

**LA TROBE UNIVERSITY**

**ACADEMIC BOARD**

**Report of the Vice-Chancellor to Academic Board:  
9 September 2009**

**I. New Senior Appointments**

**I.1 Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International and Future Students)**

Professor John Rosenberg took up his appointment as Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International and Future Students) on 19 August 2009.

In this key role, Professor Rosenberg will have direct responsibility for leading the development of the University's strategic positioning in the external market – in particular, leading our strategy to recruit high-quality domestic and international students, for growing short courses and professional development programs, and for broader internationalisation and marketing.

Professor Rosenberg will be attending his first meeting of Academic Board.

**I.2 Chair of Systems Biology and Bioinformatics, LIMS/BRC**

Professor Liam O'Connor has recently taken up the Chair of Systems Biology and Bioinformatics, a joint appointment between the La Trobe Institute of Molecular Sciences and the Biosciences Research Centre.

Professor O'Connor was most recently based in the USA as the Director of Quantitative Biology at the Novartis Institutes for BioMedical Research (NIBR) where he had global responsibility for computational and systems biology for the Novartis research community.

His appointment will significantly enhance the University's research profile and objective to become further recognised for our premier research status in molecular science, biotechnology and nanotechnology.

**I.3 Chair of Law**

International Human Rights specialist, Professor Penny Andrews, has returned to Australia from the USA to take up the Chair of Law.

Professor Andrews, who previously lectured at La Trobe between 1986 and 1992, holds a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Law degree from Natal University in Durban, South Africa, and Master of Law degree from New York's Columbia University Law School. Active in the Association of American Law Schools, Professor Andrews serves as Chair of its Africa section, and is a member of the Executive Committee of the Minorities Section. Professor Andrews is also a member of the Law and Society Association, where she co-chairs the International Affairs Section, and a member of the American Bar Association.

## 2. **Academic Achievements**

I am very pleased to report that one of the world's major scientific prizes – the Otto Schmitt Award for exceptional contributions to advancements in medical and biological engineering – has been awarded to Professor Graeme Clark, the pioneer of cochlear implant research who was appointed by Council in December 2008 as a La Trobe University Distinguished Professor and who now heads the University's Graeme Clark Centre for Bionic Ear and NeuroSensory Research.

The award is made every three years by the International Federation for Medical and Biological Engineering which represents research organisations from more than 50 countries.

## 3. **Higher Education Sector**

### 3.1 **International Education**

The Federal Government has announced plans to introduce an amendment to the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act, the objective of which is to make providers' use of education agents more transparent and accountable. The ESOS Amendment Bill will require providers to maintain a list of all persons who represent or act on behalf of the provider in dealing with overseas students or intending overseas students.

The Government has also established a more broad-ranging review of the ESOS Act to be headed by the former Federal Member for Cook, the Hon Bruce Baird. The review will consider the need for enhancements to the ESOS legal framework in four key areas:

- supporting the interests of students;
- delivering quality as the cornerstone of Australian education;
- effective regulation; and
- sustainability of the international education sector.

An issues paper will be released in the near future outlining the key issues for the international education sector and written submissions will also be sought. An interim report from the review will be presented for consideration by COAG in November 2009, with a final report expected in early 2010.

In terms of the impact upon universities of the recent media coverage of incidents of violence against Indian students in Melbourne, La Trobe University hosted a visit on 27 August 2009 by a group of Indian journalists who met with Indian students currently studying here as well as a number of staff. Both Professor Rosenberg and I also met with the journalists, and found them to be very open-minded. They were interested in the actions La Trobe has already taken to further improve the safety of students and commented that I was the only Vice-Chancellor to personally meet with them during their visit. They were impressed by the University's broad approach to internationalisation, including the fact that the University also sends Australian students on exchange to India.

Early indications are that there is a downturn in the number of applications by Indian students for 2010 across the sector as a whole. La Trobe's enquiries from India (via email and phone calls) were down 50% in July 2009 as compared to July 2008. Applications received by our admissions staff for semester 1, 2010 are down approximately 40%. Our recruitment agents in India have reported a 40% drop in foot traffic into their offices. Advice from our agents and staff based and travelling in India also suggest that enquiries seem to be restricted to students who have friends and family in Australia and are able to seek a referral from a person currently living/studying here. It is highly likely that the commencing international student numbers from India to La Trobe in 2010 will drop. The extent of this drop is difficult to predict at this time.

Professor Rosenberg and La Trobe International will continue to work with our agents in India to improve the situation over the next few months. The Deputy Prime Minister was recently in India and the Prime Minister will be visiting India in November, actively promoting Australia as a safe destination for study during these visits.

### 3.2 **Mission-based Compacts for Universities**

I reported to the last meeting that the Federal Government had just released a framework discussion paper regarding the mission-based compacts which it will enter into with universities as "a framework for jointly achieving the Government's reform agenda and institutions' individual missions".

On 21 August 2009 I met with senior government officers at a round table discussion with other Victorian Vice-Chancellors about the compacts framework.

The Compact teaching and learning component will contain institution-specific performance targets for equity and quality tied to an "at risk" funding scheme which is approximately \$135 million per annum from 2012. Additional measures (such as support for vulnerable disciplines) may also be negotiated by individual institutions.

The Compact research component will include negotiated funding under the Sustainable Research Excellence (SRE) program, participation in the new Collaborative Research Networks (CRN) program, and acquittal of formula-based block grants such as the new Joint Research Engagement program.

A number of issues regarding the development and implementation of Compact funding agreements remain under consideration.

### 3.3 **Victorian Tertiary Education Plan**

In April, the Hon Jacinta Allan MP (Victorian Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation) announced that the Victorian Government would develop a plan for the growth of the tertiary sector in Victoria to inform the Victorian Government's contribution to the implementation of the Australian Government's tertiary education reform agenda.

The Minister appointed an Expert Panel chaired by Professor Kwong Lee Dow to oversee the development of the Plan with an emphasis on the needs of regional and outer urban communities. This is of particular relevance to the University as our Regional Engagement Plan establishes the foundation for further growth in the numbers of students engaged in higher education at our regional campuses and includes two very specific targets to be met by 2012:

- to increase full-time student numbers on regional campuses by 20% (to 5,500);
- to increase participation levels of identified student equity groups by 10%.

These targets reflect our strong commitment to the Federal Government's growth agenda for higher education participation, particularly for increased participation by those groups which have previously been under-represented. As the Bradley Review of Higher Education noted in the report which it submitted to the Federal Government last December, regional and rural participation rates are still 7% lower than urban participation rates

A progress report on the Victorian Tertiary Education Plan has just been issued, and I have held two meetings with the Minister in past week to discuss relevant issues.

The Minister has asked the Panel to deliver the final Plan by December 2009.

#### 3.4 **Student Services and Amenities Bill 2009**

On 18 August 2009 the Senate rejected by the barest margin the Federal Government's Student Services and Amenities Bill 2009. It is possible that the Government will re-submit the Bill in November and, if again rejected, this would join the queue on twice rejected legislation if the Government does pursue a double dissolution.

The University was hoping to generate approximately \$5 million from a compulsory Services and Amenities fee in 2010 which now seems unlikely.

I was however heartened to learn that the National Party at its Federal Council now supports a deferrable, compulsory service fee of \$250 for sport and health services.

The University has funded Student Services and the incorporated student bodies by approximately \$3 million per annum over the past few years, supporting a large range of services including the Sports Centre and Sports Clubs, Clubs and Societies, Orientation, Student Theatre, Contact, the Student Legal Service, the Children's Centre and Student Advocacy together with support for the SRC, Postgraduate Association and the student associations at the Bendigo, Albury-Wodonga, Mildura and Shepparton Campuses.

Australia is the only country in the OECD that denies universities the right to charge a compulsory service fee to its students. By denying universities this right, students continued to be denied the full range of services,

amenities and activities critical for a comprehensive student experience which contributes to successful learning outcomes and preparation for employment.

The University will continue to support the Government's reform agenda on Student Services and supports the re-introduction of the legislation to the Senate as soon as practicable.

**4. Major Project Bids: Education Investment Fund**

Round 3 of the Education Investment Fund was announced on 4 August 2009. This will be a two-stage process with applications for Stage 1 due today (8 September 2009). Shortlisted institutions will be advised in November and Stage 2 applications invited in December. The \$300 million EIF Round 3 will continue to focus on transforming the higher education, research and vocational education and training sectors through strategic infrastructure investments.

A \$250 million EIF Sustainability Round is running concurrently with EIF Round 3, focussing on advancing teaching and/or research in the areas of climate change and sustainability through projects that also showcase environmentally sustainable design.

Two submissions have been prepared within the Project Management Framework to which I referred in my last Report and have now been submitted:

- a project which focuses on our strengths in the humanities and social sciences (EIF Round 3);
- a project which will further develop our regional research network (EIF Sustainability Round).

**Professor Paul Johnson**  
Vice-Chancellor and President

8 September 2009