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Penny Boumelha

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)

### **Student Representative submission on Phase 2 of the Undergraduate Review**

1. This submission on the Undergraduate Review is made on behalf of 2011 and current 2012 class and faculty student representatives at Victoria University of Wellington and includes input from other interested students. It has been prepared by the Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA). VUWSA is a non-for-profit organisation that represents the interests of students at Victoria University of Wellington and has been advocating on their behalf since 1899.
2. VUWSA followed a two stage process in gathering student responses for this submission:
  - a. At the end of 2011, when the Partnership paper was released, we were aware that student representatives would be very interested in the results of the first phase. We constructed a questionnaire that showed the initial area of enquiry, the 2011 Trimester 1 student response (based on the submissions VUWSA received from 409 student representatives and interested students) and the Steering Group response to the initial area of enquiry. This allowed student representatives some perspective of background and development and helped them make an informed response. This stage of consultation occurred during the exam weeks so our response rate was very small (10 responses).
  - b. In the second week of Trimester 1 2012, we sent out a focused submission survey to all student representatives and repeated this in the third and fourth week. It often takes three to four weeks to obtain representative details for all programmes and we wanted to capture the greatest input from students across the University's faculties and schools. We received 261 submissions which included input from students in all of Victoria's faculties and the NZSM.
3. From these two stages of consultation, responding students clearly indicated support for the outcome of the 2011 review findings. It was clear both to VUWSA and to the responding 2011 representatives that the University had taken into account all of the student perspectives in the Trimester 1 VUWSA student submission. To this effect, on behalf of student representatives, VUWSA would like to thank and acknowledge the effort the University has put into ensuring that students had a say both in the submission phase and in the working group and steering group discussions.
4. In principle, our student submissions show support for the outcome document and its findings. The matters of concern should, however, be noted and discussed especially around the aspirational nature of the Partnerships document and the achievability of each element.
5. However, responding students have raised some points for further discussion:

- a. Most responding students (to Phase 1 and 2) agreed with the four elements proposed. However there is some concern that each element is very aspirational and may not be achievable simply due to factors such as the:
  - i. research pressures placed on academic staff;
  - ii. diversity of teaching commitment (or skill level) amongst academic staff (that is, staff members who struggle in teaching should be required to engage in professional development, staff who do not want to teach and are bringing in research funding should not be made to teach (or lead a course));
  - iii. current administrative processes;
  - iv. feeling that some disciplines are not seen as valued by the University; and
  - v. reality that perfection (which many of the goals push towards) is very hard to achieve.

Students have also suggested that some rewording could occur to each element's definition. There was concern highlighted by a number of students that while there was a need for this document to be aspirational, much of its language was hard to understand and 'jargony'. This led to some students feeling confused around some of the documents intentions.

- b. Responding students (to Phase 1 and 2) agree that technology has a strong pedagogical place in tertiary education but, again, some students do question what the focus on technology should actually be. In all our consultation on technology, and in our discussions with class representatives, students have pointed out that some staff appear to struggle or resist the technologies in which the University has already invested (eg. Blackboard and to a lesser extent Powerpoint). Despite Victoria's ongoing commitment to improvement, students still experience problems accessing current VUW technologies (hardware and software) and some are concerned that extra costs may be imparted on them (eg. Having to invest in Smartphones or Tablets).
- c. Responding students (Phase 2) continue to question whether 'leadership' can be a graduate attribute.
- d. Responding students (Phase 1 – not directly asked in Phase 2 as it is highlighted in our 2011 submission as a concern) are concerned that a review of the points system may see a 15pt structure come into effect. Students would encourage the University to see that deep thinking requires time; juggling four 15pt papers often throws students into quick thinking.
- e. Finally (Phase 2), there is a concern from some students that the review may lead to managerial changes (course/programme closures). Because this is the second year of the review, we would recommend that the University communicate its original purpose again to students (which aims at enhancing the undergraduate experience).

### **Stage 1 Responses**

6. 2011 Student Reps who had a chance to go through the year engaged with the review process were in general happy with the outcome of the first phase. The responding students did note that the outcomes were aspirational and they expressed some concern over technology and the points system currently in place.

7. *"Course learning objectives are good. Transparency is good. Linking it all up is good. But assessment tasks and criteria are boxing our thinking in; not making us more diverse/open to the world. Hence they hinder our education."* (Student Representative)
8. *"Digital technology doesn't have to be used in all aspects of education at Victoria. Old-fashioned methods sometimes render new technologies obsolete."* (Student Representative)
9. *"[Using technology for learning] Doesn't take into account the affordability aspect."* (Student Representative)
10. *"Workload expectations differ from person to person but it must be realized that when I student is so bogged down with study that they have no other space/time for anything else they are only actually meeting deadlines and not ACTUALLY learning."* (Student Representative)
11. *"Points based on workload and spread more evenly across the university. Classes at 1st year all the same points amount, same workload, etc. Classes in 2nd year and up should be higher – with more points, more workload etc. (Say universal 15 points at 1st year, 20 at 2nd -4th and so on)..."* (Student Representative)
12. *"Current system is simply not fair and neither is making all courses 15 pts."* (Student Representative)

## Stage 2 Responses

### 13. Graduate Attributes

- a. There is strong agreement from responding students to our 2012 consultation round that when you graduate you should expect to be a good communicator (90%), critical thinker (93%), creative thinker *and applier of knowledge* (95%).
- b. There is agreement that students graduating should be prepared for leadership (63%) but the variation of responses in our consultation suggests that further engagement in further discussion is needed. Some students would state that they don't come to University to be a leader.

### 14. Programme Delivery and Development

- a. There is strong agreement from responding students for most of these factors of programme delivery and development. Students agree that programmes should be intellectually challenging (93%), encourage deep thinking (93%), incorporate discipline specific research and enquiry skills (88%), set clear objectives linked to graduate attributes and assessment tasks (81%), offer clear curriculum pathways throughout the programme (87%).
- b. There is agreement from responding students that programmes should be undergo ongoing review (74%) and be enriched by widespread use of technology (69%). The variation in both of these factors reflects the student perspective that reviews of programmes and the incorporation of technology should not be done for the sake of reviews or technology but for strong pedagogical reasons or, in the case of reviews, for discontinuing programmes.
- c. *"I am not okay with courses being "reviewed" with the underlying intention that some courses will be dropped (eg. Women's studies, gender studies)."* (Student Response)
- d. *"The courses I take (the arts degree programs - reli, history, anth, asian studies) seem to cut classes every year and the options have become so limiting it is*

*incredibly frustrating and very narrow with a disappointing variety to choose from to continuing the degree in higher studies which should be giving MORE options on topics.” (Student Response)*

- e. *“Please try to trim out the unavailable papers. It is disappointing to discover that there are only half the papers I thought there were in a school, because there hasn't been teaching staff for the past 4 years. Please signpost these clearly.” (Student Response)*
- f. *“All previous exam papers should be posted online - all course outlines should contain dates of all assessment - all courses should use methods such as non-assessed tutorial worksheets etc. to give students feedback on their progress early and often.” (Student Response)*
- g. *“It would of been nice if there were more classes available. It's disappointing that VUW thinks that humanities & social sciences are departments in which spending should be cut and more money spent on other areas. I feel disadvantaged by this especially when I see the previous year's options available whenever it comes to picking next year's papers. I have considered changing universities which will give me greater options in my field of study because of this.” (Student Response)*

#### 15. Aspects of the Learning Experience

- a. There is strong agreement from responding students for all these factors of the learning experience. Students expect to have their work assessed fairly and constructively (98%), where appropriate have opportunities for placements/internships (89%), have opportunities to give feedback to their courses and programmes (86%), be given guidance on how their study leads to the development of graduate attributes (79%) and be given opportunities for co-curricular activities (77%).
- b. *One of the key aspects to learning at the undergraduate level is the ability to seek and receive comprehensive feedback. Too often an essay or test is returned with a number attached but no indication of how to improve. (Student Response)*
- c. *I think Victoria University could do better at making one-on-one time between students and lecturers/tutors more accessible if not mandatory. I believe that I have achieved best when I have felt valued and encouraged personally by University teaching staff. I believe large class sizes, and underfunded courses that cannot have tutorials, hinder this from happening. It creates a false perception in students that they are not valuable. I have had no experience in undergraduate years of structured vocational experiences or community based activities offered by any of my courses. (Student Response)*
- d. *“Persistent help for first year students beyond their first week or orientation. My campus coach was next to useless, so I had to figure many things out on my own, sometimes unsuccessfully. The computer system is a complete mess with dozens of different sites and services spread out haphazardly.” (Student Response)*
- e. *“I feel that the organisation of teachers at my campus needs a lot of improvement. I sometimes find that our lecture slide shows are not up on time or any other information that we need. Sometimes teachers aren't clear on their expectations of assignments and this causes me to have a blurry idea of what is expected.” (Student Response)*

#### 16. Excellence

- a. 53% of responding students agree with Excellence as an element for effective Undergraduate education. In contrast, 25% of students agree with this goal but express that it will need some work and 17% feel that the goal is good but the University would struggle to achieve it.
- b. The concerns expressed by student relate to the goal itself and whether the current administrative processes (inc. current ICT systems) would actually help to achieve this. Students would like to know in advance what courses are on offer, how to engage with University processes and that the ICT system, as it currently stands, supports them in their study rather than creating another obstacle.
- c. *"I think it is important to always believe we can do better. However I think these goals are noble things to strive for. I think students need to be better informed in how they can be included to become valued members of the university's academic community" (Student Response)*
- d. *"Communication at Vic from staff and management needs to be improved for students to have a clear understanding of the actual meaning of goals like this, and enough support to achieve them." (Student Response)*
- e. *"Not sure about 'excellence', but the day-to-day studying process as it is now certainly leaves much to be desired. Take the current IT system for example - it's abominable!" (Student Response)*
- f. *"The process of signing up for the tutorials and workshops MUST be streamlined. It is very confusing now. The IT system... Well, I said it already. It's such a shame." (Student Response)*
- g. *"I feel that this goal should be shaped around the world we live in today, with most of the papers focussed on the career world and what employers are looking for. Living in this current economic climate is a worry for those who are about to graduate and/or are thinking of what to do with their degree/career and life!" (Student Response)*

## 17. Engagement

- a. 66% of responding students agree with Engagement as an element for effective Undergraduate education. In contrast, 17% of students agree with this goal but express that it will need some work and 11% feel that the goal is good but the University would struggle to achieve it. Students did note that this goal was not well worded and that it is was quite circular in its approach.
- b. Students responding are keen to see processes enhanced and developed to ensure two-way feedback (95%), strong links are developed between assessments and learning objectives (91%), pedagogy is learning-centred (88%) and where appropriate uses technology (80%), and the first year prepares students appropriately (86%).
- c. Only 58% of students expressed the opinion that a Charter should be developed. However, a number of students commented that they did not know what a 'Student Charter' would entail, which would have had some impact on the results. 39% of respondents answered 'neutral' when asked about the development of a Student Charter.
- d. *"There needs to be more student initiated learning and a focus on student empowerment by means of students actively participating in their learning" (Student Response)*

- e. *"I would love more of a hands-on approach to a lot of my subjects. Things such as the opportunity to work more with the teachers; such as interns or research assistants, etc." (Student Response)*
- f. *"Naturally this is what we should strive for, but the number of students who don't appear to want to put in optimum effort at university is appalling. It would be very difficult for the university to change all of these people's outlooks." (Student Response)*
- g. *"Very jargon-y goal, not nice to read or try to understand. Basically it seems to say that to meet this goal, students have to be motivated, and lecturers have to teach? Not very ground-breaking. How about something clearer, more concise, and requiring a little more of both parties? For students to engage critically with ideas, and lecturers to discuss ideas with students, rather than simply delivering them from a lectern." (Student Response)*
- h. *"There needs to be explicit recognition of VUW's commitment to student representation that helps underpin this goal." (Student Response)*

## 18. Enquiry

- a. 59% of responding students agree with Enquiry as an element for effective Undergraduate education. In contrast, 22% of students agree with this goal but express that it will need some work and 15% feel that the goal is good but the University would struggle to achieve it. Students did note that this goal was not well worded and that it could be more concise.
- b. The key concern students had on this goal related to the implications that might cross over into the teaching involvement. Responding students did not want to see this goal translated into a rationale for reducing contact hours in the undergraduate experience.
- c. *"Most important. Simply being able to memorise and recall is not enough in today's world. Research enhances our ability to UNDERSTAND the content." (Student Response)*
- d. *"Research is great, readings are great, self-directed learning is great, but it is a complement and not a substitute for teaching. Victoria should be aware of this and open about its goals - if the university can't afford to pay for more than two teaching hours per week for some 300-level courses, fine, but it should acknowledge that this isn't the ideal. Enquiry could also be better fostered if students were given more and earlier feedback on research - for example if courses were able to offer extra tutorials that focused on critiquing readings and research, and on the development of essays." (Student Response)*
- e. *"Students have engaged in research throughout their degrees for decades. This goal should not be used as an excuse to reduce the number of lectures or tutorials." (Student Response)*
- f. *"Too many words. What's the essence of it all?" (Student Response)*
- g. *"Focus upon the intrinsic value of learning needs be to be maintained. Rather than using education only for future productive capabilities." (Student Response)*
- h. *"It's important that studying can contribute to employability, but it should never be forgotten that personal development is far more important. Not all courses and programmes should be solely centered on workplace transferability. Inherently in*

*the process of learning itself are skills that will help student through all paths in life - not ONLY when at their job.” (Student Response)*

#### 19. Experience

- a. 70% of responding students agree with Experience as an element for effective Undergraduate education. In contrast, 13% of students agree with this goal but express that it will need some work and 13% feel that the goal is good but the University would struggle to achieve it.
- b. The two key concerns expressed by students is the financial implications of such a goal and a lack of emphasis and recognition current teaching staff have on these co-curricular programmes
- c. *“Having a good student experience can decide whether or not someone stays at University, so a goal like this is crucial.” (Student Response)*
- d. *“I think lecturers and tutors need to more actively present relevant co-curricular activities to students so they are aware about how to gain more experience relevant to their studies” (Student Response)*
- e. *“The experience of university can decide whether someone stays or goes, so a goal like this is crucial.” (Student Response)*
- f. *“VILP and Vic Plus are good programmes.” (Student Response)*
- g. *“It is increasingly difficult for unqualified students to gain paid work experience. With the current student loan system not paying adequate living costs, I fear that unpaid work experience or internships will not be feasible for the majority of students.” (Student Response)*
- h. *“It is all well and good to have student exchanges or field trips available, but often these are inaccessible because of monetary requirements for students.” (Student Response)*

#### Conclusions

20. To conclude our submission we would like to acknowledge key aspects of the learning experience at Victoria which students appreciate. There is strong acknowledgement amongst students that the University has some fantastic lecturers. While, our representatives are concerned about the appointment and professional development of some lecturers and tutors, when students experience a good lecturer it really makes a difference. The same should also be noted of course co-ordinators. Our representatives have experienced co-ordinators who align the learning objectives, teaching and assessment in their course/s with the learning experiences of students. Finally, some of our representatives would also like to acknowledge the role that Blackboard, when used well, can have in their learning. Student responding would also like to acknowledge the work of the Library and SLSS.

21. What has helped you in learning at Victoria?

- a. *“Being guided by the lecturer in the first stages of a subject/topic, and then being allowed to dive into it yourself and come up with your own opinions, forcing you to think critically for yourself.” (Student Response)*
- b. *“Support from lecturers, interactive learning and smaller classes at higher levels of my degree.” (Student Response)*

- c. *"Feedback. It outlines your weak areas and gives you ideas on how to improve on them while also supporting your strong areas and encouraging you to develop them. ." (Student Response)*
- d. *"Learning what is expected at university and how to meet those expectations; seeing how it is different from school and how to handle that." (Student Response)*
- e. *"Inspirational lecturers who encourage and provide opportunities for thinking outside the norm, both critically and creatively." (Student Response)*
- f. *"Teachers who challenge and inspire rather than just pass on knowledge. Any teacher that can do that for me, is enough to drive me to do the rest on my own, with occasional help/reference to teachers/tutors." (Student Response)*
- g. *"The way in which I am taught. I find if I have a good lecturer that is excited about what he/she is teaching I find I tend to enjoy going over the work and studying it." (Student Response)*
- h. *"Having a good lecturer that is enthusiastic in what they are teaching, if not then it becomes boring and you may be missing out on something you could be interested in." (Student Response)*
- i. *"Great lecturers with clear notes for their lectures, making it easier to understand concepts in the lectures; well organised assignments which make it easier to put the concepts into practise and develop others, such as research. Essentially lecturers who are passionate and dedicated to doing the most they can to help their students learn their topic as best they can." (Student Response)*
- j. *"Commerce courses have been really great at setting clear expectations at the start of the course, explaining assessments really well, and have had really approachable staff for the times there have been problems anyway - so basically great course structure and lecturers." (Student Response)*
- k. *"Classes which offer visual things such as music, documentaries, films, festivals, seminars that relate your topic of study with either current events or getting the visual idea of something have been amazing and have helped me excel in my classes as well as giving me a broader knowledge as well as experience." (Student Response)*
- l. *"Knowing that the lectures and tutors are very approachable and helpful in answering any questions I have. In lectures the use of clickers is also a fun interactive way to get the class involved without putting them on the spot!" (Student Response)*
- m. *"Allowing time to think critically about assignments. Online data bases are amazing! Library staff are incredibly helpful, passionate lecturers are very inspiring." (Student Response)*
- n. *"Teaching practice has given me opportunity to think about theory and how everything I learn at uni fits in with real life context. I also feel that the readings we do are really good and helping me develop my own opinions when i get to experience the teaching practice. This way I am processing all the knowledge actively rather than just learning and putting it aside." (Student Response)*
- o. Students also mentioned particular programmes and support services such as Student learning Support Services, the Awhina Programme, PASS, CUP, the Language Learning Centre, Te Putahi Atawhai, Disability Support Services and VUWSA support services as adding to their success at University.



22. The Undergraduate Review process so far has provided students with an opportunity to feed into the processes that the University uses for consultation. In all, students have been very supportive of this process and the outcomes of this process. We would encourage the Steering Group and University to consider the points for discussion and student comments in this submission and welcome any opportunity to further contribute to this process. However, we would also encourage the Steering Group to explore how to get the examples of good practice out of the course and the programme and into the University as a whole.

Bridie Hood

VUWSA President

Prepared by Dr. Fiona Beals (VUWSA Education Organiser)