

# State-Based Promoting Excellence

## Networks – Victoria/Tasmania

Final Report 2013

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## Network summary

The VTAS Promoting Excellence Network (PEN) has built strong relationships with project team members and has achieved a proven record of successful events and workshops throughout the funding period.

At the beginning of the project, there was a state-based network that met very infrequently and that was not active in fostering collaboration, dissemination of project outcomes, findings and resources, or training of its constituent university Promoting Excellence (PE) team members. This project was timely in that it confirmed the need for a committed and enthusiastic network that would benefit Victorian and Tasmanian (VTAS) institutions.

After proving our worth by running several successful events and engaging with state-based and national leaders in learning and teaching in the first year of funding, we have settled into an established pattern of success that we hope will be sustained past the funding period.

We have successfully achieved all of our intended outcomes, as outlined below.

1. *VTAS network:* With an active lead role being taken by Monash University, the network has held regular project team meetings and five network-wide workshops, with over 330 people in attendance in total. We have an active website with over 190 followers ([www.vtasnetwork.com](http://www.vtasnetwork.com)).
2. *Promoting Excellence Initiative (PEI) staff support and training/Professional Development (PD) related to sharing of systems, knowledge and processes that contribute to optimising student learning:* All network events have addressed this to some extent. In February 2013, we held a workshop specifically designed for PE support staff.
3. *Fostering collaborative development of learning and teaching research grant projects between VTAS institutions:* This outcome has been changed to 'Fostering collaboration between VTAS PEN for mutually engaging projects'. All network events have allowed opportunities for collaboration between attendees. This is something we would like to expand on in future activities.
4. *Enabling post-project dissemination, engagement and therefore impact of research project outcomes and resources:* This was a focus of our June 2013 workshop where we had three Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) grant recipients presenting about their completed projects in three different OLT priority areas. The presentations focused on the outcomes and impact of their projects.
5. *Catalysing initiatives that connect existing peer groupings – early career staff, faculty groups, to provide opportunities to share, encourage and value teaching excellence and innovation:* We have held several events that have provided opportunities to share systems and resources amongst PE staff. The project partners have promoted the VTAS network at their institutions in various ways, such as Graduate Certificate programs, faculty broadcasts, and faculty and institution-wide networks and groups, in order to engage a wide range of staff.

## Contribution to learning and teaching

The broad impacts on learning and teaching have been twofold: through people getting to know about the network – who we are, what we do, why we do it – and through achieving our aims of knowledge sharing and fostering collaboration and dissemination. As people become more aware of the network's activities, they in turn become more supportive of and involved with learning and teaching.

Each of the network's events has been designed to enhance attendees' appreciation and understanding of the importance of learning and teaching. The main aim of the events has been to be beneficial for professional development of institutional PE staff, as well as academic staff interested in engaging in OLT programs.

Throughout the life of the project, we have had approximately 330 people from across VTAS attend our workshops (Table 1). Attendance figures increased dramatically from the first network event in February 2012 (40 attendees) to the last event in November 2013 (115 attendees). Evaluation results from the five workshops we have held have been overwhelmingly positive. In particular, in response to how likely attendees would be to engage in collaborative learning and teaching grants as a result of the knowledge gained from the October 2012 and June 2013 workshops, 75.5% of respondents answered 'likely'. Interestingly, in those same surveys, 71% of attendees were engaging with the VTAS network for the first time.

The speakers we have engaged for our workshops are leaders in the learning and teaching field, for example, Suzi Hewlett and Siobhan Lenihan (OLT); Beverley Oliver (Deakin – Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education); Betty Leask (La Trobe – Executive Director Learning and Teaching); Gilly Salmon (Swinburne – Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning Transformations); Marcia Devlin (OUA); Karin Watson (UNSW – Learning to Teach Online project leader); Tilly Hinton (USQ – OLT Secondee). Having such people engaged with our network has shown the significance of the learning and teaching agenda and the need to champion and support it further. The long-term impacts of these sessions are not yet known, but we hope to see, as the ultimate goal, an improvement in the overall quality of grant applications from VTAS applicants.

We have been pleased to welcome RMIT as an adjunct member of our project team in 2013. Our project team now consists of Monash, La Trobe, Swinburne, University of Tasmania and RMIT, representing 5 out of 9 institutions across VTAS.

**Table 1 A summary of the workshops organised by the VTAS PE Network**

| Date        | Host university | Contact person            | Theme                       | # attendees |
|-------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| 8 Feb 2012  | Monash          | Anicca Main               | Inaugural VTAS PEN Workshop | 40          |
| 29 Oct 2012 | La Trobe        | Judith Lyons/ John Hannon | Networking to succeed       | 78          |

|                |           |               |  |                 |
|----------------|-----------|---------------|--|-----------------|
| 12 Feb<br>2013 | Monash    | Rachel Saffer | Professional Development, grant writing and design | 27 <sup>1</sup> |
| 5 Jun<br>2013  | Swinburne | Janet Gregory | How to write a successful application workshop     | 65              |
| 13 Nov<br>2013 | RMIT      | Diana Cousens | Learning futures                                   | 115             |

Details of the all events and meetings are in part 2 of the final report.

The VTAS PEN has also been actively engaged in disseminating other activities relevant to promoting learning and teaching in higher education.

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<sup>1</sup> This workshop was designed for the professional development of VTAS PEN team members only.

## Factors contributing to productive networking

In March 2013 we created a new VTAS network website using the WordPress platform ([www.vtasnetwork.com](http://www.vtasnetwork.com)). This has become our preferred way of communicating with the wider network, with 42 posts in 22 categories/tags. As at 27 November 2013, the site has 207 followers, with 3,097 total views. Followers of the site can elect to receive automatic emails every time a post is made, so it's a very easy way for them to access information. The website has been designed to notify and promote the networks and other relevant learning and teaching events. It is also a dissemination channel and a repository for resources, information and relevant contacts.

Twitter and Facebook profiles have also been used to varying degrees, primarily through connection with the WordPress site. This is something we wish to improve on and will be a focus of the networks, should it continue beyond the funding period.

As discussed above, we have successfully held five network workshops with over 330 attendees in total. Evaluation survey results at two of these events show that an average of 86% of attendees said they had an opportunity to connect with other members of the VTAS PEN. In another survey, 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had relevant and insightful interactions with fellow participants. In this same survey, all respondents said they would recommend the workshop to colleagues.

## Barriers to productive networking

Communication and social media has been a challenge. While we now have an active website with a reasonably large following, we are still looking at ways of increasing our subscriber base and social media presence.

The high turnover of staff and restructuring of learning and teaching centres within higher education institutions has made engagement with the project team challenging at times. There have been several changes to project team members throughout the project. People's heavy workloads have also made it difficult to remain in regular contact with some team members.

Getting all Victorian universities to engage has been a continuous challenge. While we have come a long way since the beginning of this grant and have contacts at each institution, there are still several institutions that are not actively engaged with the network. Seeking input from the project team and the wider network as to the specific areas of interest/need that they wish to be addressed in our workshops has been difficult without active involvement from others.

Non-attendance at events has been an issue, particularly for the June 2013 workshop, where approximately 25% of the registered attendees did not turn up on the day of the event. In order to work around this issue we now ensure that we have a waiting list, which we draw upon when cancellations are received and are considering charging a small cancellation fee.

Sustainability of the network is something we are strongly concerned about. Without further funding from the OLT it will not be possible to continue to facilitate workshops and provide further networking opportunities in 2014.

## What the network offers

- Workshops, seminars and networking events on issues of relevance to academic and professional staff from all VTAS institutions interested in learning & teaching;
- Professional development and training opportunities for staff from all VTAS institutions interested in learning & teaching;
- Support and training for staff in Promoting Excellence teams at all VTAS institutions;
- Dissemination channels;
- Networking opportunities that could lead to collaboration on learning and teaching projects;
- Knowledge sharing that could lead to improved processes and quality;
- Notification of other relevant learning and teaching events and funding opportunities.