

Victoria University of Wellington  
**Learning and Teaching  
Strategy 2010-2014**



## **Introduction**

The Learning and Teaching Strategy outlines Victoria University's commitment to high standards of learning and teaching. It outlines ways in which these standards are identified, maintained and developed to provide a distinctive learning experience for the University's students.

In setting out directions for the future, the Strategy gives priority to a student-centred view of learning that will also draw upon Victoria's strong culture of research, upon its engagement with professional, employer and other communities and upon its tradition of innovation. The Strategy recognises the importance of links between the formal learning opportunities offered by schools and faculties and the role of student-focused administrative and support services. It is predicated on the need to manage the University's programme and course profiles in a way that balances educational breadth, student choice and sustainability of programmes. The importance of evidence-based decision-making, professional development opportunities and recognition of good practice is also central to the objectives and actions set out in the Strategy.

Excellence in learning and teaching is identified as one of the University's core institutional values and is one of the eight key goals of the Strategic Plan. The quality of learning and teaching is also an area of central importance to the achievement of the research, student experience and capability goals of the Strategic Plan.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of this Learning and Teaching Strategy is to provide a framework that ensures the University's learning and teaching objectives and actions help it to meet its strategic objectives as set out in the Strategic Plan 2009-2014. The Strategy will be utilised by faculties, schools and academic support services in developing their own operational plans for implementation and monitoring.

## **Context**

### **International Practice**

Recent developments in the university sectors in Europe, Asia and Australasia suggest a perceived need to reassess the balance between generalist education and professional specialisation at the undergraduate level. Two influential aspects of this are the development of the Bologna accord and the so-called 'Melbourne Model'. Each of these posits as its standard structure a three year undergraduate degree followed by a two year Masters degree. Implicit in these models is the expectation that a minimum of five years of tertiary study would be the norm for most students, both those taking their degrees through coursework only and those intending to proceed to a PhD.

These and other recent innovations have certain features in common. They are, importantly, developed on the basis of reflection on the specific character of the university concerned, and use their graduate attributes as a design principle. The learning model is explicit, and is at least as important as discipline-specific content in shaping the new programmes. There is a shared emphasis on broadening the curriculum for undergraduate students. Student experience, broadly conceived, is at the centre, and non-academic aspects of the student experience (such as leadership, volunteering, or placements) are incorporated into the learning model, often for credit. For the most part, these new models envisage the undergraduate degree as only part of a longer-term cycle of learning. They are predicated upon consistency of degree structure, with flexibilities for students in other areas such as entry processes, study modes, or pace of learning.

### **Tertiary Education Strategy**

The draft Tertiary Education Strategy 2010-2015 outlines the Government's vision for an education system that equips all New Zealanders with the knowledge, skills and values to be successful citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Producing high quality research and using this research to inform teaching is identified as one of the Government's expectations for relevant and efficient tertiary education provision. The Government expects universities in particular to enable a wide range of students successfully to complete degree and postgraduate qualifications. This will contribute to the identified priority of increasing the number of young people (under the age of 25) achieving qualifications at level four and above, particularly degrees. It is suggested that this can be achieved through supporting students to study full-time, which increases the likelihood of completion, and by creating learning environments that support successful completion by a diverse range of students.

### **Academic Audit 2009**

The New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit Academic Audit Report of November 2009 noted that much had been achieved at Victoria in programme restructure and curriculum development. The student leadership programmes were commended as a valuable contribution to preparing graduates for leadership positions in society. It endorsed the Learning and Teaching Strategy as the mechanism for continuous improvement in learning and teaching and as a means of ensuring greater consistency in the learning experiences of students. A recommendation was made for the development of a clearly defined process to monitor the implementation of the strategy and measure its effectiveness; this relates closely to the articulation of an institution-wide quality assurance framework, also recommended. The report noted the challenges facing staff in ensuring an engaging learning environment for students. A more strategic approach to learning technologies, and a more effective use of student evaluation data and of the Australian Survey of Student Engagement data, were proposed. These recommendations are reflected in actions in this Strategy.

## **Victoria University's Strategic Plan 2009 -2014**

The objectives and actions of the Learning and Teaching Strategy are directed by values, goals and associated actions and measures of success contained in the University's Strategic Plan 2009-2014.

### *Value*

We are committed to excellence in teaching.

### *Goal*

Strengthen Victoria's high quality research-led learning and teaching environment, and reward and celebrate learning and teaching excellence in all its forms.

### *Actions*

- Complete implementation of Pathways to Success and embed new practice in teaching and learning.
- Progressively implement one or more internationally benchmarked instruments of student engagement and achievement to raise awareness of areas that require further exploration and action in teaching and learning.
- Implement relevant recommendations from programme reviews, and from the New Zealand Universities' Academic Audit Unit academic audits.
- Establish teaching projects (courses or collaboration across courses) that explore integrated approaches to academic problems using perspectives from different disciplines.
- Acknowledge the importance of teaching excellence and maintain the status and importance of local and national tertiary teaching excellence awards.

### *Measure of success*

One or more internationally benchmarked instruments that assess student learning outcomes, applied consistently and regularly, show that Victoria is achieving to international standards in teaching and learning.

## **Treaty of Waitangi**

The University is committed to Māori educational success. The Treaty of Waitangi Statute is the formal expression of Victoria's commitment to Māori as the tangata whenua and treaty partners. As well as a commitment to Māori student recruitment, retention and achievement, the Strategic Plan also outlines other commitments to Māori. These are:

- Māori research excellence with the potential for significant social, economic and scholarly impacts;
- the contribution of Mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) to scholarship across disciplines;
- building long-term and positive relationships with Māori stakeholders;
- building Māori staff capability;
- increasing the capability of all staff to engage with Māori interests; and
- the contribution of Te Reo Māori and Tikanga Māori to the culture of Victoria.

The Victoria University Māori Student Recruitment, Retention and Achievement Strategy 2009-2014 outlines objectives, actions and measures of success to increase the number of Māori students at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels who successfully complete their degrees.

## **Links to Victoria University's Research Strategy**

Research-led teaching is among the features that distinguish universities from tertiary institutions of other kinds.

Victoria's strength as a research-intensive university can add particular value to the linkage of research and teaching. Research-led teaching, properly understood, is a reflective process benefiting both activities. Most undergraduate teaching is geared to content delivery, but the content that is delivered must be continually shaped and contextualised by research in the area. Staff and students are thereby able to engage actively and productively in research that informs and improves teaching and in teaching that generates new directions for research. Researchers face the challenges of contributing to continuously renewed curriculum, of providing opportunities for students to develop their own research and inquiry skills and of communicating their own research to new audiences. Students can benefit from the intellectual excitement of discovery in a research environment, as well as from the development of skills and attributes that fit them well for employment or further study.

Placing a stronger emphasis on the scholarship of teaching will enable the University to ensure that current research on the theory and practice of teaching informs educational practices. Both the Research Strategy and the Learning and Teaching Strategy are predicated on the importance of this integration as a basis for the delivery of academic programmes. The Learning and Teaching Strategy sets out actions to support the development of research-led teaching practice of excellent quality.

The University has also identified in its Investment Plan a set of interdisciplinary strengths which, as they come to be more fully implemented in the course of the planning period, can generate innovative approaches to curriculum and new opportunities for learning.

## **Relationship to Pathways to Success**

The Pathways to Success review examined undergraduate and honours degrees and made a number of recommendations. Those that have already been implemented have been designed to improve students' experiences of learning and teaching and the quality of their academic programmes. The Learning and Teaching Strategy has integrated the outstanding actions from the Pathways to Success review into its goals and objectives. Actions specifically designed to complete the implementation of Pathways to Success and embed new practice into learning and teaching are:

- revising the undergraduate curriculum;
- reassessing the University's graduate attributes; and
- developing strong curricular frameworks that make pathways for progression clear and accessible for students.

## **Responsibility**

Formal responsibility for implementing the Learning and Teaching Strategy lies with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic). Learning and teaching underpin the core business of the University, and a collective commitment to the actions, accountabilities, targets and timelines from the Learning and Teaching Strategy will be articulated in the unit plans of Faculties, Schools and academic support services.

A Learning and Teaching Strategy Group, convened by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), was formed to give advice on the development of the Learning and Teaching Strategy. A new constitution and new terms of reference for this group will be established in 2010, giving it a role in the implementation and continuing development of strategy and achievement in learning and teaching.

## **Monitoring and reviewing**

The actions in the Learning and Teaching Strategy are expected to be embedded in operational unit plans of faculties, schools and central service units. These will be monitored through the University's normal review processes.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) will co-ordinate an annual review of progress against the learning and teaching actions proposed in unit plans and report this to the University Council.



## Learning and Teaching action plan

### Goal

**Strengthen Victoria's high quality research-led learning and teaching environment, and reward and celebrate learning and teaching excellence in all its forms.**

### Objective 1

Establish a distinctive vision for education and the student experience at Victoria.

#### *Actions*

- 1.1 Conduct a review of undergraduate education, with terms of reference focusing on the identification of viable and practicable learning and teaching practices of high quality and reflecting international standards.
- 1.2 Reassess the University's graduate attributes with an emphasis on the identification of the learning opportunities that enable students to develop them; then embed this approach systematically in planning statements, course and programme approval processes, course outline templates, teaching portfolios and related processes and documents.
- 1.3 Evaluate the usefulness of developing generic and specific attributes for post graduate degrees, certificates and diplomas of the university; and evaluate the University's model of post graduate degrees, certificates and diplomas.
- 1.4 Prepare a statement of educational principles, and ensure alignment between it and the graduate attributes.
- 1.5 Give greater emphasis to active, flexible self-directed learning as a model better suited to supporting Victoria's identified graduate attributes.
- 1.6 Build upon the University's strengths as a research intensive university by ensuring that students have structured opportunities to develop skills in research and inquiry.
- 1.7 Articulate clearly for the benefit of prospective students the skills required for university study. Communicate this information to potential students, and to teaching staff and advisors at secondary schools.

#### *From the Strategic Plan*

- 1.8 Establish teaching projects (courses or collaboration across courses) that explore integrated approaches to academic problems using perspectives from different disciplines.

## Objective 2

Foster, support and reward good practice in learning and teaching.

### *Actions*

- 2.1 Establish a Learning and Teaching development budget to build leadership, support innovation and improvement by providing a source of contestable funding support for activities such as project support, pilot studies, or significant professional development.
- 2.2 Review the application of promotions criteria relating to learning and teaching and the evidence applicants are required to submit to address them, including criteria relating to contributions in the scholarship of teaching.
- 2.3 Support early career academics and make use of the skills of outstanding teaching staff through the use of induction, mentoring and peer review programmes.
- 2.4 Enhance feedback to students on the information gained through student evaluations of courses and teaching and on responses to them.
- 2.5 Review the policy and guidelines for assessment of student performance to ensure that high standards of reliability and validity are set, and develop good practice examples as a resource for faculties and schools.
- 2.6 Actively publicise and celebrate the educational achievements of our students, graduates and staff so as to increase understanding and enhance perceptions of the value and quality of our learning and teaching.
- 2.7 Provide administrative, academic and, where necessary, funding support for staff applying for teaching awards, fellowships and grants.
- 2.8 Develop initiatives that foster active collaboration across the University to enable the development of student-centred learning environments, in particular between programmes and academic support services. These initiatives should maximise the learning and teaching opportunities provided by co-ordinated academic support services, particularly at first year level.
- 2.9 Establish Ako Victoria as an annual Learning and Teaching staff conference, thematically linked to the Learning and Teaching Strategy priorities.

### *From the Strategic Plan*

- 2.10 Acknowledge the importance of teaching excellence and maintain the status and importance of local and national tertiary teaching excellence awards.

### *From the Internationalisation Strategy*

- 2.11 Encourage and support staff in the internationalisation of curricula and pedagogy where appropriate.

### *From the Equity Strategy*

- 2.12 Further develop the availability of flexible delivery, web-based learning resources and learning support for students who need extra assistance.

### Objective 3

Ensure that academic programmes and teaching delivery are of high quality, and specifically, that they:

- are informed by current research and scholarship;
- meet the needs of accrediting and professional bodies;
- are relevant and accessible for students; and
- are sustainable and efficient.

#### *Actions*

- 3.1 Review the current model and structures for the provision of learning support and teaching support.
- 3.2 Develop incentives for high quality teaching through management of the course profile and workload management.
- 3.3 Develop strong curricular frameworks that make pathways for progression clear and accessible for students and facilitate decision making about the numbers and ranges of courses needed to fulfil the goals of a major.
- 3.4 Set up a system to monitor the assessment of student performance to ensure fairness and validity.
- 3.5 Adopt continuous improvement processes, informed by evidence on the achievement of Student Learning Objectives together with research and scholarship on learning and teaching.
- 3.6 Develop and adopt a policy framework in relation to distance and flexible learning, teaching and assessment with a view to encouraging more effective use of these modes of learning and teaching.
- 3.7 Review the current technology platform for online learning and teaching to ensure that it meets institutional requirements.
- 3.8 Further the development and implementation of a consistent student workload policy as a principle of course design.
- 3.9 Ensure that Victoria has appropriate mechanisms for consultation on the curriculum with relevant professional and community bodies.

#### *From the Strategic Plan*

- 3.10 Implement relevant recommendations from programme reviews, and from academic audit by the New Zealand Universities' Academic Audit Unit.
- 3.11 Complete implementation of Pathways to Success and embed new practice in learning and teaching.

#### *From the Equity Strategy*

- 3.12 Use inclusive learning practices to enable identified equity groups to achieve the same educational success as other students.

## Objective 4

Create an environment of good leadership and evidence-based decision-making in learning and teaching.

### *Actions*

- 4.1 Establish and adopt standard measures of learning and teaching that facilitate the management of these activities at all levels from the Senior Management Team to individual courses.
- 4.2 Establish norms of good practice in learning, teaching and assessment, and align all official documents that refer to learning and teaching so that they use criteria that form a comprehensive system.
- 4.3 Develop and adopt a set of defined responsibilities in learning and teaching at University, Faculty, School, course coordinator and programme level that will guide Deans, Heads of School and programme directors on the best way to fulfil those responsibilities.
- 4.4 Establish key performance indicators in learning and teaching, together with a schedule by which appropriate governance and management committees will regularly review progress measured against them.
- 4.5 Identify and actively engage with a small number of national and international benchmarking partners in relation to academic standards and learning outcomes.
- 4.6 Establish a schedule for the regular conduct and systematic review of student surveys so as to inform planning for improvements in learning, teaching and student support.
- 4.7 Improve staff participation in the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement survey to increase our understanding of the link between the broader aspects of student experience and academic engagement.
- 4.8 Use data from surveys, research, and external evaluations in a holistic fashion to inform and improve learning environments.
- 4.9 Explore opportunities to build up leadership capability in learning and teaching through the processes of mentoring and professional development, and the setting and reviewing of appropriate performance objectives.

### *From the Strategic Plan*

- 4.10 Progressively implement one or more internationally benchmarked instruments of student engagement and achievement to raise awareness of areas that require further exploration and action in learning and teaching.

## Objective 5

Actively value and draw upon the cultural diversity of our student body and teaching staff, and ensure that it is reflected appropriately in curricula, teaching delivery, and assessment practices.

### *Actions*

- 5.1 Devise and implement initiatives to support students in developing the Victoria graduate attributes in ways culturally appropriate to them, including implementation under the leadership of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Māori) of the Strengthening Pathways: Success for Māori and Pacific Students at Victoria project.
- 5.2 Assess our pedagogic and management practices to ensure that distance and offshore students have appropriate opportunities to develop the University's graduate attributes.
- 5.3 Ensure that staff are aware of the best practice standards from Kia Ōrite so that academic programmes are wherever possible accessible to students with disabilities, and staff can design and implement appropriate teaching and learning strategies.
- 5.4 Acknowledge and demonstrate the value of Mātauranga Māori to scholarship across disciplines.

### *From the Internationalisation Strategy*

- 5.6 Strengthen and facilitate staff awareness of the intercultural dimensions of pedagogy.
- 5.7 Strengthen and extend the availability of initiatives designed to support students in preparing for life as global citizens, including leadership programmes and student exchange programmes.

### *From the Strategic Plan*

- 5.8 Recognise the different learning needs of students by using a variety of teaching approaches and showing sensitivity to cultural issues.

### *From the Equity Strategy*

- 5.9 Identify and implement targeted policies and strategies to increase the attraction and retention of staff members from the designated equity groups.



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December 2009