**\*Interviewee: Vice-Chancellor, Professor John Dewar (M)**

**\*Interviewers: Male (I), Female (I)**

**\*Location: ELT 2, La Trobe University Melbourne campus**

**\*Date: 29/02/12**

**\*Notes: unclears caused by poor microphone pick-up of questions from regional campuses**

I: My name’s Claire, I’m a student at La Trobe.

VC: Hello, Claire.

I: Hello. You talked about low-SES students and in the recent government base funding review there’s quite a lot of recommendations which are going to have greater impacts on low-SES ... on students from low-SES backgrounds and I was just wondering what your thoughts were on if any of those recommendations are brought into the tertiary sector?

VC: Do you mean essentially the impact on those students of possible increased charges?

I: Yes.

VC: Yeah. I think every university now needs to think very seriously about its scholarship strategy. We started doing that incidentally, but I don’t think we nearly have enough resources to put into scholarship support for students who are needing. We should be able to admit students irrespective of their needs, that’s the aspiration I think we should sell ourselves. Robin Williams and his Advancement and Alumni Team will be working very hard over the next five years to increase the pool of resource we have available to put into scholarships, that’s something that I think is really, really important. The university already makes quite a significant commitment through its operating funds to funding scholarships, as I said we’re reviewing how we do that at the moment and getting the balance right between attracting high achieving students through scholarship support on the one hand and providing needs by an admission on the other is ... it’s going to be a really important question for us. Having said that I don’t think there is any disconnect between high achievement and low‑SES. My experience has been that if you run good programs that are attractive to low-SES students that attracts high achieving students as well, there are a lot of very high achieving students in those categories. So we’ve got to go to another venue if that’s alright, so if we go to Bendigo, are there any questions in Bendigo?

I: I’m interested in your comment about research, [unclear] low in my numbers here at La Trobe, would there be any way of bringing those numbers up?

VC: Well it depends in part on the sources of income from which those staff are supported. One of the reasons why the Go8s have so many is because they have such big research grant income from whom ... from which they’re able to support a big cohort of research only staff. We have to improve our research income performance in order to recruit more research only staff, so that’s one thing. The workload management system is designed in part to ensure that where staff are on teaching and research contracts that the research active and research intensive staff have their levels of research activity factored into their workloads, so that’s another way in which we try and recognise research performance through allocation of work. The third thing I’d say is that I think we do need to look at the way in which we create career pathways for staff who are currently on research only, fixed terms, soft money, contracts, so I’m aware that our enterprise bargaining agreement has something to say about people who’ve been on a succession of fixed-term contracts, I think we need to be ... have a much more deliberate strategy around identifying the future academic stars who are sitting on insecure forms of employment and finding a way of pulling them through into something more secure that will mean that they end up on more permanent ... a more permanent member of our workforce, so that’s a long answer to your question but there are a number of different ways of tackling it I think. So can we go to Albury/Wodonga, is there ... are there any questions there?

I: My questions, there’s about four of them, [unclear] and I’m wondering when it’s possible to actually revisit the ways in which that has actually being hijacked because it’s [unclear] standardise approach to the workload to ensure that we’re able to actually have the appropriate time to do the research that [unclear] doing in order to boost our performance but what’s happened is that it’s gone on [unclear] 1,000 hybrid differences and it means that people are not actually given the research hours that they need and in my view that’s really a kind of a retrograde step in a kind of way because that performance both in research and [unclear].

VC: Thanks, Virginia. Look, I know that you and I will be talking about this in the near future. Of course we’ll keep the workload model under review; it has to achieve the strategic objectives we set for it. I guess one observation I’d make at this stage is that I’m keen to see a more seamless narrative around academic work at La Trobe. Workload management is a part of that but so is the research plan and definitions of established productive researchers, so is our promotion and reward system and so is our annual performance review system. They all have to come together so that everyone understands what expectations are of performance, what support there will be to assist staff to achieve those expectations and what happens when, for whatever reason, you’re not able to meet those expectations and, equally, what happens when you exceed them. So I think we need to draw all of that together into a more seamless whole than perhaps has been the case so far and we started work on that and I’ve asked Gabrielle and others to join the dots a bit more effectively than we’ve perhaps been able to do to this point, but obviously if the workload management system is operating in a way that we didn’t intend or is not achieving the outcomes for it then we need to know and that’s why dialogue between us, Virginia, is important, so I’m looking forward to having that discussion. Having said that I think it is quite legitimate to have disciplinary differences in the way things like research performance are measured but this is a big conversation that I’m happy to have perhaps in a slightly different forum. Shall we go to an internet question?

I: Okay, from the webcast, what is your preferred timeline for an appointment to be made to the position vacated by the DVC, Belinda Probert, last ... mid last year.

VC: Yeah, a really good question that, as soon as possible. As I think I mentioned on an earlier occasion I’ve asked some external ... an external expert to come in and help me and my senior team think about what our senior management and leadership structure should be like. There’s no doubt that we need a DVC, E or A or whatever we decide to call it but I need to make sure that when we fill that hole it’s a hole in the structure that is otherwise the one I want it to be so we’re very ... we’re almost conc ... by the end of the next month, March, I’m hoping to have a much clearer idea than I do at the moment about how I want that senior group, senior team, to look and to work together and then we will move very quickly to fill that position. I know that there are a number of people around the country who would be very interested in coming ... fulfilling that role and I think once we’ve got the decision right about its shape and its scope of its responsibilities then we’ll move very quickly to fill it. So I would hope to see an advertisement and the process underway by early April.

I: You’ve got about seven minutes.

VC: Okay, right. So we can go to Shepparton. Is there a question in Shepparton?

I: [Unclear] I just have a question in regards to the [unclear] great idea we’re all anxious that it’s not considered ... it’s not a substitute for the on-campus experience [unclear] regional student [unclear] on-campus experience with the academic [unclear] as well and I’m just hoping that it’s an adequate substitute. Could you discuss?.

VC: I was tempted to do the Toby Jones and say I’ll take that as a comment. Look, there are some students for whom an on-campus experience and the support that that provides is really important but there are other students who simply can’t get to a campus physically or can’t get to a campus physically every day, or three or four days a week across two or three 12 or 13 week semesters, it’s just not possible. We know already, from some programs that we have developed into more flexible modes, that there are students studying with us who are only able to do that because of that mode, so you’re right, I’m sure that there will always be a cohort of students for whom an on-campus presence is important and the supports and I’m not suggesting that we abandon that by any means but I am suggesting that there are other students for whom online and distance or more flexible modes of teaching is a critical part of them being able to participate at all, so I absolutely understand what you’re saying and I’m not sugg ... it’s not an either/or I don’t think, it’s about increasing our accessibility to students who currently aren’t able to come.

I: Just ... I noticed recently Monash is in the [unclear] student peer model [unclear] going to have a little bit more of a vocational focus and making part of the charter to accept students with lower ATAR scores, so I’m just wondering if you can comment on that model and [unclear].

VC: I think that was reported in the paper this morning, I haven’t yet had a chance to read that report. This is something that Monash has been contemplating for some time. Monash has a schizophrenic character, I think, it’s Go8 part and it’s regional in part. I think that’s their solution to that dilemma. I would not envisage taking that solution and applying it in very different circumstances, however I do think we need to look at regional ... the regional campus structure and the way in which we work with other local educational providers, the way in which we identify and meet local needs and the way in which we resource and staff programs that we offer at our regional campuses, I think those are questions that we need to look at and that will be certainly part of the conversation that we will have. I’m very interested to hear any ideas that there are from colleagues on the regional campuses as to what we should be doing that we’re not in terms of getting those organisational principles right but just because Monash has done it doesn’t mean that it’s right for La Trobe, on the other hand I think there are some issues in the regions that we will need to attend to as part of the conversation that I’m hoping we can have soon.

I: Hello vice-chancellor, I’d just like to maybe make a point about discussion this morning on ATARs because ... and then link it to obviously my area of indigenous participation and how we might be able to find a balance in terms of looking at students of our demographic who don’t come through the traditional Year 12 background and therefore don’t have an ATAR and what we might do.

VC: Yeah, the ... as I said at the beginning promoting participation doesn’t always mean lowering standards, that’s not a correlation that I’ve ever seen necessarily at work. What I think we do need to look at are ways in which the current pathways or pipelines by which students come to us might inadvertently put students off or erect barriers that they find too discouraging and I think there’s no doubt that indigenous students often fall into that category. I think there are a lot of things that we can do to make the university a more attractive place for indigenous students to come to, I see no reason why we shouldn’t have higher levels of participation than other Victorian universities, we’re dealing by and large with a similarly composed population and given our regional presence, as I said, I think we’re probably better positioned than others to attract indigenous students. I don’t think we need assume that establishing special pathways is always in opposition to promoting an improvement in the quality of the general student body that we admit measured on the ATAR score. I would rather see indigenous students coming to a university that everyone regards as a great university on pretty much every measure than one that isn’t, just as I would much rather see low-SES students come to a great university rather than to one that isn’t. I think that’s our mission, that’s what we’ve done really, really well and I don’t think we should walk away from that, it’s just how we measure that excellence and that is an important part of the conversation that we’re going to have. I think we'd better wrap up there. Can I just say thank you very much for your attention, there’ll be lots more opportunities to have discussions of this sort. The next phase for me is to get something down on paper that can then be read by everyone with some ideas that you can then respond to. I’m aiming to refresh the university strategic plan towards the middle or the third quarter of this year so that next year we’re pretty clear about what our aspirations are and how we’re going to get there but in the meantime thank you very much, that worked beautifully, that’s very good, well done and thank you for your time.

End of recording