



Repositioning La Trobe University

A Green Paper by Paul Johnson, Vice-Chancellor

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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this Green Paper is to stimulate a focused discussion within the University about what we do, how we do it, and how we might change our ways of doing things to further develop our core business of research, learning and teaching over the next 10 years.

La Trobe University has achieved much since the first students arrived on the Bundoora campus forty years ago. More than 120,000 students have graduated from the University over this period. Academic staff have published thousands of top quality research papers and monographs, and made major and sustained contributions to public discourse in Australia and internationally; and the University has physically expanded, on the Bundoora campus and through the establishment of five other teaching campuses in Bendigo, Mildura, Shepparton, Albury-Wodonga, and in the Melbourne CBD, thereby extending the educational and research benefits of higher education to a broad community.

These achievements have depended on four distinct but essential inputs: the ability, energy and commitment of University staff, the ambition of each cohort of students, the financial support of Commonwealth and State governments, and the political and moral support of the communities in which the various campuses of the University are located. Each of these inputs has been essential to our achievements over the past 40 years, and will remain so for the future.

However, the context in which the University will operate throughout the next decade will be different in many important respects from that of the past. Academic staff will be working in a more competitive labour market in which recognition and reward are likely to be more closely tied to specific measures of performance, and in which mobility of staff between universities is likely to increase. Students will be required to pay higher fees for their education, and will expect more in return; they will want universities to deliver high quality teaching in ways which fit with the complex work/study schedules of their lives. University revenue will become more diverse, an increasing proportion of public funding is likely to be distributed through competitive rather than allocative mechanisms, and greater reliance will be placed on international and domestic full-fee income, and on private sector research income. Local communities are likely to look for specific evidence of university engagement and benefit, rather than accept aspirational statements, given that they now often have multiple universities operating in the same geographical area.

We need to ensure that La Trobe University is positioned to respond to these and other contextual changes in ways which can bring benefit to our research and our learning and teaching activities. This requires us to plan in a careful and calculated way, and to harness the considerable resources of the University, so that at our 50th anniversary in 2017 La Trobe is an even stronger, more dynamic, and more successful university than it is today.

This Green Paper is my attempt to evaluate the challenges and opportunities that La Trobe University faces in 2007, and over the next 10 years. It represents the beginning of a new planning process for the University. We need to agree on our primary institutional objectives for the decade ahead, so that each operational unit (faculty, school, research centre, administrative division) can then align its own activities and objectives with these. If we cannot achieve this consistency of objective and commonality of effort, then rather than harnessing our resources in the interests of the University, we will dissipate them, for which we will all be the poorer.

1.2 Process

In order to develop a shared ambition for La Trobe University over the next decade, I want all parts of the University to discuss, evaluate and elaborate the themes and ideas contained in this paper and, in particular, to respond to the 16 proposals relating to the future of the University. I do not want this process to take too long. Academic communities have a habit of talking to death any proposals for change, but the nature of some of the issues facing the University today, and the pace of change in the external environment, means that we cannot afford the indulgence of very lengthy deliberation. A number of issues will require discussion and decision by the Academic Board, or Council, or both, although many operational matters will be the responsibility of faculties or divisions. If we are to reach agreement and be in a position to put ideas into action from the start of the 2008 academic session, we need to conclude our formal discussion and decision-making process by December. This will require considerable focus and a lot of hard work from everyone in the University – an investment of time that will produce significant benefits over the next 10 years. The timetable for moving from Green Paper to an agreed new Strategic Plan for the University looks like this:

TABLE 1: TIMELINE FOR THE 10-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

Key Dates	Activity
Week commencing 23 July <i>(Release of Green Paper)</i>	Circulation of Green Paper (GP).
July - August <i>(Consultation, Discussion & Feedback Phase)</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. GP Briefing & Discussion Sessions - Paul Johnson, Vice-Chancellor (all campuses). All staff invited. 2. Feedback on GP to Paul Johnson, via email. All staff invited to email feedback. 3. Discussion of GP within University.
September – December <i>(Strategic Planning Sessions commence)</i>	Paul Johnson works with members of the Senior Management Group to create a 10-year Strategic Plan for La Trobe University. Feedback from Green Paper incorporated into planning.
10 th October	Presentation of Draft Strategic Plan to Academic Board.
November	Presentation of Draft Strategic Plan to Council.
10 th December <i>(Strategic Plan completed)</i>	Final Presentation of Strategic Plan to Council.

1.3 Structure of paper

In order to plan for the future, I have found it useful to look back to some of the founding principles of La Trobe University. Section 2 examines some of these founding principles, and proposes that the University define a set of core values which can be used to guide the direction of development over the next 10 years. Section 3 then examines the recent performance of the University across a broad range of indicators, and identifies some major challenges which we need to address. Section 4 considers the national and international context in which the University operates, and suggests how changes in this environment may condition the manner in which we respond to these challenges. Sections 5-7 then look in detail at the core elements of the University's activities (learning and teaching, research, administration), identify a set of performance objectives for the decade ahead, and suggest how we need to change what we do and how we do it so that our achievements by 2017 match or exceed our ambitions.

The analysis in this paper is, wherever possible, based on quantitative data, but in many areas of the University's activity information is scarce and so the inferences I draw are necessarily more subjective. Since joining the University in April I have managed to talk with many people in the various faculties, divisions and campuses in order to gain insight into the issues of greatest concern to current staff and students, but as a newcomer I am conscious that I may have missed many things of significance. On some issues I may simply be wrong, and I am confident that the University community will make me well aware of any such errors!

2. La Trobe University: Founding principles and core values

2.1 La Trobe University Act, 1964

The formally defined objectives or purposes of most universities are narrowly focused on academic issues (although in the case of the University of Melbourne's revised 1958 Act there are no formally defined objectives at all). La Trobe University is different. The objectives of the University, as defined in the founding Act, are:

To serve the community and in particular the citizens of Victoria –

- (i) by making knowledge available for the benefit of all;*
- (ii) by providing an institution in which all enrolled students will have the opportunity of fitting themselves for life as well as becoming learned in a particular branch or branches of learning;*
- (iii) to promote critical inquiry within the University and in the general community; and*
- (iv) to aid by research and other means the advancement of knowledge and the pursuit of the benefits of its practical application.*

From its inception, therefore, La Trobe University was intended to be distinct in its mission: it was to serve the community through the relevance and inclusiveness of its research and teaching, and through the production of graduates who were rounded citizens as well as trained professionals.

2.2 Radical origins

In its early years the University pursued its mission to serve the community with determination. Many of the early cohorts of students were drawn from lower-middle and working-class households in the northern suburbs of Melbourne where there was no family tradition of higher education, and in 1972 La Trobe was the first University in Australia to admit mature students who had left high school before matriculation. When the University opened more than 40% of students were female, compared with 28% in all Australian universities.¹

The initial curriculum design for the University was radical. In the four foundation Schools of Humanities, Social Sciences, Physical Sciences and Biological Sciences there was an emphasis on integration and dialogue between disciplines, and this proved attractive to some of the inaugural students who chose to study at La Trobe because they perceived it to be intellectually more exciting than the much more traditional Melbourne and Monash universities.

The radicalism of the early years extended well beyond purely academic affairs to embrace a wide diversity of community engagement. An early move by ecologically aware students and staff in August 1967 to form the LTU Conservation Society led to the designation of part of the University's land as a wildlife reserve in order to safeguard the native flora and fauna of Bundoora. In the 1970s direct support for the communities living adjacent to the Bundoora campus came from the commitment by the Department of Legal Studies to initiate and supervise a legal aid clinic attached to the West Heidelberg Community Centre.

2.3 Core values

The wildlife reserve and the legal aid clinic continue to operate as vivid demonstrations of La Trobe University's commitment to social and environmental responsibility. In the 1990s La Trobe University expanded into regional Victoria. This was a further demonstration of the University's commitment to social responsibility. We now play a central role in the development of regional Victoria.

Yet if we look critically at the content and mode of delivery of our teaching, and at our broader patterns of community engagement, we are now less radical, and less different from other universities, than we were 40 years ago, although we continue to attract higher proportions of

¹ Details in this section taken from William J. Breen (ed.), *Building La Trobe: Reflections on the First 25 Years* (Melbourne, 1989)

students from low SES backgrounds and rural areas than the state and national averages across the university sector.²

I believe that the objectives of La Trobe University enshrined in the 1964 Act are as relevant to the University today as they were four decades ago. In fact the circumstances of 2007, which see governments, employers, communities and students all expecting universities to be actively engaged in socially responsible and economically and culturally relevant activities, make these founding objectives and purposes of La Trobe even more apposite for the early 21st century than they were for the 1960s.

I believe that we should draw on our founding principles and early history in order to define for the early 21st century a set of core values which encapsulate the unique commitment of La Trobe University to socially responsible, inclusive, relevant and radical teaching, learning and research. An explicit statement of values can have use both within and without the University: internally it provides a clear benchmark against which academic and administrative plans and actions can be assessed; externally it sends a clear message about how we view ourselves and how we intend to contribute to the common good.

Proposal 1: That La Trobe University define an explicit statement of core values that are derived from the formal objectives of the University, that reflect the commitment to social and environmental responsibility demonstrated by the University community since its foundation, and are relevant to the circumstances of the University and its members in the early 21st century.

3. The recent performance of the University

3.1 Internal beliefs and external assessments

The founding principles have always been important for La Trobe University's self-image, but we have to ask whether the University's performance in recent years has been consistent with these principles and self-perception. The academic faculty at La Trobe contains a number of Australia's leading 'public intellectuals', and their work certainly 'makes knowledge available for the benefit of all.' The University continues to recruit students from the northern suburbs of Melbourne and, in its regional campuses, from regional Victoria, thereby directly creating opportunity and serving its

² Equity data taken from Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) 2006 Institutional Framework Assessment Portfolio for LTU, p. 22-3

local communities. There exist a large number of creative and extremely valuable projects and programs in different parts of the University designed to develop the personal capacities of students, thereby giving them an 'opportunity of fitting themselves for life.' The University maintains a strong research reputation in many areas of intellectual endeavour, thereby promoting 'the advancement of knowledge and the pursuit of the benefits of its practical application.'

However, if we turn to external indicators of our achievements across the different areas of activity, we find that measures of our performance have been less positive than we would wish. This has had a detrimental impact on the financial strength of the University, and has compromised our capacity to invest in intellectual innovation. This section of the paper looks in turn at indicators of our recent performance in the two core areas of learning and teaching and of research, and also reviews our recent financial performance.

3.2 Student demand

A composite indicator of the status of a university among prospective students is the level of demand for undergraduate places. If senior high school students value the university's reputation, if they are attracted by the course offerings and believe they will be well taught, if they feel that their investment of time and money in a given course will benefit them in terms of their future career, then they will seek to be admitted to that university and course.

The overall picture for La Trobe is disappointing. There is a general downward trend in ENTER scores – particularly pronounced in Science, Technology and Engineering - and our market share of final preferences has been in fairly constant decline over the past five years. Our median ENTER scores in recent years have been below the median level for the State in all broad discipline areas with the exception of Health Sciences, and our decline has been relative to the State average (for example, in Natural and Physical Sciences our median score between 2002 and 2005 fell from 79 to 70, whereas the median for the State was constant at 86).³ These data reveal that the relative attractiveness of La Trobe University for prospective Victorian undergraduates has been in decline for at least the last five years.

The position in terms of international student demand at first sight is marginally more positive. Over the past five years we have increased international student revenue from just over \$20 million to \$40 million. However, relative to the sector this has done no more than maintain our position at 18th

³ DEST 2006 Institutional Framework Assessment Portfolio for La Trobe University, pp.34-5.

in a university league table of the number of international students enrolled in full degree onshore programs. We also fall far behind relevant peer groups in terms of overseas fee revenue.

3.3 Student satisfaction

Recruiting students is one challenge; delivering to them the education they expect is another. La Trobe University has not been among the sector leaders in seeking and analysing the opinions of students, so there is little consistent data other than that derived from the (national) Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ). The latest discipline-specific results from this survey of recent graduates produced the national rankings shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2: LA TROBE UNIVERSITY POSITION IN CEQ NATIONAL RANKINGS, 2007

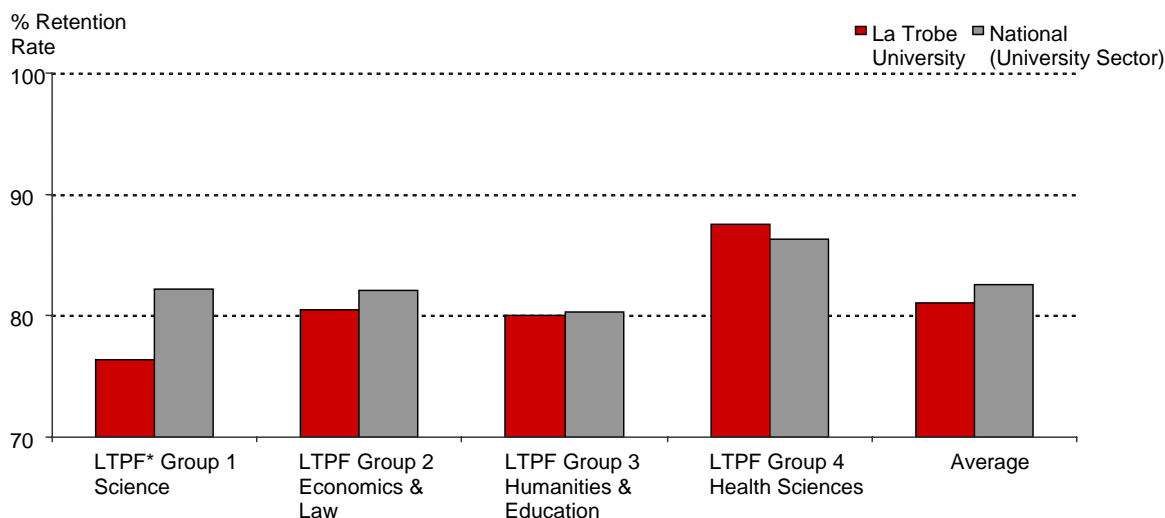
Discipline	Ranking
Business, Law and Economics	32nd
Health	20th
Humanities, Arts and Education	10th
Science, Computing, Engineering, Architecture and Agriculture	36th

The CEQ is not a refined instrument for the evaluation of learning and teaching, but regardless of its inadequacies it is clear that it has identified issues in relation to student satisfaction which need to be addressed. It should be noted that aggregate learning and teaching performance is not directly related to the type, size or vintage of university. Among the top 10 universities in the 2007 aggregate rankings are the Australian National University (1), Wollongong (2), Melbourne (3), Murdoch (7), and Swinburne (10). La Trobe University comes in at 28th. La Trobe's disappointing performance in this national teaching evaluation cannot be attributed to excessive average teaching loads. Although Student-Staff Ratios (SSR) today across the sector are much higher than in the 1990s (the national average in 1990 was 12.9 students to one teacher, compared with 20.4 to one in 2005), La Trobe's SSR in 2005, at 19.3, was little different from Monash (19.2), and lower than Murdoch (20.1), Swinburne (20.6) and Wollongong (21.6).⁴

A further indicator of our performance in providing appropriate teaching and support for students comes from retention rates. Figure 1 shows that, with the exception of Health Sciences, our retention rates are below the national average.

⁴ Universities Australia database

FIGURE 1: 2007 ADJUSTED RETENTION RATES



*DEST Learning and Teaching Performance Fund

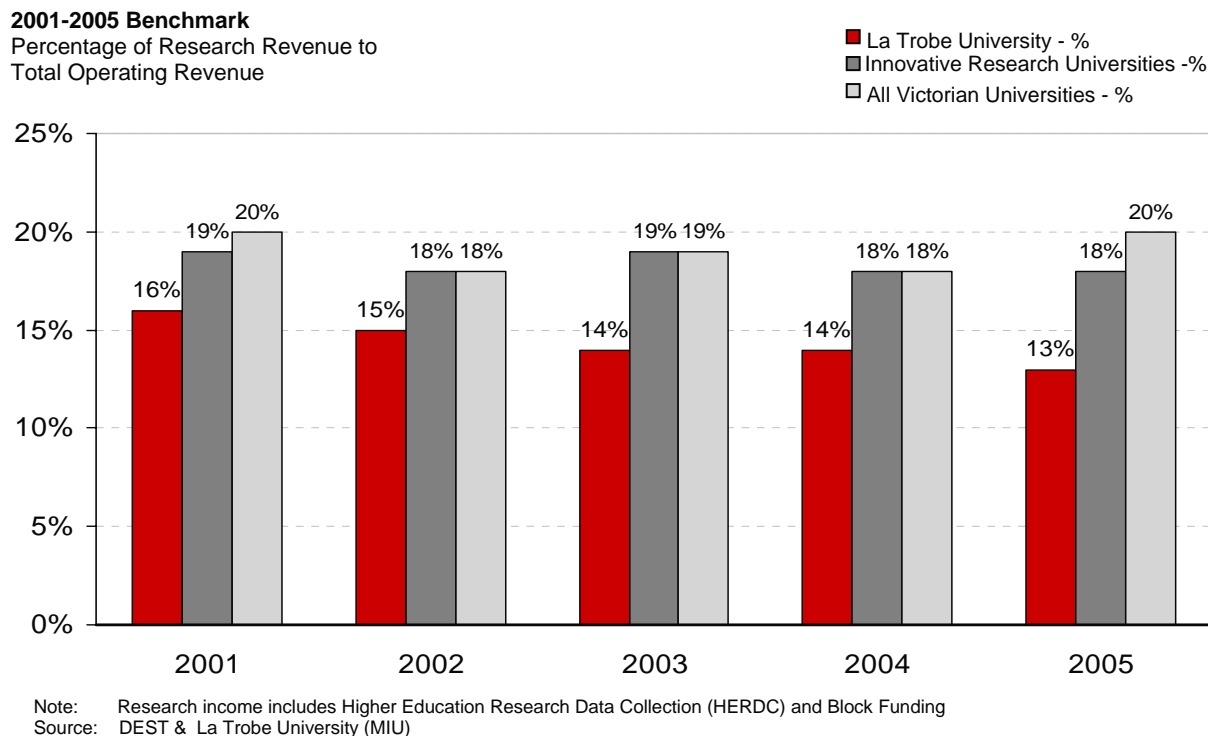
3.4 Research

La Trobe University has research strengths across all disciplines. These strengths have been recognised by the award of major competitive research grants by the Australian Research Council (ARC) and other funding bodies. The success rate of La Trobe academic staff in ARC and National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) research grant competitions has been consistently above the national average over the past six years.⁵ However, the volume of external research funding obtained by the University is relatively low, placing La Trobe 20th in a league table of Australian university research income. Furthermore, this relative position has been declining steadily over recent years. In 2001 La Trobe received 2.0% of total sector research income, but by 2005 we received only 1.3% of the total. Average research income per member of academic staff has hovered around \$30,000 since 2001, whereas for our peer universities the figure has risen from \$39,000 to \$50,000, and for the sector as a whole it has risen from \$48,000 to \$65,000.⁶ Figure 2 shows that our research income has declined as a proportion of total revenue from 16.0% to 13.0% over the five years from 2001. When academic staff at La Trobe go in pursuit of external research funds, they are pretty successful; the problem is the small number of people who enter the chase.

⁵ Review of LTU Research and Graduate Studies Office (June, 2007), p.5.

⁶ Data taken from DEST Institutional Framework Assessment Portfolio for LTU, pp. 38-9. The peer universities in the group of Innovative Research Universities of Australia are: Macquarie, Newcastle, Griffith, Flinders and Murdoch. Since none of these universities has a major medical school or significant medical research income, they provide a more appropriate benchmark for research income volume than does the sector average.

FIGURE 2: UNIVERSITY RESEARCH REVENUE AS % OF TOTAL OPERATING REVENUE



3.5 Finance

The fundamental purpose of a university is not to make money, but to promote learning, teaching and research. It is nevertheless a truism that no university can effectively pursue its fundamental purpose unless it is financially sound. In 2006 La Trobe University reported an operating deficit of \$7 million, and substantial economies have had to be implemented in the current year in an attempt to avoid a further deficit. These financial constraints mean there is no surplus within the University to make much needed investments in new academic appointments, new research infrastructure and new teaching facilities. (The cost of modernising the physical infrastructure of the University – much of which is more than 30 years old – is estimated to be more than \$140 million.) The low level of external research income means that much research has to be internally financed from teaching revenue; the relatively low proportion of international students means that this teaching revenue is significantly less than that obtained by our peer institutions.

The financial pressures faced by La Trobe are largely a consequence of our low income rather than abnormally high expenditure. Our institutional student/academic staff ratio of 19.3 students to one staff in 2005 was below the State average of 19.9 to one and the national average of 20.4 to

one. Our student/non-academic staff ratio of 15.8 to one was significantly above the sector average of 13.6. On balance we have a relatively greater proportion of academic staff and relatively smaller proportion of non-academic staff than the sector average, and our expenditure on staff benefits (pay) in 2005 was 60.9% of total expenditure, compared to a sector average of 58.7%. We are currently living beyond our means, not because we are particularly profligate in expenditure, but because we do not raise the same volume of teaching and research revenue as do our peer institutions.

Universities gain much of their reputation – particularly in an international context – from their research activity, but they gain most of their income from their teaching activity. In the case of La Trobe, 66% of our income comes from teaching activities (of which 11% comes from international students), 13% from research activities (including consultancy and contract research), with the remainder coming from trading activities (e.g. residential services), capital grants and investment income. Our peer institutions gain 16% of total revenue from international student fees, and 18% from research. If we were to maintain the current revenue from domestic students and from trading activities, but increase our international student income and research income to match that of our peer universities, we would see our total annual revenue increase by \$50-60 million. More teaching and research output would, of course, require more resources to support additional academic staff, but if we could expand our academic output without increasing support costs across the University, we could generate a \$20-30 million surplus over operating costs. This level of surplus is needed to finance improvements to the University's physical assets, to make major new intellectual investments, and to cover interest and debt repayments.

4. The national and international context

4.1 Commonwealth funding

The challenges that the University currently faces in terms of student recruitment, research income and financial performance have to be addressed within a context of increased competition between universities for students, staff and other resources.

Within Australia the funding regime for universities is likely to continue to exhibit a shift from allocative (block grant) funding to competitive funding. Although the 2007 Federal budget provided significant additional funding for the higher education sector, there was no general increase in (or indexation of) block grants to cover operating costs. Much of the additional resource (including the \$5 billion Higher Education Endowment Fund) has been channelled into specific areas, and will be

subject to competitive bidding from universities. It is reasonable to anticipate that our chances of gaining any significant additional public funds to support teaching or research will be determined by external evaluations of our track record and future potential for excellence in teaching and research.

It is unlikely the Federal Government will re-introduce indexation of operational funding for the university sector. As a result the value of the Government's operating grant to each university falls steadily year after year. Even greater competition for these diminishing resources would emerge if the proposals recently advanced by the Group of Eight (Go8) universities for portable student scholarships (education vouchers) were to be adopted by some future government.⁷ At present there is no indication that the Go8 ideas will be put into practice, but it is clear that all universities are vulnerable to shifts in Federal funding priorities, so it is prudent to take note of signals coming from Canberra. The Federal Minister for Education Julie Bishop has indicated that she wishes to see more specialisation and diversity within the higher education sector, and this view is not confined to the Liberal Party.

4.2 International competition

Greater competition between universities for revenue will not be confined to the domestic sphere. The heady days of double-digit growth in the number of international students enrolling in Australian universities are unlikely to return; a recent House of Representatives study estimates a growth rate of 5-6% per annum over the next seven years.⁸ There will continue to be a significant inflow of students from China, India and elsewhere, but the rapid expansion of undergraduate educational provision in these countries means that international student demand in Australia will increasingly be directed to graduate programs. Graduate students are likely to be more discriminating than undergraduates in their selection of courses and universities; programs that are perceived to be deficient in quality or relevance will suffer. In addition, the Australian higher education sector can expect to see more competition for international students from continental European universities, an increasing number of which have recognised the revenue opportunities created by offering their programs in English.

We must anticipate that competition between universities for a share of national and international revenue sources will increase over the next decade, and that shifts in federal funding policy may further challenge the financial position of some universities. We cannot know how these issues will

⁷ *Seizing the opportunities: designing a new policy architecture for higher education and university research* (Group of Eight, June 2007).

⁸ House of Representatives, *Servicing our Future* (Canberra, May 2007), chapter 5.

evolve, but in planning for La Trobe's development over the next 10 years we need to be alert to both the risks and the opportunities inherent in the changing national and international context.

5. Renewal and redirection of learning and teaching activities

5.1 The dual role of teaching and research

In considering how to develop La Trobe University over the next decade we need to recognise the fundamental importance of both teaching and research activities to our overall purpose as an educational institution, and to our financial health. The research excellence of La Trobe's academic staff, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, and in bioscience, has been consistently recognised in international rankings of university research performance.⁹ We have more than 5,500 students registered for higher degrees, and we draw a disproportionate number of doctoral students from overseas (22%, compared to a sector average of 16%) because of the high international research reputation of the University and its leading academic staff. We need to develop our existing research strengths in order to raise the volume and quality of research activity, increase research income, and further enhance the international reputation of the University. At the same time we need to extend our capacity to deliver high quality and relevant teaching so that our programs become more popular with both domestic and international students.

In short, we have to raise our game in research and in learning and teaching. We cannot afford to let either of these core activities languish. To achieve this we need to adopt an integrated approach to intellectual renewal which draws on La Trobe's commitment to deliver socially responsible, inclusive, relevant and radical teaching, learning and research. But we will not succeed unless we also address a much broader set of issues: the way we communicate with and respond to our major client group, our students; the way we manage and administer our internal affairs; the way we promote the activities and successes of the University; and the way we engage with the broader community, including alumni. If we are to change the University in the fundamental way that is required to ensure our intellectual and financial future, every member of staff in every part of the University will need to accept that 'business as usual' is not an option for the future.

⁹ In the 2006 Shanghai Jiao Tong international ranking of universities, which excludes indicators of research in the humanities, and which is heavily biased towards citations in top science journals, La Trobe was ranked in the top 400 in the world, and 10th/11th in Australia. In the 2006 *Times Higher Education Supplement* international ranking, La Trobe was in the top 100 in Arts and Humanities. Both these ranking exercises are replete with methodological deficiencies; for a critical discussion see Simon Marginson, 'Global University Rankings: Implications in general and for Australia', *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 29/2 (July 2007), pp 131-42.

In the remainder of this paper I will sketch out those areas of the University's activities where I believe we need to focus our energy over the next twelve months in order to reposition La Trobe for the future.

5.2 Student engagement

We need to make distinctive the educational opportunities available to our students, so that La Trobe University becomes the preferred destination for a greater number of Victorian senior high school students. We can do more to differentiate the content and mode of delivery of our academic curriculum – this is discussed in section 5.3 – but a central element of any process of differentiation must be related to what is often, somewhat loosely, described as 'the student experience'. If we are to be true to our founding objective of 'fitting students for life', then we must provide ways for students to develop a broad set of 'life skills' both within their formal education and through extra-curricular activities. Our aim should be to provide each student with an experience of engagement in a progressive learning community, so that when they graduate they have an enhanced opportunity and ability to succeed in employment and in personal and social life.

There already exist many good examples of student engagement around the University, but they operate very much as 'cottage industries' – small scale, unco-ordinated, and largely unsupported by any central resource. We need to build on these foundations in order to provide students with a wide range of opportunities for engagement and leadership, both within the University and in the broader community. There are examples elsewhere of university-wide policies on student engagement; including an interesting initiative at the University of Manchester. See <http://www.careers.manchester.ac.uk/mlp/>

Proposal 2: That La Trobe University establish and support a set of integrated programs for student enrichment and engagement, in order to create a more fulfilling experience of university life for La Trobe students, and to enhance their employment and life skills.

5.3 Undergraduate program renewal

The reasons why our undergraduate degree offerings have become less attractive to domestic students in recent years are complex, but one potential factor that requires serious investigation is the content and mode of delivery of the undergraduate teaching program. We should ask of each degree program (and of each component unit) a series of questions along the lines of :

- Is this program/unit at La Trobe University distinctive? Does it differ – in terms of content and mode of delivery – from similar programs/units in competitor universities?
- Do we know whether these differences are viewed positively by students? Have we asked them?
- If the program/unit has been running for five or more years, has the content and mode of delivery been significantly changed over this period to reflect the new learning and teaching potential of the Web?
- In surveys of student satisfaction, is this program/unit ranked above the La Trobe/Faculty average in terms of quality of teaching and course design? If not, what action is being taken to improve student satisfaction?
- In what ways is this program/unit reflective of La Trobe's commitment to providing an undergraduate education which is relevant, radical and socially engaged?
- How will the program assist students to obtain their preferred employment options?

Some schools and/or faculties are already undertaking a review of their undergraduate offerings, but this activity should be extended to all teaching units. When La Trobe was founded it offered undergraduate programs that were radical in comparison to those available at Melbourne and Monash; my sense is that today many of our programs look rather staid and conservative. We need to renew and refresh the undergraduate program.

Proposal 3: That each faculty and school review its undergraduate teaching program, with the intention of renewing and refreshing both content and mode of delivery in 2009.

5.4 Undergraduate program consolidation

In parallel with the process of renewal, there needs to be a process of consolidation of undergraduate teaching. We are profligate with our time. Table 3 reports the number of undergraduate units offered, by faculty, in the last two years. Some units exist as 'empty boxes' in any one year because of staff absence on leave. It is clear however that - even though there has been some consolidation over the last twelve months - there continue to be many very small units offered and taught, more so in some faculties than others. This would not matter if the time of university teachers was a free resource, but it is not.

Table 3: Summary of La Trobe University Undergraduate Units Offered, 2006 and 2007

Teaching year	2006			2007		
Faculty	Number of Units Offered	Units with more than 100 Students enrolled	Units with fewer than 20 Students enrolled	Number of Units Offered	Units with more than 100 Students enrolled	Units with fewer than 20 Students enrolled
All Faculties	4132	379	2647	3083	350	1778
Faculty of Education	439	47	296	319	43	175
Faculty of Health Sciences	1084	97	719	755	115	409
Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences	1183	49	819	958	47	622
Faculty of Law & Management	599	131	300	347	100	149
Faculty of Sciences Technology & Engineering	827	55	513	704	45	423

Source: Data Warehouse as at 04/06/07

Note: Some units have more than one unit code

In order to increase our research output we have to release more staff time for research activity, and to deliver a larger number of taught graduate programs (e.g. Master of Arts/Master of Science by coursework) to international students, we will need to release staff time from existing teaching commitments. We therefore need to increase the efficiency of our undergraduate teaching by offering fewer units to larger groups of students.

Proposal 4: That in order to promote more research activity and to facilitate the development of new graduate coursework programs, undergraduate programs should be consolidated so that very small units are no longer maintained, and staff time devoted to undergraduate teaching is reduced across the entire University by at least 25% by 2010.

5.5 Enhanced support for sessional teaching staff

The delivery of fewer and larger undergraduate units will probably require greater use of sessional teaching staff. To provide sessional teachers with the support they need to deliver high quality teaching in a responsive manner, the University will need to enhance its support for their professional development. We will also need to ensure there is an adequate supply of well-trained sessional teachers. We should give serious thought to adopting the US practice of providing PhD scholarships that are linked to the delivery of a specified amount of class teaching by doctoral Teaching Assistants.

Proposal 5: That the University expand the provision of professional development support for sessional teachers, and evaluate the costs and benefits of creating a significant number of doctoral-level Teaching Assistantships.

5.6 Graduate program development

To take advantage of the anticipated growth in demand for graduate coursework programs, from both international and domestic students, we need to ensure that each faculty has available an appropriate range of programs. These need to be carefully tailored to the market, hence program development needs to be consumer-led rather than producer-led. The intensity of competition for international students means that programs will have to be renewed or replaced on a regular basis, and program innovation by competitor universities closely monitored.

Proposal 6: That each faculty offer a range of graduate coursework programs designed to maximise the ability of La Trobe to raise the scale of international student activity to that of our peer institutions by 2012.

5.7 Inter-faculty trade

The University's current internal resource allocation model provides strong incentives for each faculty to minimise inter-faculty trade. The consequences are: that student choice of units taught outside the faculty may be inappropriately restricted; there is duplication of teaching effort (and sometimes of academic appointments) because faculties prefer to deliver 'in-house' courses rather than export students to relevant courses in other faculties; and there are strong disincentives to the establishment of genuinely multi-faculty teaching programs. A new and more transparent internal resource model will reduce the disincentive for co-operation across faculties in the delivery of teaching (see section 7 for more details), but there will need to be further work done to remove the barriers to trade.

Proposal 7: That the University devise a mechanism to facilitate and promote inter-faculty trade in teaching services.

5.8 Regional learning and teaching

The University faces significant challenges operating in a sustainable manner in the regions. The cost of providing teaching services is substantially greater at the University's regional campuses as there is limited scope to achieve economies of scale. We need to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of learning and teaching delivery in the regions. This must include increasing our level of involvement with TAFE institutions. We also need to improve the online learning experience we deliver to our students, and achieve better alignment of Federal funding with the cost of operating in the regions.

Proposal 8: That the University develop strong partnership arrangements especially with TAFEs to assist with the creation and delivery of university learning and teaching in regional Victoria, and further develop online and other learning platforms to ensure that a quality university education can be delivered.

6. Renewal and redirection of research activities

6.1 The current research base

Our relative decline in research performance in recent years is most likely to derive from problems relating to structures, incentives, and capacity. In terms of capacity, our formal position looks positive: among the 1074 full-time and fractional full-time academic staff in 2006, just 32 were employed on teaching-only contracts, 175 on research-only contracts, and 867 on teaching and research contracts. However, an initial evaluation of research output conducted in advance of the Research Quality Framework (RQF) indicates that only half of the University's academic staff have sufficient research output (four recognised items since 2001) to qualify for inclusion in this research assessment exercise. Although the age profile of La Trobe's academic staff differs significantly from the sector average (27% of our staff are aged 55 and above, compared to a sector figure of 24%), age does not appear to be a determining factor in research activity: RQF eligibility for staff aged 55+ is no different from staff aged 54 and under.

6.2 Research structures

La Trobe currently supports 24 faculty-based and nine University research centres or institutes, and is a partner in seven Co-operative Research Centres and nine other national or international research centres. In some disciplines and sub-disciplines these structures work very well to support and extend the research activity of University staff, yet overall we do not seem to be

harnessing the full potential of a multi-faculty university. Many potential funders of research are driven by issues or questions that span traditional disciplinary boundaries, but our research structure is primarily arranged around faculties and/or disciplines. We could do much more to draw on research strengths right across the University to address cross-disciplinary research themes such as water resources, ageing, bio-security, international development. We should also see our regional presence as providing special opportunities for building these strengths.

Proposal 9: That the University establish and support a small number of cross-faculty research institutes which will draw on existing research capacity within the University to obtain significant additional external research funding.

6.3 Research incentives

Some members of academic staff publish large amounts of high quality research, but others publish little or nothing. In many cases those whose research output is minimal make major contributions to their school or faculty by taking substantial administrative roles and by delivering a large volume of teaching. However, this implicit sharing of responsibilities occurs informally; the University does not have a well-developed workload model which recognises the value of research output, and which moderates the allocation of teaching and administrative duties towards research-active staff. We need to change this so that our internal incentive structure more effectively supports our leading researchers.

Proposal 10: That each faculty devise and implement a workload model which recognises the different levels of research activity of academic staff.

6.4 Internal funding of research activity

In the higher education sector in Australia the great majority (70%) of academic staff are employed on teaching and research contracts, and Commonwealth funding of students recognises that a significant amount of staff time is devoted to research rather than teaching activities. Most universities, including La Trobe, then distribute this Commonwealth funding according to student load in the different faculties/schools. However, we know that within La Trobe, and across the entire higher education sector, research activity is not spread evenly across all staff. The internal distribution of Commonwealth fee income by student load in effect assumes that research is undertaken by every member of academic staff to an equal degree. A more rational internal

funding model would recognise the concentration of research activity, and would allocate resources accordingly. The University is already beginning to implement a new budget model based on the real cost of internal activities and services (more details in section 7) and in due course it will be possible to take account of different levels of research activity in making internal resource allocations to each faculty. This will result in a fairer and more transparent process of resource allocation, and will provide a financial underpinning for faculty-based workload models.

Proposal 11: That the University develop and implement a mechanism for partitioning Commonwealth income into teaching and research elements, and for allocating this income according to measured levels of teaching and research activity.

6.5 Staff recognition and reward structures for teaching-focused staff

Implicit in proposals 10 and 11 is the identification and resourcing of some academic staff as 'teaching-focused'. The RQF data indicate that we already have a considerable number of 'teaching-focused' staff, though we have never officially recognised this. I believe that the University should recognise the specialisation of some academic staff in teaching, and should reward these staff in an equivalent manner to those who specialise in research. At present, although the University draws two-thirds of its total revenue from teaching activities, opportunities for promotion to higher levels are extremely limited for staff who do not have a significant research profile.

In the US a number of leading universities (e.g. Columbia, Carnegie-Mellon) use the designation 'Professor of Practice in X' to recognise staff who have made major nationally and internationally recognised contributions to excellence in teaching and pedagogy. If we are to recognise the reality of 'teaching-focused' staff, we need to establish a clear pathway for career development offering them access to appropriate reward and recognition for excellence.

Proposal 12: That the University develop career and promotion pathways which recognise the reality that many valued members of academic staff are teaching-focused but not always research-active.

7. Renewal and redirection of University support services

7.1 The function of University support services

The core business of the University is learning and teaching, and research. All other activities conducted within the University exist because they support, directly or indirectly, these core activities. They do so by providing services to various members of the University community, and to outside agencies. Some of these services are largely invisible to the wider university community (for example the work of the insurance office), while others, such as IT services, are ubiquitous. Non-academic staff who provide these services comprise 55% of the University's total workforce.

7.2 The strengthening of a service culture

If a support service is working well it will be meeting the primary needs of its client group. My impression from three months at La Trobe University is that many of the support services do not really know whether they are meeting the primary needs of their clients, because (a) they do not have a clear understanding of who those clients are; and (b) they have not directly sought the views of those clients about the current extent and quality of service provision. On the other side of the relationship, the clients do not know what to expect from many service units because responsibility for delivery of any particular function is frequently fragmented between a number of central and faculty service units, and this can lead to either duplication of effort or under-provision.

Last year a *PriceWaterhouseCoopers* study of administrative processes within the University indicated that we could get much more value from our administrative services by eliminating unnecessary or uneconomic practices. We have submitted an application to DEST under the Workplace Productivity Program for additional financial support to carry through a program of productivity improvement in our administrative services. We need to do this work in order to release financial resources and staff time to devote to other activities: student recruitment, student engagement, curriculum modernisation, enhanced support for teaching and research activities, modernisation of the physical estate, improved marketing, expansion of alumni activities, and so on. We need to undertake these additional activities, and to service the needs of several thousand additional international students, without any increase in our administrative costs or staffing levels. This means we need to identify and eliminate redundant or low-value support activities, and put more effort and resource into supporting the things that really enhance the teaching and research performance of the University.

We can probably all think of examples – big and small – of administrative waste within the University. We generate vast amounts of paperwork, we have hundreds of paper-based forms which are filled out and moved from one office to the next so that the requirements of our current administrative and decision-making processes are met. Each one of us, the Vice-Chancellor included, should think seriously about every task we undertake, and ask a series of questions:

- Why I am doing this? Does it really need to be done at all? Could it be done in a more efficient way?
- For whom am I doing this? How do I know that I am doing what they want in the way they want it?
- Who else in the University is doing the same or similar tasks for the same clients? Could we partition or share the tasks?
- What would happen if I stopped doing this? Would anyone notice? Would anyone care?

Proposal 13: That the University undertake an analysis of business processes across a wide range of support services in order to identify areas of duplication and overlap so that we can provide clients with a simpler and more responsive support structure.

7.3 The University's internal budget model

La Trobe University has hitherto operated an internal budget model which has top-sliced central administrative costs from total revenue, and then allocated the remainder to faculties on the basis of student load. Work is now underway to replace this with a cost-allocation model, in which all revenue is allocated to the units which earn it, and internal services which these units consume are then directly charged to them. This will make explicit the real cost of each area of service provision, and permit benchmarking of the cost of services so that we can see whether our costs and levels of service provision are aligned with industry norms.

Proposal 14: That the University implement a new budget model based on full cost allocation.

7.4 The responsibilities of the University, of faculties, and campuses for external relations

If we are to harness rather than dissipate our resources in the interests of La Trobe University, we need a clearer understanding of the responsibilities of different operational units. One factor which has undoubtedly worked to weaken La Trobe's public image over a number of years has been the

fragmentation of responsibility for external engagement. Faculties, schools, research centres and institutes, campuses and central divisions have all variously taken it upon themselves to: communicate with the press; lobby politicians; engage with alumni; forge links with business; recruit students, and so on. This dispersed effort has taken place without adequate co-ordination of purpose, content or design. The University would benefit from a clearer set of protocols regarding the responsibility and authority of different organisational units to engage with external agents. This does not mean we should centralise these activities; rather we should have clearly defined university policies and practices which can be implemented at local level in a consistent and coherent manner.

Proposal 15: That La Trobe develop a clear policy about the relative responsibility of the University, faculties, campuses, and other organisational units in the formulation and delivery of external relations.

7.5 Alumni relations

La Trobe University's renewed commitment to being socially responsible and inclusive should extend beyond the current university community to embrace our alumni. La Trobe has not effectively maintained or developed its links with former students. We need to re-engage with our alumni, and work with them, as we plan over the next decade for our 50th anniversary year in 2017.

Proposal 16: That La Trobe expand its alumni relations and fundraising operations, and provide clearer opportunities for former students and staff to contribute to the current and future activities of the University.

8. Conclusion

In order to reposition La Trobe University for continued growth and success over the next ten years we need to change many aspects of our activities. I believe these changes should draw on and develop the University's commitment to socially responsible, inclusive, relevant and radical teaching, learning and research. If we can achieve this, we will ensure a future for the University that is intellectually and educationally distinctive and distinguished.

Change on the scale envisaged in this Green Paper will have implications for each and every member of staff. Many aspects of the way we undertake teaching, research and administration will need to change so that we can more readily respond to current challenges and future opportunities. This will require commitment, determination and hard work right across the University; if we make this investment of time and effort now, we will all be able to reap the benefits over the next 10 years. Please take the time to join the University-wide discussion of this Green Paper; it is fundamental to all our futures.