
Academic Board

Report of the Vice-Chancellor

1. **Vale Emeritus Professor Roger Wales**

I am very sad to report formally that Emeritus Professor Roger Wales died on Saturday, 29 January 2011.

A highly distinguished academic, Roger joined the University in 2000 as Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, a position he held until his retirement in late 2006. He subsequently assisted the University in a number of critical short-term roles.

He was held in great affection and respect by his friends and colleagues, and will be very sadly missed. I have written to his family to convey condolences on behalf of the University.

2. **Professor Nick Hoogenraad: Charles La Trobe Professor**

I am very pleased to report formally that the Charles La Trobe Professor Committee met on 17 December 2011 and awarded the title of "Charles La Trobe Professor" to Professor Nick Hoogenraad, Head of the School of Molecular Sciences and Director of the La Trobe Institute of Molecular Sciences.

3. **Federal Government's Flood Relief Package**

On 27 January 2011, the Prime Minister announced the Government's response to rebuilding flood-affected regions across Australia. Preliminary estimates indicate that the Government will need to invest \$5.6 billion, the vast majority of which will be required for rebuilding essential infrastructure.

The Government proposes that two-thirds of this funding will be delivered through spending cuts. In terms of the higher education sector, the following programs are affected:

- *Capital Development Pool*: funding of new projects will cease from 1 January 2012, saving \$299 million over the forward estimates. All current projects already funded under the program are unaffected.
- *Australian Learning and Teaching Fund*: funding will be discontinued from 1 January 2012, providing savings of \$88 million over four years.

At the time of writing, the outcome of the Government's proposed package in its passage through the House of Representatives is unknown and will be dependent upon the support or otherwise of the Independents and the Australian Greens. However, the sector has widely expressed its disappointment at the mooted funding cuts with, for example, both the Innovative Research Universities (IRU) and the National Union of Students noting the importance of the Capital Development Pool in funding critical teaching, learning and student facilities.

4. Compacts

The University's draft Compact was received on 22 December 2011 for submission to the Federal Government by 15 February 2011. Preparation of this document is well advanced, and I will be meeting with senior Government officers for discussions on 30 March 2011.

5. Review of Higher Education Base Funding

In October 2010, Universities were invited to provide preliminary views on the review process and terms of reference in order to help inform a discussion paper to be released prior to the end of the year. This paper was released on 17 December 2010, with formal submissions due by 31 March 2011.

I have also accepted an invitation to meet with the Review Panel (chaired by the Hon Dr Jane Lomax-Smith, former South Australian Minister for Education) and will do so on 21 February 2011.

The review will consider a range of higher education funding issues including:

- what is a high quality higher education and what does it cost;
- how much public and private benefit is there from higher education;
- what is the appropriate level of Government and private funding of higher education; and
- what funding model provides the best incentive to universities to deliver on the Australian Government's commitment to equity, skills, growth and quality.

6. State Government Ministerial Meetings

I have been meeting in recent months with State Government Ministers and Parliamentary Secretaries to brief them on a range of issues of importance to the University: these discussions have proved very constructive.

7. Research Issues

7.1 Australian Research Council (ARC) Advisory Council

I have recently been appointed by the Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator the Hon Kim Carr, as a member of the Australian Research Council (ARC) Advisory Council.

The role of the Advisory Committee is to assist the ARC in considering:

- strategic issues relating to the mission of the ARC, including strategic planning;
- policy matters relating to innovation, research and research training; and
- matters relating to the evaluation of the quality and outcomes of research and research training in an international context.

7.2 Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) 2010 National Report

On 31 January 2011, the Federal Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator the Hon Kim Carr, released the Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) 2010 National Report), providing a comprehensive overview of the quality of research undertaken in higher education institutions within Australia in an international context.

ERA outcomes will inform the allocation of funding to support the indirect costs of research through the Government's Sustainable Research Excellence program, and will be included as a key measure of research performance in the Government's Compacts with universities.

These findings confirmed La Trobe as the leading university in Australia in Biochemistry and Cell Biology, the only university where the Government rated research in this specific field as well above world standard. Biological Sciences overall was similarly rated, attaining the maximum possible score of 5. This is very compelling objective evidence of the value of the University's strategic investment in the biosciences (including the \$94 million La Trobe Institute of Molecular Science and \$288 million AgriBio, the Centre for Agribiosciences).

In other areas:

- Condensed Matter Physics and Human and Sports Science were rated at the maximum possible 5;
- Humanities performed strongly with a 4 rating ("above world standard") in the broad fields of history and archaeology and language, communication and culture.

Fifty-nine percent of the La Trobe results (at the "four digit" level) were at or above world standard (ratings 3, 4 or 5) with 27 per cent above world standard (ratings 4 or 5). La Trobe had the 13th highest proportion of four digit ratings that were above world standard, the rating favoured by *"The Age"*.

The average overall scores (1-5) across all research clusters for Victorian universities have been ranked as follows by *"The Australian"* utilising results from "two digit" fields of research:

University	Average Score
2. University of Melbourne	4.33
8. Monash University	3.45
18. La Trobe University	2.62
= 19. RMIT	2.61
25. Deakin University	2.41
28. Swinburne University	2.24
36. Victoria University	1.71
37. University of Ballarat	1.56

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor Tim Brown, will present an update to Academic Board at its meeting on 9 February 2011 under Agenda Item 8.

8. Student Issues

8.1 Rural Tertiary Hardship Fund

On 17 December 2010, the Federal Minister for Tertiary Education, Senator the Hon Chris Evans, announced details of new grants under the \$20 million Rural Tertiary Hardship Fund which enables students from areas other than major capital cities, commencing a bachelor degree in 2011 and experiencing severe financial hardship, to apply for a \$3,000 one-off grant to assist in undertaking their university degree. The first call for applications is expected to be made in February 2011.

8.2 National Union of Students: 2011 Office Bearers

La Trobe University student Mr Jesse Marshall has been elected as National President of the National Union of Students (NUS) for 2011.

Two further students from the University have been elected as 2011 office bearers: Patrick Sheehan (National General Secretary) and Indrajeet Chauhan (National International Students' Officer).

Congratulations to Jesse, Patrick and Indrajeet on their elections.

9. Preferences and Enrolments

9.1 Domestic Enrolments

La Trobe University has recorded further growth in preferences during the VTAC application round for undergraduate entry in 2011. The number of students placing La Trobe University as their first preference for study in 2011 increased by 10% at timely stage (pre-results release) and by 5.5% at final (post results released). As in 2010, La Trobe recorded the largest growth in first preferences of any Victorian university.

The University's market share (i.e. share of first preferences) for Commonwealth supported university places was 12.8%, up from 11.9% at the same time last year.

This year, La Trobe made 5,990 Commonwealth supported offers in VTAC round 1. This is 2% fewer than the number of offers made in Round 1 of 2010, but remains significantly higher than the number of offers made in earlier years. The increase in preferences combined with this modest reduction in offers has seen the clearly-in ATAR increase in the majority of La Trobe's courses in 2011.

The University is currently sitting at 89% of its commencing semester 1 target. The corresponding figures (as a percentage of the final commencing semester 1 load) in 2008, 2009 and 2010 were 92%, 90% and 93% respectively. Continuing Commonwealth supported load is currently at 83% of target, compared with 90%, 86% and 95% in the previous three years. Enrolments are continuing and the final outcome will not be known until the end of February.

Comparative data for 2008-2011 are set out in the following tables for commencing load (Table 1) and continuing load (Table 2).

Table 1: Commencing semester 1

	Early Feb as % of final			Early Feb as % of target
Faculty	2008	2009	2010	2011
Education	87.7%	91.8%	96.6%	99.2%
Health Sciences	97.7%	93.9%	97.3%	102.0%
Humanities & Social Sciences	90.6%	77.8%	85.3%	65.6%
Law and Management	87.6%	91.3%	81.9%	89.2%
Science, Technology & Engineering	95.0%	94.1%	100.2%	85.6%
Total	92.5%	90.0%	93.4%	89.1%

Table 2: Continuing Semester 1

	Early Feb as % of final			Early Feb as % of target
Faculty	2008	2009	2010	2011
Education	90.5%	88.4%	96.5%	93.5%
Health Sciences	96.8%	96.0%	102.1%	89.0%
Humanities & Social Sciences	85.9%	79.5%	92.3%	77.5%
Law and Management	91.8%	83.0%	88.7%	71.8%
Science, Technology & Engineering	82.1%	79.2%	92.2%	85.8%
Total	90.0%	85.8%	94.8%	83.1%

Notes:

- 2008 percentages are based on student load by teaching Faculty: all other years are based on load by owning Faculty.
- 2010 final EFTSL data are passed on provisional data as at 2 February 2010; data for census dates in September to December 2010 are yet to be finalised.

It is likely that the University will be slightly under the target, particularly in the Humanities where there has been strong competition for students from other universities. This will have limited effect on revenue since the University target was well above the cap on Commonwealth supported load which is still in place in 2011.

In addition, the Load Plan for 2011 includes separate targets for semester 2 intake into some courses which are not included in these tables.

The following table summarises load on a Campus basis as at 1 February 2011.

Table 3: Campuses

By Campus (as at 1 February 2011)	% of Commencing Sem 1 Target	% of Continuing Target
Albury-Wodonga	80.9%	67.7%
Bendigo	93.6%	85.4%
Melbourne (Bundoora)	89.4%	83.8%
Mildura	64.3%	79.6%
Shepparton	91.5%	60.8%
Total	89.1%	83.1%

9.2 International Enrolments

At 28 January 2011, there are 708 confirmed acceptances from international onshore students commencing in semester 1 of 2011, against a semester 1 target of 1708 persons (41.5%). In comparison, at the corresponding point in 2010 there were 813 confirmed acceptances for semester 1 entry against a final commencing cohort of 1716 persons (47.3%).

As has been well described in the media over the last several months, the decline in the attractiveness of Australia as a study destination for prospective students from India and many other countries stemming from changes to the visa regulatory environment, perceptions of safety and security in Melbourne particularly, and the strength of the Australian dollar, have combined to make 2011 the most difficult year for international student recruitment in many years. The expectation of a downturn was anticipated in setting 2011 commencing targets, but it is still too early to tell precisely how semester 1 enrolments will perform. Many students from Chinese and Vietnamese backgrounds have returned home for the Lunar New Year festival beginning 3 February, and we look forward to their return by mid February so they can participate in the international Welcome Festival and University Orientation.

10. International Issues

10.1 Review of Student Visa Program

On 16 December 2010, the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Chris Bowen MP, and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations, Senator Chris Evans, announced a review of the Student Visa Program along with a package of measures for the international education sector.

These measures include:

- reducing the Student visa assessment levels from April 2011 as indicated in the recent assessment level review conducted by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). As part of this decision, the higher education visa assessment levels for applicants from China and India will also be reduced;

- refining the rules to further enable pre-paid boarding fees to be counted toward students' cost of living requirements in their visa application;
- improved information exchange between the Government and the international education sector, including provision of a quarterly statistical publication on the Student visa program that will soon be available from the DIAC website to allow the sector to track emerging student visa trends; and
- enabling assessment level 4 vocational education and training (VET) students to undertake a package of certificate level courses to meet visa requirements.

This is a very significant change. In particular, the change in assessment level for China and India from 4 to 3 greatly reduces the burden on students and makes Australia much more competitive. If the Government can now also improve visa processing times this will help to turn around the situation. However, it must be understood that this is not being put in place until April 2011 and so will have no effect on first semester 2011 enrolments and little effect on 2nd semester enrolments in 2011.

11. Victorian Floods – Community Support

I have written to relevant Ministers, local Members of Parliament and Council/Shire Chief Executive Officers in the regions within which our campuses are located and which have been badly affected by the ongoing flooding, offering the University's practical support in any way which may assist our communities now and in the ongoing recovery process.

The University has also put in place a range of support services for staff and students affected by the floods.

Professor Paul Johnson
Vice-Chancellor

2 February 2011