10 February 2011

<addressee>
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear

Planned closure of the Australian Learning & Teaching Council

We write on behalf of the professional engineering and engineering education communities to urge you to reject closure of the Australian Learning & Teaching Council from the end of 2011, as proposed within the government's cost savings to support infrastructure rebuilding following the recent Queensland floods.

Having a sufficient number of adequately qualified engineering graduates is absolutely essential to ensure Australia's future physical and information infrastructure, and underpin the economy. We acknowledge government's concern about the shortfall of engineering graduates and its positive commitment to meeting future demands through funding projects via the Australian National Engineering Taskforce (www.anet.org.au), of which ACED and Engineers Australia are members.

As representative bodies of those responsible for providing engineering education programs and the national organisation responsible for the professional accreditation of education programs, we value highly the contributions that the ALTC's project funding schemes have made to Australia's engineering enterprise.

In 2007, ALTC project funding supported a comprehensive review of engineering education. Subsequently, ALTC has funded several further projects (in total approximately $1.6M) to act on the recommendations of this review. The universities and our organisations bodies have provided at least equivalent in-kind and cash contributions. These projects are aimed at increasing engineering students' graduation rates, increasing the participation of women and other under-represented groups, increasing the effectiveness of pathways between VET awards and engineering degrees, and delivering improved graduate outcomes.

A characteristic of most of these ALTC-funded projects is that they are undertaken by collaborative partnerships of education leaders from a wide range of universities, including from the Go8 and ATN groups and regional universities. No other national funding program has supported such effective collaboration. Alternative sources of funding for such projects are not apparent, particularly as Australia's industry employers continue to regard the formative stage of engineers' education as a public good.

The cessation of funding for the ALTC risks further improvement in teaching and learning in engineering education, and thereby the quality of future engineering graduates, and ultimately impacts on Australia's infrastructure and economy. Closing the ALTC will also put Australia's strengthening international reputation for effective innovation in engineering education at risk.

While we make our case for retaining the ALTC on its proven value for enhancing the quality of Australian engineering education, we believe strongly that the value of the ALTC lies in its support for learning and teaching in all of higher education. For example, several projects have supported increasing the effectiveness of workplace integrated learning for all disciplines.

We strongly urge you to reject closure of the Australian Learning & Teaching Council. The value of ALTC to the quality of Australia's higher education system and its million-plus students far exceeds its budget allocation of $22M per year.

Summary information on the ALTC and the value it has provided is attached. Detailed information on their programs can be found at http://www.altc.edu.au.

Yours sincerely

Professor John Beynon, President, Australian Council of Engineering Deans (ACED)

Peter Taylor, Chief Executive, Engineers Australia

Professor Duncan Campbell, President, Australasian Association for Engineering Education

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Attachment

The Australian Learning & Teaching Council and Australian Engineering Education

The Australian Council of Engineering Deans (ACED) consists of the leaders of the faculties/schools of the 33 Australian universities that provide higher education qualifications in engineering. (See www.aced.edu.au)

The Australasian Association for Engineering Education (AaeE) is a technical society of Engineers Australia and is sponsored by ACED. Its members are the 2,000 engineering educators. AaeE runs an annual conference and member workshops, and publishes a journal, all aimed at enhancing the quality of engineering education in Australia. (See www.aaee.com.au)

Engineers Australia is responsible for the professional accreditation of engineering qualifications. The accreditation system is internationally benchmarked through agreements (accords) with 19 countries. The Accreditation Board of Engineers Australia works with ACED and AaeE and their members to maintain and develop the quality of engineering education in Australia. (See www.engineersaustralia.org.au)

The Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) was established in August 2004 as a national focus for the enhancement of learning and teaching in higher education. Prior to May 2008 the ALTC was named the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. (See www.altc.edu.au)

The ALTC operates competitive programs to recognise, reward and support outstanding educators and to support projects to enhance the practice of teaching in higher education.

Engineering educators have been awarded ALTC Fellowships and projects in the ALTC's competitive grant schemes. All such recipients are expected to disseminate best-practice as widely as possible.

ALTC project funding has enhanced this mission by supporting projects undertaken by collaborative partnerships of engineering academics drawn from most of the engineering faculties. Projects completed, or nearly completed since 2008 include (with their reporting year):

- ***Review of Engineering Education (2008):*** this highly consultative review made recommendations on improving the visibility of engineering; industry links; revised graduate standards; academic support for best practice curriculum; and increasing the participation of under-represented groups. The review findings and recommendations continue to provide the framework of evidence for subsequent projects.
- ***Engineering Mechanics Teaching (2008):*** developed a much greater understanding of how engineering students learn mechanics, and developed material to assist educators to develop tailored support for students.
- ***Teaching and Assessing Meta-attributes (2009):*** developed material to assist academics to deliver improved graduate outcomes in systems thinking and reflective practice, thereby ensuring that engineering graduates have improved skills required by contemporary engineering industry.
- ***Curriculum Specification and Support (2011):*** covering: understanding attrition and identifying best practice to increase graduation rates; development of revised graduate standards for accredited programs; evaluated trial of short courses to support new engineering academics; identification of barriers and best-practice for increasing the effectiveness of pathways between VET awards and engineering degrees; and scoping the issues of increasing the participation of women and indigenous students.
- ***Gender-inclusive education (2011):*** developing evidence-based guidelines to assist academics ensure that curriculum is designed and delivered effectively to all students, noting that historically, engineering and construction management professions are highly gendered.
- ***Design-based curriculum reform (2011):*** increasing the engineering curriculum emphasis on engineering problem solving and design, with increasing emphasis on development of team-work and professional competencies.
- ***Defining Your Discipline (2011):*** development of practitioner-authenticated graduate outcomes for an engineering discipline, with corresponding guidelines for curriculum developers.

In addition to other ongoing projects, the ALTC is currently funding ACED to provide a *Discipline Support Strategy for Engineering and Information & Communications Technology* – a workshops series and web-site to ensure wide dissemination of project outcomes and best practice engineering and ICT education.