Hello, as you may know the La Trobe University Collective Agreement expired on June 30 this year.

Our Collective Agreement is a very important document and covers terms and conditions of employment which are now due for renegotiation.

The opportunity to renegotiate a new Collective Agreement presents us with opportunities on two different but very important levels.

First, it is an opportunity to engage directly with you – the staff of the University - and in particular to continue the direct dialogue which has begun with the consultation around the revised strategic plan.

You’ll recall that that process started with the strategic directions paper ‘World Ready’, and once that had been released we sought feedback from staff across the University through Café Conversations, email submissions and through the Yammer site. And that’s how we plan to continue throughout the consultation around the Collective Agreement.

Because I’d like to maintain this honest and direct dialogue for which La Trobe is well known.

Second, the Collective Agreement is a really important enabler for the vision and objectives of La Trobe University. It’s one of a number of important mechanisms – but perhaps the most important – that can give us the framework to support our progress and our success as a leading teaching and research university.

So today I am launching a series of Faculty and Divisional focus groups to which we will invite staff to participate and through which they can contribute to the development of our next Collective Agreement.

There will be a series of these focus groups - at least one per Faculty and one per Division, at least one in the regions, ensuring that we have a really good representative voice for the staff. And ideally we will try to get a cross section of Academic and Professional staff to participate in these focus groups. And each group will consist of about 15- 20 people in order to generate really good discussion.

I was really encouraged to see the amount of feedback and level of engagement during the consultation process of the strategic directions paper and the level of interest we saw really is true to the spirit of La Trobe and I’d like to thank every one who took the trouble to participate.

The feedback that we received on World Ready is already on the intranet and is summarised under a number of themes:

1. The first is the feedback relating to our character – Where I have to say that the pride felt by staff at the University came through really strongly
2. The second focussed on teaching and learning – And the feedback there really emphasised the importance of innovation in curriculum and modes of delivery
3. The third area of feedback focussed on research where there was a strong endorsement of the University’s aspirations and the plan’s strategies in that area
4. The fourth focused on energising our communities – particularly Melbourne’s north and our regional communities
5. And the fifth themed area of feedback relates to what we called **enabling** strategies

Now it’s this final theme, enabling strategies, where the Collective Agreement really comes into its own – because it is such an important **enabler** of our strategic plan.

And the feedback that you provided during the World Ready consultation process endorsed and supported that idea.  So some of the really strong themes in the feedback related to things like:

* The need for the University to have and increased market presence
* The need for improved and streamlined internal systems
* Encouraging a more flexible approach to work
* And going about our tasks in a more business-like manner
* Being more agile and innovative, particularly in our modes of learning

Now all these are things underpinned and can be supported by our Collective Agreement.

So an invitation will soon go out to participating staff to take part in the focus groups to be held in the fortnight from 1 October – and that’s the week following semester break.

We started the consultation process around the Strategic Directions paper as a really open discussion forum, and these focus groups will continue that dialogue but in a slightly more structured format.  The groups will take a particular focus on the Collective Agreement and its content, they will compare and discuss experiences of other organisations and sectors and once again, all of this feedback will be collated for review.

And once the feedback has been received from these groups, we will report back on the data arising from the focus groups and will create a designated Collective Agreement website to which all communications and updates will be posted throughout the negotiation process.

Now those of you who are wondering where we’ve got to with the developments of the strategic plan – well I can tell you that we hope to have a draft version out later this month – later in September or early October.

So alongside our revised strategic plan that I hope to launch in late November, these steps towards agreeing a new Collective Agreement will put La Trobe in really good stead to achieve our goal of becoming one of Australia’s and Victoria’s top universities.

Thank you very much.