

A. RESPONSE TO DUE DILIGENCE AUDIT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

B. PURPOSE

The objectives of the due diligence audit of teaching and learning were, first, to assess the University's current and proposed learning activities against internal, national and other relevant benchmarks and, second, to assess the University's capacity to secure favourable outcomes from external reviews, in particular from the 2005 Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) review and from the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund. The purpose of this report is to respond to the reviewer's comments and recommendations pursuant to those objectives.

C. KEY ISSUES

The reviewer, Dr Gregor Ramsey, highlighted the commitment to good teaching that he encountered. He noted that there has been a great deal of hard work in recent years to achieve attitudinal change. Many specific initiatives have been taken both University-wide and at faculty/departmental level. All faculties have transition and 'student-at-risk' programs; all have ways of recognising excellence in teaching. He noted that academic processes, while occasionally slow, are robust and collegial.

Dr Ramsey concluded that the University is well-placed to satisfy AUQA documentation requirements and to complete Stage 1 of the Learning and Teaching Development Performance fund by demonstrating that it meets the eligibility criteria in full. The 2004 Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) recorded a generally high level of satisfaction among students with their University experience, with 72% of undergraduates and 80% of postgraduates at least satisfied. Attrition rates and employment outcomes are far better than sector averages.

Nevertheless, he highlighted a range of concerns to do with the quality of teaching and learning and the way the University evaluates the quality of both. Student perceptions of the quality of teaching are only slightly above Go8 average and slightly below sector averages. If the University aspires to be one of the finest universities in the world, and to differentiate itself from other Australian universities, it will need to provide better than average outcomes for teaching. This is a major University goal in 2005 and beyond.

Dr Ramsey's comments may be grouped into eight broad issues:

1. Uneven student perceptions of courses and quality of teaching
2. Other measures of the quality of teaching
3. Performance in national teaching awards
4. Further measures to improve staff teacher-training programs
5. Relationship between the DVC (Academic) and the Academic Board
6. Relationship between teaching and research
7. Development of graduate attributes
8. Quality of the campus experience

D. SUMMARY OF OPTIONS

1. Uneven student perceptions of courses and quality of teaching

Performance on Quality of Teachings surveys and the CEQ is uneven, both between and within faculties. There are faculties such as MDHS, Science, and Economics & Commerce where successful, impressive initiatives have been implemented, and others where this has not occurred to a significant extent.

Dr Ramsey suggested that students be given additional opportunity to provide feedback on the quality of their experience through mechanisms other than questionnaires, for instance through student liaison committees and focus groups. This does not occur throughout the University.

2. *Other measures of the quality of teaching*

Dr Ramsey noted that, apart from departmental self-assessments and student responses to questionnaires, there are no measures for how the University knows that it is teaching well. There is a need to develop a clearer approach to objective assessment of quality and success of teaching with the introduction of more national and international benchmarks - for instance the amount spent on staff training to improve teaching, and proportion of study leave devoted to this outcome. The University might encourage teams within each faculty to embed the *Nine Principles Guiding Teaching and Learning* into operational teaching practices.

3. *Performance in national teaching awards*

The audit noted that the University has not performed well in achieving AUTC national awards for teaching. (Since the University instituted its own awards in 2003, however, it has had one winner (2003) and two finalists (2004).)

4. *Further measures to improve staff teacher-training programs*

Dr Ramsey raised the issue of whether the University might introduce a process for continual teacher training of staff, so that they reach acknowledged stages of proficiency in teaching performance. While several strategies to increase the status of teaching are already in train (especially recognition in staffing and promotion processes), Dr Ramsey suggested that the University investigate the idea of teaching-only staff and 'teaching professors'.

He highlighted the possible role of mentoring and leadership in teaching in the career development of younger staff.

5. *Relationship between the DVC (Academic) and the Academic Board*

Dr Ramsey noted that the *Nine Principles Guiding Teaching and Learning* provides the framework for the University's teaching and learning goals. The *Teaching and Learning Management Plan*, prepared by the DVC (Academic), outlines the processes by which the principles are to be applied and goals achieved. As this is outside Academic Board processes, Dr Ramsey suggested that there may be a case for integrating the responsibilities and functions of the Academic Board, the Academic Secretariat and the role of the DVC (Academic).

6. *Relationship between teaching and research*

Dr Ramsey questioned whether there was an ideal balance between the importance given to teaching and research, and whether teaching was adequately 'illuminated' by research.

7. *Development of graduate attributes*

The University has developed a set of 'Attributes of the Melbourne Graduate'. Given that these apply to all students, irrespective of their discipline, Dr Ramsey questioned whether the first years of undergraduate programs should be a common program which aims to provide a general education developing those graduate attributes, and leaving focus on development of specific skills for specific professions until either later in the course or in a broader range of separate coursework graduate professional and vocational programs linked closely to future employment and leadership opportunities.

8. *Quality of the campus experience*

Dr Ramsey highlighted the ways in which the student body is changing (ethnic and social background, pressures on time, familiarity with the digital revolution, and in other ways), and raised questions about the longer-term approach to the campus experience.

E. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A

F. KEY IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

Specific initiatives to be taken in response to the issues raised by Dr Ramsey are:

1. Uneven student perceptions of courses and quality of teaching

- A key target in the 2005 Operational Plan is that all faculties are to achieve a mean score of 3.9 or higher on Question 2 ('This subject was well taught') in the Quality of Teaching Survey.
- All faculties except Land and Food Resources have as a target in 2005 a lower student:staff ratio than in 2004.
- All faculties are expected to report improved outcomes in the 2006 CEQ report.
- Other actions to improve students perceptions of courses overall are identified in 8. below.

2. Other measures of the quality of teaching

- A target in the 2006 *Teaching and Learning Management Plan* will be to evaluate the impact of the *Nine Principles Guiding Teaching and Learning*.
- Department audits in 2005 have examined how departments monitor the quality of teaching beyond student responses; all faculties are expected to have at least one benchmarking of teaching project in 2005.

3. Performance in national teaching awards

- A target in the 2005 *Teaching and Learning Management Plan* is to have two shortlisted nominations in the Australian Awards for University Teaching. (Note: these awards are currently being reviewed for 2006.)

4. Further measures to improve staff teacher-training programs

- While the target of 60 members of staff to have undertaken the Graduate Certificate of University of Teaching in 2004-05 has not been met (47 are enrolled), all newly appointed members of staff are to undertake at least an intensive induction program.
- While there is not support for designated 'teaching only' positions, a review is currently occurring of the requisite balance of teaching, research and service in promotions policy.
- The importance of teaching will be highlighted by reference to the *Nine Principles Guiding Teaching and Learning* in confirmation and promotions procedures.

5. Relationship between the DVC (Academic) and the Academic Board

Rather than 'integrating' the responsibilities and functions of the Academic Board and the role of the DVC (Academic), the President of the Board, the Academic Registrar and the DVC (Academic) have sought to distinguish their responsibilities while highlighting the strength which should result in those areas of overlapping interests.

6. Relationship between teaching and research

The University places emphasis on 'research-led' teaching, which is a central element in the *Nine Principles* and a key to differentiating the 'Melbourne Experience'. Academic Board

and faculties are currently considering a policy document on 'The Teaching-Research Nexus' developed by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education. This outlines nine ways in which the nexus might be used to meet our goal of introducing students to the content, methodologies and ethics of research.

7. *Development of graduate attributes*

- One of the key questions in Academic Board course reviews in 2005 is closer evaluation of how courses develop generic skills and attributes and how this development is monitored.
- A central component of the 2005 *Teaching and Learning Management Plan* is the implementation of recommendations in the 2004 report *Students from Asia*, concerning curriculum, pedagogy and student services.

8. *Quality of the campus experience*

The 2005 Deans and Heads Conference and Council Planning Conference both highlighted the need to re-examine what we mean by the 'Melbourne Experience' and to consider ways it could be enriched in the context of changing student needs and expectations, and the introduction of 'voluntary student unionism'. Apart from the intrinsic educational worth of so doing, other objectives are to improve student retention and outcomes on student surveys, and in particular the CEQ, the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire, the International Students Survey, and the Quality of Administrative and Support Services survey.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) has convened a working group to propose actions on these matters, comprising representatives of all key groups responsible for the quality of the 'Melbourne Experience'.

G. RISK ASSESSMENT

Failure to implement all or most of the initiatives outlined above would expose the University to reputational and financial risk. These risks and the current and proposed action plans and strategies to mitigate them are further detailed in the *University Wide Risk Assessment and Management Action Plan 2005*.

H. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council note the actions to be taken in response to the issues raised in the due diligence audit.

Peter McPhee
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
1 May 2005