Institute for Learning & Teaching in Higher Education – Should you join?

Liz Sockett

Experienced university academics can currently apply for membership of the newly established Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILT). SGM Education Officer Liz Sockett outlines the nature of ILT and the application process so that SGM members can decide whether membership may be beneficial to them.

What is the ILT?

The ILT is an organization for higher education professionals, recently established as a result of the Dearing Report into Higher Education, to promote and support excellence in learning and teaching in universities. Membership is intended for academics who can show evidence of innovating and developing their university teaching. ILT membership will provide them with further staff development opportunities and will give them formal recognition of their lecturing and teaching skills (which might be useful when seeking promotion.) It is possible that future QA audits of university teaching may also use membership figures as a positive indicator of a department's commitment to teaching quality.

Applying to join

The conventional route for academics wishing to join the ILT is to successfully complete an accredited Post-graduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) at their institution. As the ILT is a new organization, it also recognizes that existing experienced academics will already have the skills that such a PGCAP might provide to newer staff. Hence, until September 2001 ILT is accepting applications for membership from experienced staff without the PGCAP. Applicants are required to submit a CV with two references and to complete a form which asks them to comment on (and if appropriate supply a little photocopied 'evidence' of) their personal activities under six headings.

Teaching and the support of learning – Details of courses and types of teaching carried out, with examples of student feedback. Details of any teaching committee or leadership activities.

Design and planning of learning activities – Details of any teaching committee membership or any training or guidance given to others re teaching. Details of any resources developed for teaching.

Assessment and giving feedback to students – Details of the different types of assessment methods used, with any innovations or novel approaches highlighted. Explanation of how students with difficulties are helped.

Developing effective learning environments and student learning support systems – Details of student projects supervised in the lab, practical classes taught, library or web-based information tasks set or industrial placements or trips set up.

Reflective practice and personal development – Details of attendance at SGM Education Symposia and on any recent training courses on aspects of teaching or IT methodology.

Other information – Details of any mentoring done for new lecturers, any teaching done on university lecturing training courses, any presentations given on education (e.g. at SGM meetings), how personal research is linked to teaching (including PhD supervision).

the institute for learning and teaching in higher education

Are the benefits of membership worth it?

There have been some fairly animated exchanges in the education pages of newspapers on the value of the ILT to the practising academic, and the monetary and time costs associated with applying.

Speaking from experience, it does take the best part of a weekend to complete the application and a little photocopying time to collate the 'evidence' (one or two pieces per section seems ample). As with other professional institutes there is a membership fee (£75 p.a.). Currently there is no pro-rata subscription for part-time staff, something that has been criticized. Several universities are offering to pay the fee on behalf of their academics, in the hope that it may improve the future TQA performance of the institution. As the ILT is relatively new, and only holding its first education conferences and symposia as we go to press, it is too early to evaluate the full benefits of membership. ILT will be publishing a refereed journal *Active Learning in Higher Education*; this may contain useful teaching ideas for science academics but only time will tell.

However, for those academics who have wished over the years that their contribution to teaching might be recognized or valued a bit more, ILT membership may be for you!

● *Full details can be found on the ILT website* ***http://www.ilt.ac.uk/*** *or by writing to ILT, Genesis 3, Innovation Way, York Science Park, Heslington, York YO10 5DQ (Tel. 01904 434222).*