

# Executive summary

The vision statements and strategic plans of most universities around the world nominate the provision of excellence in education among their key purposes. This aspiration is generally stated in terms which encompass innovative and inclusive teaching, contemporary and challenging curriculum, and quality learning experiences and outcomes for students. Most universities also identify leadership of the education agenda as a key priority for their institute. The challenge for many has become how best to drive and coordinate leadership of excellence in education, and how to translate theory and rhetoric into practice.

*Leading Excellence* (which grew out of the initial 'Leadership for Implementing Improvements in the Learning and Teaching Quality Cycle' project) addressed this challenge by proposing, investigating, testing, reflecting upon and refining a leadership framework designed to facilitate change and improvement. The framework, referred to as the Engaging Leadership Framework (ELF), adopts an institution-wide perspective. It takes a high-level, strategic view of leadership yet at the same time provides a practical tool for analysis of evidence and subsequent implementation of improvement.

Theories and concepts of leadership abound. Many have studied and written about the attributes and competencies required to be an outstanding leader. Others have developed tools for surveying the characteristics of current leaders, for predicting leadership potential and for better understanding individual leadership styles. This body of knowledge provides important and useful insights for leadership of learning and teaching in higher education – especially as it relates to the individual. However, the purpose of *Leading Excellence* was to approach leadership from a cultural change perspective. We wanted to develop a tool which would assist leading improvement. Our focus was on the *activity* of leading, rather than leadership as an attribute.

The ELF brings together, in simple graphic form, a vision – the 'trilogy of excellence' (excellence in scholarship, engagement and management); a process – the incorporation of a quality cycle; and participants – diverse individuals or groups sharing leading roles in learning and teaching. Implicit within the framework is an inclusive interpretation of leadership as an activity or behaviour, which may involve individuals and/or teams at any level of an organisation (and/or external to it), depending on the nature of the leadership task. The ELF provides a framework to lead and navigate change. It promotes a culture within higher education where improvements in learning and teaching are systematically accepted and practised across the organisation.

This report describes for the reader the initial impetus for the *Leading Excellence* project – the issue of how best to assist those with leading roles in learning and teaching to link evidence (in this case student feedback) with improvement strategies and actions to facilitate excellence. It describes the development of the ELF and the action research approach which guided iterations of the framework – the starting point being earlier work undertaken in the Faculty of Education, Monash University. The development of the ELF was informed by case study trials; the wider leadership literature; expert and user consultations and workshops; and graphic representation. Activities for embedding the ELF at Monash University are also identified and discussed.

There is potential for the ELF to be used elsewhere within the higher education sector and the report provides the reader with ‘learnings’ from the Monash experience which might guide application in other contexts. Links are made between the *Leading Excellence* project and other projects within the Australian Learning and Teaching Council’s ‘Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Program’. Finally, recommendations are made to enhance the project’s consolidation and sustainability.

The *Leading Excellence* report is designed to be read on several levels. It tells the story of the project journey and the evolution of the ELF. At the same time it addresses content requirements specified by the ALTC. The report is also designed to allow readers to delve into various parts which are largely self-contained. The Project Team is keen that *Leading Excellence* illustrates for the reader the potential of the ELF to be used as both a strategic and practical leadership tool for improvement – but particularly in learning and teaching. The application of the ELF to student feedback enhances the quality of the student learning experience by demonstrating a way to listen to, and act upon, the ‘student voice’.

We hope to inspire, motivate and excite.

When I first saw a poster for the Engaging Leadership Framework (ELF) I was drawn to its clarity and simplicity. It links three complex concepts essential for effective leadership: the ‘trilogy of excellence’; the quality cycle; and diverse leadership perspectives; to create a comprehensive leadership tool.

I note that ‘Leading Excellence’ recognises that to be sustainable the ELF needs to be embedded within the institutional structure. As DVC (Education), charged with responsibility for leadership of learning and teaching at Monash, I will strive to promote and support the use of the ELF as a leadership tool. The ELF has a lot to offer Monash, both as a strategic and practical tool in the current higher education climate characterised by rapid change, globalisation and quality assurance.

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