**\*Speaker: Jacqui Martin**

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The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Dewar has asked us to aim to be number three in Victoria. The two universities that are standing in our way preventing us from being there are Deakin and RMIT. RMIT can compete with us in a geographical basis as well as on offering interesting and good course opportunities. Deakin competes with us by being extremely similar to La Trobe in the market. We are not seen as differentiated from them to any great degree and so people can choose to go to Deakin even though geographically they may have to travel further. There’s ... Deakin is seen as being a very credible alternative to La Trobe. So they’re the two major competitors that we have to deal with. The market has changed considerably over the last couple of years. We are now in a deregulated market. The prospective students can choose where they want to go. They are going to evaluate a much greater number of things when it comes to choosing the university that they want to study at. They also want to make sure that they’re going to get value for money and that the degree that they’re going to come out with at the end of their course of study is going to represent them well in the job market. So it’s no ... we can no longer just open our doors and assume that students will come and study with us. The role of brand is very important in enabling us to be differentiated from our competitors in the market. Our brand is who we are so when a prospective student sees our brand, interacts with our brand they need to be able to extrapolate from that what they’re going to experience and feel when they come here to La Trobe. It’s also really important that what we say ... who we say we are is actually who we are and that that is what students and staff will experience when they come here. A hollow brand will not serve us well. So having branded experiences, branded customer service, making sure that all aspects of the university’s operations are on brand and saying the same message is critical. The university’s brand journey goes back to about 2007 ... obviously it goes back a long way before that but the particular brand project that we’ve been working on commenced in late 2007. La Trobe had been under the radar prior to that time, was not top of mind in the market. But critically La Trobe didn’t have a bad brand, it just wasn’t visible. So the aim of the first phase of our brand repositioning was to really just get the La Trobe name back out there into the market. And we did this through the start of the Infinite Possibilities campaign. But you just can’t go pushing a logo out there and a name and some statements and expect people to suddenly jump on board. People then want to know more about well what exactly is sitting behind your brand? What is it you’re trying to say to us? So phase two of the brand project, we started trying to tell more stories about the individuals that were studying here at La Trobe. About the breadth of students that we were attracting here, about the breadth of experiences that you could have when you came here, not just studying but interacting with people from all around the world. Now from phase three we’re really trying to prove, we’re trying to put out there, here is the data, here are the proof points that absolutely back up the statements that we were making to the market. So that’s what we’re about to start with in phase three and it’s going to be a really exciting and I think an approach that’s going to bring a lot of clarity to our brand. It’s really critical that the university’s brand is solid and strong no matter what the context it’s seen in. Fracturing a brand to suit particular context doesn’t help anybody, either the ... say the regional context that it might be in or the university organisation as a whole. However it is really important that the university’s brand is articulated in a way that is meaningful for the context in which it’s being used. So for example if you have a regional city such as Bendigo, the examples that you might be using to actually articulate that brand into that area, you would include images of students, you would include students’ stories that are relevant to that particular area, you would include statements that are meaningful and proof points that are meaningful to that campus. But the brand itself is still the La Trobe University brand. There are a number of things that will impact on a student’s choice internationally before they actually are even looking at the university’s brand. So it’s really the reputational aspects, rankings, where are we sitting in comparison to other top universities around the world. And then taking that and comparing, well within Australia what city would I like to go to, what sort of experience do I want and how much is it going to cost me? So I think the puzzle becomes far more complicated when you start to look at it in an international market. Measuring brand is not an easy thing to do in our business. With fast moving consumer goods for example it’s very easy to see if a brand is resonating when products walk off a shelf. For us it’s a little different. But there are two ways that we can measure or have an understanding of how our brand is being perceived in the market. The first one is looking at the school leaver group and looking at first preferences. And the best measure of our brand is how many timely first preferences does La Trobe receive? So ... and I’m specifically saying timely and I’m specifically saying first. Those two things indicate a student’s aspiration. It’s this is where I want to study, I want to study that course and I want to study it at La Trobe. And they put us down as number one. The other way to measure brand and it is less quantitative, is for a brand health survey. We have conducted two of these now, two years apart for La Trobe. We did one in 2009 and we then did a follow up survey in 2011. What this enables us to do is to track how our brand is perceived. We can track how aware people are of our brand, how it is perceived in the market but also how we are perceived in comparison with those other universities who are also competing with us for students. The shift ... it takes a long time to shift perceptions of a brand. Again especially in this sector and especially when you don’t have large amounts of money to saturate the market with information about your brand. So to expect to see major moves in a brand health survey in two years is just not going to happen.

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