

Victoria University of Wellington
**Student Experience
Strategy 2010 - 2014**



Student Experience Strategy 2010 - 2014

Introduction

Vision for the student experience

Victoria University will offer its students a challenging and stimulating educational experience leading to qualifications that are recognised and valued worldwide. Its services will be integrated, accessible and responsive, will enhance learning, and generally enrich the student experience. Its campuses will provide a safe, environmentally sustainable and enjoyable environment, and offer a wide range of opportunities for student engagement and interaction.

Student experience goal (Goal 3) from the Strategic Plan

“Engage students as active and lifelong members of an inclusive and supportive community of higher learning through an outstanding academic, social and cultural and campus experience that equips them to make a significant contribution to local, national and international communities.”

The Student Experience Strategy sets the framework within which Victoria’s approach to learning and teaching, equity and diversity, the student focused aspects of the internationalisation and research strategies will operate.

Definition

For the purposes of this Strategy, the term ‘student experience’ denotes the activities and services that are intended to enhance student life at the University by extending the knowledge and skills acquired through academic courses and by providing support for learning, health and well being.

It is based on a commitment to foster full participation by all students including international students and students from equity groups. Victoria’s commitment to Māori as tangata whenua and Treaty partners is given stronger formal expression in the Treaty of Waitangi Statute. The Victoria University of Wellington Students’ Association (VUWSA) is currently the legally endorsed student representative body. VUWSA is a partner in building a good student experience by promoting the interests and welfare of students within the University and to the Government and providing services to its members. VUWSA has a range of representative organisations, and the Postgraduate Students’ Association has particular relevance to this Strategy.

Ngāi Tauira is Victoria’s parallel Māori Students’ Association, which works closely with VUWSA. Ngāi Tauira provides services to all Māori students on campus, and caters to the specific educational, cultural, political and social needs of Māori students.

The Strategy recognises there is no generic student experience but rather individual experiences reflecting different backgrounds, identities and whether a student is studying part time, full time, on campus or at a distance.

Nature and purpose

The Strategy is predicated on a view of the student experience that extends from first contact through preparing students for university study, to study programme completion, to alumni status. It puts students at the centre. The Diagram in Appendix 1 shows the total student experience at Victoria from the student's internal connections in the centre extending out to external/community links. Experience of life at Victoria includes both the learning experience and the living experience. The learning experience is primarily addressed in the Learning and Teaching Strategy and equity of access is addressed in the Equity and Diversity Strategy. The living experience is addressed through the Student Experience Strategy which identifies the services and opportunities designed to support students in achieving their best in academic and personal development, while fostering positive and lifelong engagement within the University community. The learning experience and the living experience work together to contribute to the University's graduate attributes of creative and critical thinking, communication and leadership.

The Strategy is based on the following good practice principles.

Holistic: the university aims at providing a rich academic and social environment which will enhance the social, personal, physical, intellectual, ethical, equitable and emotional development of students.

Celebratory: the importance of student success is reflected in all publicity materials, and celebrated through scholarships, leadership awards, recognition events, and news releases.

Participatory: students are involved in planning and evaluation, and engaged in leadership.

Comprehensive: a full range of student support programmes is offered, with employment and volunteer opportunities, induction programmes and a focus on first year.

Strategic: the university makes appropriate use of new technologies, there is collaboration to anticipate student problems and coordinate services, and academic staff are partners in designing and developing student services.

Evidence-based: service development is informed by student feedback, regular reviews, student focus groups and workshops, senior staff maintaining networks with other universities as part of a continual monitoring process, and benchmarking informing evaluation.

Inclusive: a sense of belonging is created, within and beyond the campus, and the cultural diversity of the student population is celebrated through events and communications.

The Student Experience Strategy aims to provide a seamless link between formal learning opportunities and the environment in which these opportunities can be taken up. This environment includes student administration, academic advice and guidance, leadership opportunities and support for health and well being. Learning facilities such as the library, information and communications technologies and other technical facilities are also addressed in the Student Experience Strategy.

The Student Experience Strategy is complementary to the more narrowly targeted Equity and Diversity Strategy. Victoria is committed to providing an inclusive and representative environment for students that is conducive to participation and success. This commitment is described in the Equity and Diversity Strategy.

The Student Experience Strategy relates to the Internationalisation Strategy by establishing a framework of expectations for the student experience for those studying at Victoria from abroad, as

well as fostering intercultural understanding and preparing all Victoria students to be active and responsible global citizens.

Victoria's Research Strategy provides specific detail on the study experience of postgraduate research students.

Context

External environment

Tertiary Education Strategy

The Tertiary Education Strategy 2010- 2015 outlines the Government's priorities for tertiary education and the direction it wants the sector to take. The Government aims to ensure the tertiary system achieves the best return on the public's investment by:

- increasing the number of young people (aged under 25) achieving qualifications at levels four and above, particularly degrees
- increasing the number of Māori students enjoying success at higher levels
- increasing the number of Pasifika students achieving at higher levels
- increasing the number of young people moving successfully from school into tertiary education
- improving literacy, language, and numeracy and skills outcomes from levels one to three study
- improving the educational and financial performance of providers
- strengthening research outcomes.

In the near future it seems clear that the Government will not be providing significant funding increases to meet the growing demand for tertiary education. It has signalled that there will be financial consequences in the future if tertiary institutions enrol students above the funding cap (between 97% and 103% of the agreed funded limit).

TEC performance-based funding

The Government sees improving students' course and qualification completions and progression rates as a key driver to improve the efficiency of public investment in tertiary education. To help achieve this, a proportion of future funding is to be linked to performance. . Educational performance will be measured by tracking student enrolments for Māori, Pacific and people under 25 years on the basis of successful course and qualification completions, retention, and progression.

Benchmarking

Association of Commonwealth Universities

Victoria University is undertaking a benchmarking project on the student experience organised by the Association of Commonwealth Universities. An outcome of this benchmarking will be a model of good practice in relation to the student experience. The benchmarking also provides an opportunity to engage with other commonwealth universities with a strong track record in a particular field to explore potential improvements on our performance.

International

Victoria International has participated in iBarometer, an international system for surveying international students. iBarometer benchmarks Victoria with other New Zealand universities and also with about 150 other universities worldwide. Participation is being considered again for 2011.

Australasian Student Engagement Survey

Victoria participates in the Australasian Student Engagement Survey which is managed by the Australian Council for Educational Research www.ausse.acer.edu.au. It is an annual survey of students enrolled in Australian and New Zealand universities. Six key areas of student engagement are measured by the Student Engagement Questionnaire: academic challenge, active learning, student and staff interactions, enriching educational experiences, supportive learning environment, and work integrated learning. The comparisons indicate that students at Victoria, in general, are rating several elements of their experience slightly lower on the scale than students at the benchmarked institutions. In 2009, the elements of the student experience that Victoria students rated lower than the benchmarked universities were: active learning, student and staff interactions and enriching educational experiences.

Internal environment

Managed enrolment

As a result of the capped funding environment for universities, Victoria is managing enrolment through controlling first year undergraduate domestic student numbers from 2011.

A process and methodology have been developed that will enable selective entry to undergraduate programmes on a clear and equitable basis. The process takes into account the different student cohorts: school leavers, special admissions applicants and transferring students, and applicants in the designated equity categories.

Academic audit report and recommendations

In 2009 the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit undertook an audit at Victoria. The audit report outlines the commendations, recommendation and affirmations Victoria received for the mechanisms for monitoring and enhancing the academic quality and standards to achieve the aims and objectives from the Strategic Plan. The student experience was integral to most of the topics audited, but particularly to teaching and learning. Support for student learning was particularly commended.

The audit panel affirmed Victoria's intention to co-ordinate current endeavours to improve Māori and Pacific student retention. The audit panel noted that Victoria needs to state its intentions with respect to enhancing leadership and support for Pacific students.

It commended Victoria for the international leadership programme and recognition of extra-curricular activities in preparing graduates for leadership positions in society, and for the positive impact of the library.

Learning and Teaching Strategy and the Equity and Diversity Strategy

These Strategies were developed in 2009 to support the Strategic Plan.

The Learning and Teaching Strategy gives priority to a student centred view of learning. It recognises the importance of links between the formal learning opportunities offered by schools and faculties and the role of student-focussed administrative and support services.

The first objective of the Learning and Teaching Strategy is to establish a distinctive vision for education and the student experience. The Learning and Teaching objective of actively valuing and drawing upon the cultural diversity of the student body addresses some of the same issues as the Equity and Diversity Strategy and makes the link to educational endeavours.

There are two student-related objectives in the Equity and Diversity Strategy. The first objective is to improve the recruitment, retention and success rates of students in equity groups; and the second is, in partnership with the Victoria University Students' Association, to create and support a study environment that recognises the diversity of the University community and advances equity by giving all students opportunities to achieve their best.

Student Support Services

A new structure for student support services has been established, partly in response to the need to focus on managed enrolment and performance based outcomes. These changes highlight the need to attract to Victoria students with the best possible prospect of academic success, to support them effectively through the transition into a new environment, and to retain them to the completion of their degrees within a positive culture of scholarship and academic achievement.

The core principles for student service delivery at Victoria are:

- A focus on the quality of the student experience should guide the design and delivery of services.
- Services should be seamless: students should not need to understand the internal structures of the University to access the support they need.
- Responses to students should be integrated and co-ordinated: referring students to other parts of the university should be kept to a minimum.
- Service levels should be consistent across units.
- Communication with students by all who interact with them should always be clear and respectful.
- Student services should be provided in an inclusive and responsive fashion.
- Students should be provided with the technical tools to manage their own requirements as far as possible, but the option of personal interaction must always remain available.

The new structure provides an increased focus on recruitment and transition, with strong connections into the management and administration services, student development, equity, and health and counselling services. This will enable a focus on retention and achievement within a safe and integrated environment. These areas will work across internal structural barriers to achieve a cross-functional and shared service approach to the delivery of services.

The changes have also realigned the support and opportunities offered through university supported student accommodation, crèches and recreation services. These aspects of the student experience will integrate with the wider academic support to ensure a student focussed approach to maintain a 'healthy' campus.

VUWSA and the University have in recent years developed a strong partnership based on shared oversight and funding of services and facilities to students. The Strategic Partnership Deed signed in 2006 acknowledged the past contributions by students to student facilities and set up a structure to provide joint governance for recreation and social services and spaces. This partnership has now been enhanced through the Memorandum of Understanding agreed in 2009 for the establishment of a new joint advisory committee to provide oversight of the student support services funded through

the student services levy. There is an emphasis on ‘good faith’ engagement and consultation with the student body in order to support responsive, cost effective service delivery and a focus on continuous improvement.

In addition VUWSA and VUWSA Trust have partnered the University for the design, delivery and funding of the Campus Hub and Boyd Wilson Field projects, and continue to explore other opportunities for working together for the benefit of students.

Hub development and library upgrade

The University is upgrading its Kelburn Campus to ensure it offers leading research and teaching facilities and a world class student experience.

The Campus Hub project involves the construction of a new central building with social and study spaces, the refurbishment of the Library, and a new outdoor area. As part of the project, the Student Union Building will be revamped, with space for clubs and representative groups, a dedicated Student Health area, and improved areas for gigs and socialising.

The Hub project aims to enhance the sense of dynamism and the sense of community on the Kelburn campus, and to provide students with a safe and comfortable environment achieved in an ecologically responsible way.

Responsibility

Formal responsibility for implementing the Student Experience Strategy lies with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic). A collective commitment to the actions, accountabilities, targets and timelines from the Student Experience Strategy will be articulated in the unit plans of Faculties, Schools and all support services.

A Student Experience Group, convened by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), was formed to share information on the student experience. A new constitution and new terms of reference for this group has been established in 2010, giving it a role in the implementation and continuing development of student experience strategy.

Monitoring and Reviewing

The actions in the Student Experience 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 student experience actions proposed in unit plans and report this to the University Council.

Objectives

1. *Create a student experience that is transformative, and helps to develop values, knowledge and relationships that equip students to be responsible global citizens and instil a sense of personal accomplishment and pride in their association with Victoria.*
 - 1.1 Supplement the formal educational opportunities offered to enable students to develop Victoria's graduate attributes through the provision of leadership, social, cultural, sporting and governance opportunities.
 - 1.2 Work in partnership with key student groups and associations in their work to foster and provide such opportunities.
 - 1.3 Offer all students opportunities to promote their experience of research and discovery, as well as foster the skills and qualities required for lifelong learning.
 - 1.4 Foster active collaboration across the University to enable student-centred formal and informal learning environments.
 - 1.5 Ensure that internationalisation is a distinctive feature of the Victoria student experience, and increases cross-cultural awareness so that all students become responsible global citizens.
 - 1.6 Ensure that student achievements and the student experience are celebrated regularly through student focussed channels.
 - 1.7 Develop and implement a comprehensive alumni strategy which leverages and celebrates the Victoria student experience.

From the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2010 – 2014

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.

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 project 'Strengthening Pathways: Success for Māori and Pacific Students at Victoria'.

From the Internationalisation Strategy 2009 - 2015

Develop and promote the Victoria International leadership programme as a flagship internationalisation initiative to help prepare students to live more creatively as global citizens and to work more productively in today's highly international workplaces.

Encourage more interaction between international and domestic students, including exposure of students to Māori dimensions of New Zealand life.

Increase funding for the University's student exchange programmes and other forms of student mobility with leading universities around the world, so that such opportunities are available for as many students as possible.

Create greater opportunities for groups of students currently under-represented in exchange programmes to participate in student mobility.

2. *Provide services to students that are: integrated, empowering, responsive, and focused on supporting academic success.*

- 2.1 Review the way all services are delivered for students and put in place structures which enhance the student experience by being easy to access, integrated, responsive and as seamless as possible.
- 2.2 Foster and develop a culture throughout the University of prompt, courteous, culturally appropriate and considerate communication with all students in every interaction, whether online or in person.
- 2.3 Review and develop strategies to improve the first year undergraduate student experience, recognising its importance for retention and achievement.
- 2.4 Review and further develop equity strategies for recruitment, retention and achievement, recognising the importance of these for achieving the University's equity and diversity objectives.
- 2.5 Develop integrated information channels which provide clear, up to date information about the full range of Victoria's programme offerings, activities and opportunities for both future and current students.
- 2.6 Provide a full range of course, academic and careers advice and guidance for students, which encourages them to be self-managing, but retains the option of personal contact with academic and professional staff.
- 2.7 Foster opportunities for students to learn and develop through peer support programmes.
- 2.9 Provide efficient, effective, reliable and accessible IT services which support student learning and other activities.

From the Strategic Plan 2009 – 2014

Ensure that Victoria offers a first-rate student experience through high quality and challenging academic programmes, excellent facilities, responsive student services, and opportunities for stimulating social and cultural experiences.

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

From the Equity and Diversity Strategy 2010 – 2014

Through dialogue with iwi, communities and schools, improve our understanding of the aspirations of prospective students in the identified equity groups, and the factors that contribute to or impede their success.

Identify and develop pathways for school leavers and other prospective student groups who have experienced systemic educational disadvantage (such as transition learning programmes, university preparatory programmes or articulation pathways from the vocational sector).

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

Promote and co-ordinate approaches to the identification of students at risk of failure and provide targeted support to these students through initiatives such as peer-led workshops, additional tutorial support and mentoring schemes.

Ensure that student services are delivered in culturally appropriate ways that respect diverse ethnic and cultural heritages.

3. Provide a safe vibrant and welcoming environment that offers opportunities for meaningful engagement among the diverse university community.

- 3.1 Accommodate changing pedagogy and student expectations by providing flexible, responsive services with our existing facilities while developing new facilities with a sustainable environmental focus, including the Campus Hub.
- 3.2 Focus on remote library services and resources to students beyond the campuses and in doing so work to enhance the online learning environment (embedding resources, and providing online support).
- 3.3 Provide a safe and sustainable campus and facilities for students that are cost effective and recognise the needs of a diverse student community.
- 3.4 Build partnerships with VUWSA, the Postgraduate Students' Association and the VUWSA Trust in the provision of facilities and programmes.
- 3.5 Review the University's risk management, security, safety and critical incident policies, procedures and systems, and liability policy/procedures for field trips and study tours.
- 3.6. Provide attractive and welcoming spaces on each campus for social interaction between students.

From the Equity and Diversity Strategy 2010 – 2014

Review the IT environment to ensure that appropriate specialised equipment and software are available to students with disabilities.

From the Internationalisation Strategy 2009 -2015

Continue to offer high quality, culturally appropriate support services and pastoral care for international students.

Ensure that Māori and Pacific students and staff are able to participate fully in the University's internationalisation activities.

Investigate ways of providing more support, where appropriate, for the needs of those students not of New Zealand background (mainly permanent residents) but not technically identified as 'international students'.

4. *Ensure the quality of the student experience has a central place in the University's planning, evaluation and reporting processes.*

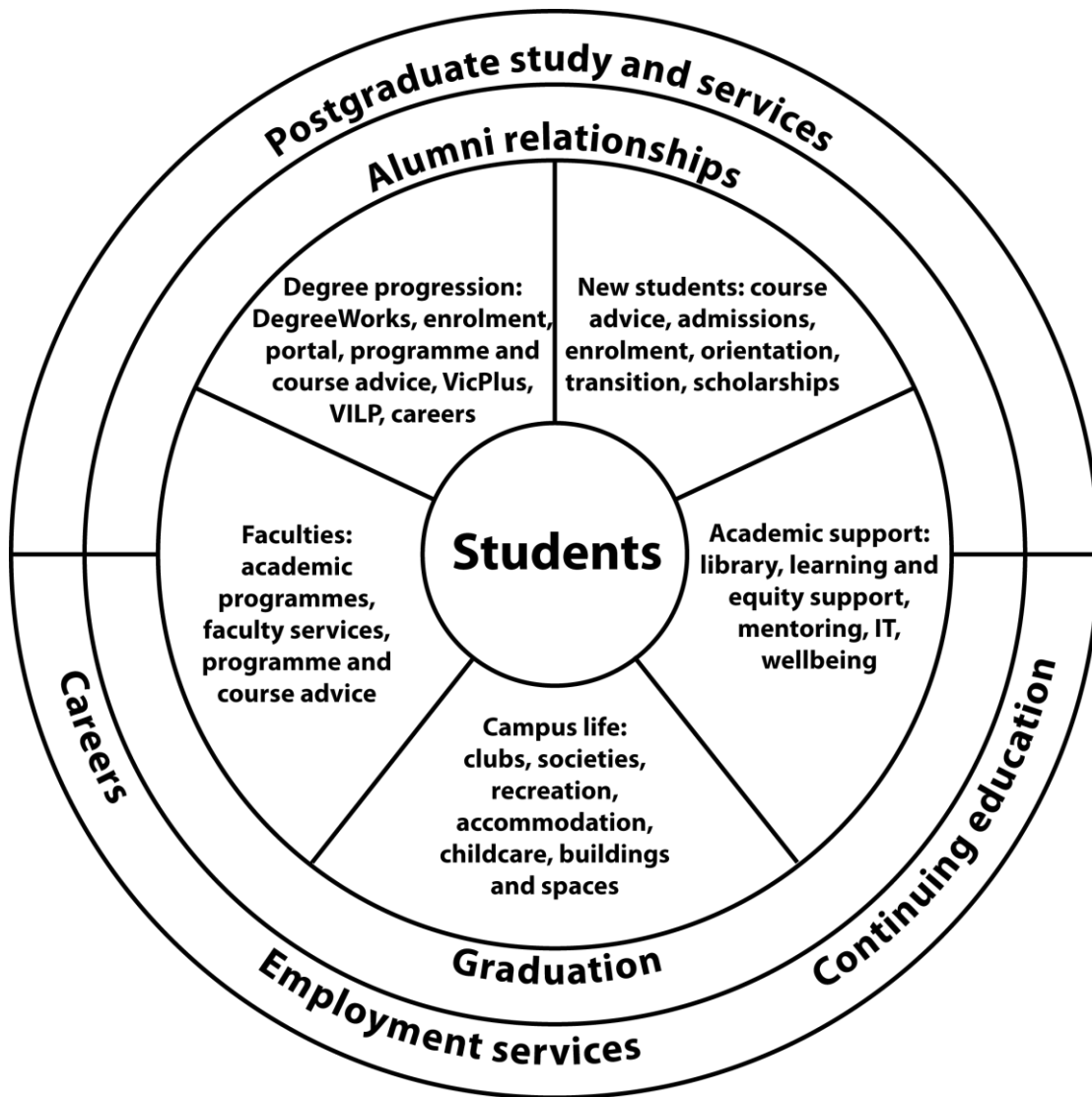
- 4.1 Coordinate a university-wide programme of research to evaluate whether our students' differing needs are being met.
- 4.2 Develop robust connections between the Student Experience Strategy, action planning and faculty, school and central service unit operational plans.
- 4.3 Develop robust mechanisms for monitoring implementation of the Strategy, evaluation and further development, and reporting back to students.
- 4.4 Develop and manage a co-ordinated student survey framework, and ensure that its findings inform the development of service strategies.

From the Strategic Plan 2009 – 2014

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.

Appendix 1

Model of the Student Experience





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