me' IT-enabled learning.

2. Project Outcomes and Impact

2.1 Outcomes achieved

This project has delivered an Online Leadership Learning System (OLLS) for Australian higher education, comprising:

- A user-validated online learning tool for learning and teaching leaders in Australia's universities in each of the following roles (or their equivalent): deputy vice-chancellor, pro vice-chancellor, dean, associate dean, head of school or department, head of program and director of learning and teaching.

- An indicative framework for leadership succession, selection, development and performance management within which the use of the OLLS tool has been located. This system builds directly on the findings of the ALTC 'Learning Leaders in times of change' project, along with the key findings on what optimises leadership learning from other ALTC projects in the Leadership for Excellence area.

- A set of self-instructional guides on how to use the system and the OLLS tool. These include field-tested and user-developed self-instructional guides on how to complete the OLLS online leadership survey; how to make sense of and use results with or without a mentor; a software guide; and an administrator's manual.

2.2. Approach and methodology

This project has built directly on the findings from the earlier 'Learning Leaders in times of change' project (Scott, Coates and Anderson, 2008) and the strategies used to design, deliver and disseminate its findings.

The methodology used in the current project involved:

- completing a literature review
- identifying and reviewing similar online tools within Australia and internationally
- developing a prototype online survey based on the validated online survey used in the 'Learning Leaders in times of change' study
- developing a reporting system for individual results on the survey, benchmarked against the results for experienced players in the same role, including those who completed the original ALTC Learning Leaders survey
- developing of a range of case studies with experienced higher education leaders, nationally and internationally, covering the major challenges faced in each higher education leadership role and key suggestions on how these might be most productively handled
- prototype testing in detail by educational research, reporting and survey staff at the University of Western Sydney
- organising state-based workshops in Queensland, NSW, ACT, Victoria, the Northern Territory and Western Australia.
- managing international workshops in New Zealand, South Africa, and Canada. Note: in the user-centred design and review process adopted for both national international workshops participants completed the

latest prototype survey online, checked the case studies, received their results online and, in the light of this, and reviewed the overall system during the workshop. The enhancements suggested at each workshop were progressively used to sharpen the relevance, clarity, and utility of the system, along with its user-guides.

- testing the IT operability of the system with higher education leaders in Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and Saudi Arabia.

In total some 600 practicing higher education leaders from across the world have actively tested and/or reviewed the system.

This approach optimises system ownership of what is produced and is consistent with the broader set of research findings on effective change leadership and implementation in higher education. This research is reviewed in *Turnaround Leadership for Higher Education* (Fullan & Scott, 2009) and was presented in a keynote on the project at the UNESCO-Microsoft Higher Education Leaders Conference attended by 130 ministers for education and staff at the Pasteur Institute in Paris in July 2009 (Scott, 2009b).

2.3 How the project advances existing knowledge and approaches

National and international benchmarking has been undertaken to identify and build on similar systems being used elsewhere. To date it appears that OLLS is the first tool internationally to focus concurrently in a *comprehensive, role-specific* and *validated* way on leadership self-assessment and learning for all teaching and learning related leadership positions in higher education. International need for, and interest in, the prototype OLLS approach was confirmed at the UNESCO-Microsoft Educational Leaders Forum on higher education noted above.

This project has:

- Produced an effective online learning system for higher education leaders – a system which models to higher education leaders the approach to learning now known to engage and retain their higher education students in productive and flexible learning. This was a key recommendation from the 1100 higher education leaders involved in reviewing the findings of the 'Learning Leaders in times of change' study.

- Explored how this focus on role-specific leadership learning can be located within a comprehensive, institution-wide approach to early identification of potential leaders using a process of effective selection, targeted development and constructive review.

- Shown how to ensure that initiatives of this type can be effectively developed and implemented by actively applying key lessons learnt on successful change management and leadership in higher education.

The project has provided a valuable tool with the potential to contribute to tackling the leadership succession crisis that is currently unfolding for higher education, not only in Australia, but also around the world.

2.4 Factors facilitating success

Factors facilitating success for this project were consistent with earlier findings on successful change implementation in higher education and included:

- Adopting the 'listen, link, then lead' approach to change implementation (Fullan & Scott, 2009). That is, developing a prototype which combined the best of existing successful strategies and then field testing this to get user feedback. An enhanced version of the prototype was then developed and re-tested, finally leading to broader implementation of this 'owned' version across the system.

- Strong leadership and networking, including the selection of a project leader known and respected across the sector and the use of networks to identify approaches underway elsewhere.

- Working directly on the prototype with the DVC (A) Group of Universities Australia to ensure their early engagement with its development and 'ownership' of what was emerging in order to optimise take-up in their home institutions.

- Working in a whole-of-institution way with La Trobe University, the University of New England (UNE), and the University of Western Sydney in order to embed and build local capability to implement the system.

- Working collaboratively with existing groups operating in the same area (e.g., the LH Martin Leadership Institute); and with peak bodies interested in adapting the prototype for their own use (e.g., the Australasian Association for Tertiary Education Management).

- Building in sustainable project outcomes. For example, in the present project it was essential that there was a partner capable of sustaining the IT component of OLLS beyond the end of ALTC funding. ACER is a long-standing institution, independent of government with the capabilities required.

- Presenting and testing the results in workshops and keynote addresses at national and international conferences, including at the 2009 Australian Quality Forum: Higher Education (Scott, 2009a), the Association for Tertiary Education Management conference 2009 (Scott, 2009d) and at the UNESCO Higher Education Conference 2009 (Scott, 2009b).

2.5 Factors for special consideration

A number of factors were given special consideration by the project team as they were seen as potentially problematic. These included that:

- the online component of OLLS user friendly and that the report users receive is easily interpreted, relevant and can be readily and productively used

- deputy/pro vice-chancellors were engaged with the project. This concern was addressed in two sessions on the system with the Universities Australia DVC(A) Group in Melbourne in November 2008 and in Canberra in May 2009

- user input into the design/testing process for the prototype was secured. This concern was addressed with by organising state/territory workshops. The workshops provided constructive feedback that was acted upon to finalise the prototype system by December 2009.

A key challenge encountered in this project was to ensure that all current ALTC Leadership projects were operating within a common, agreed quality assurance framework. How ALTC projects could be more systematically and productively linked into an integrated, complementary strategy is a question that needs to be considered.

The project leaders found it difficult to make productive contact with other ALTC project leaders when they had been funded on the basis of a different set of assumptions.

2.6 Lessons learnt

- It is the total university experience which shapes the effectiveness and retention of our leaders and this must be reflected in any leadership learning and support system.

- Leadership learning is most productive when it is context and role specific.

- There is strong support for an integrated approach to identifying, selecting, developing and constructively reviewing the performance of our leaders.

- Any reflective tool is, at its best, a vehicle for strategic conversations as it provides a commonly understood or contestable framework and a common language. The efficacy of the tool will ultimately be dependent on leaders' abilities to use OLLS in the most productive way.

The UNESCO-Microsoft Education Leaders forum in Paris in July 2009 confirmed that developing such a system is now a top priority for higher education worldwide as the leadership succession crisis in our universities starts to bite. It also confirmed that no such system of the type developed in the OLLS project currently exists.

3. Dissemination

As indicated in Section 2, the approach in this and other ALTC projects undertaken by the UWS-ACER team uses an iterative, user-centred design, testing and improvement process. This strategy builds stakeholder 'ownership' of produced materials and sharpens their relevance to the higher education teaching and learning community. By ensuring relevance and feasibility of produced materials dissemination is optimised.

More than 600 leaders from over 45 universities in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada and Saudi Arabia have either completed and given feedback on the online leadership learning survey and/or helped shape the system that underpins it.

Additional strategies used to share project outcomes have included:

- A presentation on the project at The Australian Quality Forum: Higher Education in Alice Springs in July 2009 (Scott, 2009a)

- A keynote address at the UNESCO-Microsoft Higher Education Leaders Meeting in Paris in July (Scott, 2009b)

- A keynote address at the Universities Australia DVCs (Corporate Services) conference hosted by The University of Adelaide in July (Scott, 2009c)

- Reference to the project in the book *Turnaround Leadership for higher education* (Scott & Fullan, 2009)

- An international video conference on this work with leaders from Mexican universities hosted by Monterrey Institute for Technology in November 2009

- A range of invited whole-of-institution workshops with leaders at UNE, UWS, La Trobe University, the University of Auckland, Waikato University and Western Sydney Institute of TAFE throughout 2009

- Use and testing of OLLS in LH Martin Leadership Programs for Heads of School and Administrative Leaders[1]

- A keynote address at the Tertiary Education Managers Conference in Darwin in September (Scott, 2009d)

- A range of articles and conference proceedings which refer to the project (e.g., Scott, Bell, Coates & Grebennikov, 2009; Scott, Chang & Grebennikov, 2009).

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[1] The Universities involved in these workshops included: Bond, Charles Sturt, Curtin, James Cook, La Trobe, Southern Cross, Ballarat, Melbourne, New England, Southern Queensland, UTS, Western Sydney and Wollongong.

3. Linkages

The director and team members of the OLLS project have been invited to participate on a range of advisory committees for proposed ALTC Leadership Projects – for example the Monash University project: 'Leading Excellence – application of Engaging Leadership Framework to new higher education sites and contexts' (Lorraine Bennett).

Particular focus has been given to the joint project led by Griffith University and involving UWS: 'Developing program leader networks and resources to enhance learning and teaching in multicampus universities'. In addition the project team regularly receives input from related ALTC projects – for example, the November 2009 report on the project: 'Strategic leadership for institutional teaching and learning centres: developing a model for the 21st century'.

The OLLS project director attended the ALTC Leadership Project Leaders' Meeting in Hobart on 18-19 February 2009. This forum was used to compare and contrast developments and identify linkages to similar projects. This included discussion of the ALTC project: 'Academic leadership development within the university sector by dissemination of a web-based 360° feedback process and related professional development workshops' with its leader Trish Vilkinas.

The executive of the Association for Tertiary Education Management is currently working with the OLLS project director to develop a customised version of the system for tertiary education managers. ACER is working with the LH Martin Institute and VET organisations to develop a version of the OLLS suitable for use with leaders in that sector.

As indicated earlier, careful attention has been given to working in close collaboration with the LH Martin Institute in its leadership programs for both heads of school/department and senior administrative leaders.

4. Evaluation and Quality of Impact

A range of indicators and forms of feedback have been used to ensure that the project has been delivered on time and to specification, and to optimise adoption in Australia and internationally.

The strategies and indicators used to improve and prove the quality of the OLLS project outcomes include:

- Formative feedback and positive review from the project's national steering committee[2].

- Feedback from development workshops and discussions of the project with key leadership groups including a review of the project at the Universities Australia DVC (A) meeting in Canberra in May 2009.

- Invitations to work with universities at a whole-of-institution level on how to use the OLLS tool and the broader leadership identification, selection and development approach that underpins it. These institutions include UNE, Waikato University, University of Auckland, La Trobe University, Durban Institute of Technology and Stellenbosch University

- Invitations to give keynote addresses on this work as international conferences

- Focus on the key findings of the ALTC 'Learning leaders in times of change' study (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008) and the OLLS strategy in the book *Turnaround Leadership for Higher Education* (Fullan & Scott, 2009) which received a US Colleges' 2010 Bellwether Award

- Broad circulation of articles on the project in US publications in 2009 and 2010 (Scott, 2009e, 2010)

- Requests by a wide range of institutions and groups to participate in the development of the OLLS survey tool and to be involved in any follow up on its outcomes. Specifically:

Within Australia

NSW: Australian Catholic University, Charles Sturt University, Macquarie University, Southern Cross University, University of New England, University of Technology Sydney, University of Western Sydney, University of Wollongong.

VIC: Australian Catholic University, La Trobe University, RMIT University, Swinburne University, The University of Melbourne, Victoria University

QLD: Australian Catholic University, Bond University, Central Queensland University, Griffith University, James Cook University, Queensland University of Technology, The University of Queensland, University of Southern Queensland

ACT: The Australian National University, University of Canberra

SA: University of South Australia

WA: Curtin University of Technology, Murdoch University, The University of Western Australia

NT: Charles Darwin University

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[2] Professor Jane Den Hollander, DVC (A) Curtin, A/Professor Peter Hutchings (ALTC) and Professor Sharon Bell (LH Martin Institute), Chair.

Universities Australia: DVC/PVC (A)'s group
Professional Associations: Association for Tertiary Education & Management

Internationally
South Africa: Durban University of Technology, University of Stellenbosch;
Canada: Members of the Canadian Quality Network of Universities including
                  McMaster University, Ryerson University, Simon Fraser University,
                  University of Calgary, University of Alberta, and York University;
New Zealand: Auckland University of Technology, University of Auckland, University
                  of Otago, University of Waikato, Victoria University Wellington;
Saudi Arabia   King Saud University.

# 5. Sustainability of the OLLS Project and Recommended Next Steps

ACER, as a long-standing institution independent of government, is well positioned to guarantee sustainability of the IT-enabled component of the OLLS survey system. It is important, however, that intellectual property and costing issues are resolved to ensure that there is sufficient funding to sustain, support and update the OLLS tool.

The whole-of-institution pilots run as part of the project indicate that this integrated focus – aimed at developing institutional capability to deliver a comprehensive leadership identification, selection, development and review process is an important contribution toward developing Australian higher education succession strategies. In each of these institution-wide projects effectiveness has been enhanced by the active involvement of the vice-chancellor and deputy vice-chancellor from the outset. There is potential for the ALTC and LH Martin to work together to scale up this approach, using OLLS as the underpinning framework and the OLLS survey system as a key diagnostic tool. It is recommended that this option be considered as a key way to follow up on the project.

The viability of this recommendation might best be tested by running a national workshop on the outcomes of the OLLS project similar to that run on the findings from the 'Learning Leaders in times of change' project. The OLLS System Guide could be used as the key discussion paper for such a meeting.

In December 2009 the Deputy Prime Minister the Hon Julia Gillard flagged a strong interest in ensuring that university teachers are appropriately trained. There is potential to adapt the methodology used in the 'Learning Leaders in times of change' and OLLS projects to develop a field-of-education specific, targeted, state-of-the-art university teacher education system for Australian universities.

Such a project would identify high rating university teachers in different fields of education and invite them to complete an online survey based on the professional capability framework validated in this study and in earlier ones with successful early career graduates (including teachers); and identify how they have learnt to be effective. The results could then be used to build a field-of-education specific, online teacher development and support system for our universities similar to OLLS. At the same time the data generated could be used to validate and enhance the focus and approach of existing graduate certificate and similar programs in higher education.
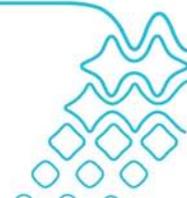
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