La Trobe U goes for local student growth: it’s sending a needed signal

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*It’s the only growth game in town*

La Trobe U has taken a UG enrolment hit – and it’s not all COVID-19 caused, with school leavers in regions it serves said to have turned to TAFE. And so, the university is responding to build share among the expected bumper school leaver market next year. There isn’t much choice – Vice Chancellor John Dewar warns international enrolments may never recover to where they were before the crisis (CMM May 13).

*New moves*: LT U has a new alternative entry scheme for school leavers, who can take two subjects on-line, with results used to calculate an ATAR-equivalent. DVC Students Jessica Vanderlelie says “it is based on solid evidence and recognise student achievement in a way that is directly linked to what it takes to succeed at university.”

It’s additional to the university’s Aspire scheme which guarantees early entry to school students who have the minimum ATAR for the course.

And there’s a new TV, digital recruitment campaign – pitching LT U on the quality and caring of teaching staff who help students, “be the best they can be.”

*Why they matter*: For month’s Vice Chancellor John Dewar has appeared to be on the back foot in dealing with La Trobe’s projected deficit, (CMM May 13. The problem was his frankness on finances led some to assume that the university’s front foot was in the budgetary grave. The Age claimed the university was “at risk of going broke in a matter of weeks,” (CMM June 2). It hasn’t, but the perception that LT U would be a basket case, if it could afford the straw, is a problem.

Which LT U is addressing. Last week’s staff vote to accept reductions in wages and conditions to protect jobs from the COVID-19 crunch was a win, saving the university from a brawl over redundancies (CMM June 26).

And rather than just cutting to keep both feet, on rather than under, the ground, LT U is also getting going on a rapid-restructure.

Rob Pike (provost, science, health and engineering,) has gamely stepped up to a four-month appointment as provost, university transformation.