The Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) recently released the third discussion paper from Professor Belinda Probert - this time - on the role of the PhD in becoming a university teacher. The paper interrogates whether the traditional PhD in Australia - with its emphasis on new disciplinary knowledge, the thesis, and the production of independent researcher as the foundation for future academic work and practice - remains an adequate preparation for the complexities of university teaching. The paper hints at what university teaching in the future academy is likely to entail: more students, more diverse and under-prepared students, the need for flexible curriculum design and learning arrangements, increasing external regulation and outcome standards, team-teaching, unbundling of teaching roles and responsibilities etc. Probert suggests there is not only more to be done to orient and support doctoral students to the future scene of university teaching, but that a radical re-think of the PhD is now warranted.

The paper cites research from a range of sources: disciplinary investigations in biology, literature, and modern languages), major national surveys of Australian research students, data about the experiences of academic employment from casual and sessional staff, and findings from similar studies in the US, UK and NZ.

In response, the OLT has extended its program priorities to include grants on The Contemporary PhD. Visit the ITL’s grants website for further information.

Download the full report here.