

# Improving Teaching and Learning: A systemic approach to institutional change

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# Presentation summary

- Improving quality of learning through curriculum design
- Aligning promotion policies to drive academic behaviour
- Providing budget incentives
- Structural and cultural obstacles.

# The context and the challenge

- La Trobe was established in 1967
- Now has almost 27,000 students
- Offers professional, generalist and specialist degrees
- Strong research record in sciences, humanities and social sciences
- Recent decline in enrolments.

# Context and challenge (cont)

- Diverse student body, including many ill-prepared for university
- Conservative academic staff promotion criteria; little weight to teaching
- Scored low on external measures of teaching quality
- Declining staff/student ratio
- Teaching indistinguishable from competitors.

# A once-in-a-decade opportunity?

- Completely new senior executive over 2007 - 2008
- New strategic plan – review of *all* courses announced
- Restructure of academic support services
- Creation of a united teaching and learning leadership team

# The La Trobe approach

- Systematically improve quality of teaching and learning through curriculum design, not individual teachers
- Curriculum Taskforce developed principles underpinning good curriculum design
- Widespread consultation; two iterations before formally approved by University.

# The La Trobe approach (cont)

- Distinctive features of *Design for Learning*
  - Shared graduate capabilities
  - Grad capabilities assessed against agreed standards of achievement
  - Mapping development, assessment and evaluation of grad capabilities at the program level (rather than subject level)
  - Program structure which includes cornerstone, mid-point and capstone to ensure student feedback.

# Changing the culture

- Significant staff engagement during consultation process, *but*
  - Most staff take their leads from their Heads of School/Department and Deans
  - and from promotions scheme
  - Heads of School/Department and Deans preoccupied with budgets and research targets.

# Changing the culture (cont)

- Promotions criteria reviewed – extensive consultation
- Can now be promoted for teaching excellence if specific evidence provided, including evidence of preparation for successful teaching (eg professional development)
- Requirement that all staff undertake professional development.

# Budgets

- University support for three year *Design for Learning* Project (approx A\$7 million)
- Curriculum and Teaching Improvement Index (approx A\$750,000 p.a.)
  - Funding ‘top sliced’ from faculties
  - Funding redistributed on basis of curriculum and teaching preparation and performance.

# Lessons learned so far

- Morale improved by taking evidence-based and consultative approach
- Implementation working parties with wide representation overcome isolation
- Strategic importance of including and convincing leaders/managers
- Communicate, communicate, communicate!

# Conclusion

- Distinctive approach which focuses on curriculum
- Aligning every possible driver to that goal
- Any university could adopt
- But depends on the will and capacity of dedicated individuals
- Only real outcome is increased student learning.

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Thank You

