VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
ACADEMIC BOARD

PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS: REPORT OF THE 2006 WORKING GROUP ON UNDERGRADUATE AND HONOURS DEGREES AT VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

The Pathways to Success working group was commissioned by the Senior Management Team and was formed in March. The group met regularly from April to August 2006.

The initial report of the working group is attached. It is intended that this report will be circulated to the wider academic community for consideration and feedback and will come back to future meetings of Academic Committee and Academic Board for discussion in 2007.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Academic Board:

> **Receives** the report of the 2006 Working Group on Undergraduate and Honours Degrees at Victoria University of Wellington, and
>
> **Notes** that the report will be circulated to Faculties for consideration and feedback before being considered by Academic Committee and Academic Board in 2007.

Lyn Kelly
Academic Policy Adviser

16 November 2006

Pathways to Success

Report of the 2006 Working Group on

Undergraduate and Honours Degrees at Victoria University of Wellington

October 2006

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Terms of Reference

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON

'PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS'
UNDERGRADUATE AND HONOURS DEGREES AT VICTORIA

Terms of Reference

1 To consider the findings of the 'Review of Undergraduate and Honours degrees' and suggest alignments between these and the VUW *Strategic Plan 2005-2015,* the recommendations of the cycle 3 audit report (August 2005), and recent international developments in this area.

2 To identify principles which inform the overall structure and presentation of the undergraduate and honours programmes[1] to:

- establish clear pathways within and between degrees;
- facilitate the definition and achievement of course and programme learning outcomes;
- facilitate the definition and achievement of generic and University-wide graduate attributes.

3 To identify key performance indicators in relation to the distinctiveness, relevance and quality of undergraduate and honours programmes.

4 To suggest a strategy and identify resources to enable the strengthening, rationalisation and re-development of undergraduate and honours programmes within and across faculties.

Considered by Senior Management Team (28 January 2006)
Academic Committee (16 February 2006)

Approved by: Senior Management Team (28 February 2006)

Report due: mid-June 2006

For consideration by: Faculties
Academic Committee
Academic Board

Office of the Assistant Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
28 February 2006

[1] Including the use of Special topics (as recommended by Academic Committee, Nov 2005)

Group Membership

David Crabbe - (Convenor)
Peter Adds - (Toihuarewa)
Tom Angelo - (UTDC)
Shaunnagh Dorsett - (Faculty of Law)
Cedric Hall - (Faculty of Education)
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Graeme Whimp - (PGSA)
Nicki Wilford - (VUWSA)
Lyn Kelly - (Office of the AVC (Academic))

Background and process

This report was commissioned by the Senior Management Team as a continuing examination of undergraduate and honours degrees, following an earlier report (*Review of Undergraduate and Honours Degrees Discussion Paper),* presented in April 2005. We were asked to consider the findings of this review and suggest alignments between these and the VUW *Strategic Plan 2005-2015,* the recommendations of the cycle 3 audit report (August 2005), and recent international developments in this area. We also considered the submissions from the University community in response to the earlier report. The group met regularly from April to August 2006.

The Strategic Plan outlines a number of pressures in providing quality tertiary education. Important factors include:

- The number of school leavers from the local catchment area is projected to increase in the short term, then decrease to around 2005 levels;
- The demographics of the student population are changing – we can expect more mature and part-time students; a variable proportion of international students, and a higher percentage of Maori/Pacific Island students;
- There is an increasing demand from students for flexibility in course options, delivery options, and content;
- There are increasing pressures to set new standards internally, including pressures to adopt specified standards for accreditation purposes.
- Tertiary sector changes include emphasis to be given to teaching and learning as well as the increased emphasis placed on research due to the PBRF environment;
- There are questions surrounding the graduate attributes desired by students, alumni, and by employers, and how we might measure these;

- There is continuing debate around the relative merits of research, teaching, and professional practice as well as the desire to create synergies within these different activities;
- VUW needs to achieve its strategic goals while operating within tight financial and physical constraints;
- A large number of courses poses challenges for the university administration in timetabling and other support areas;
- There is increasing and sometimes conflicting pressure on staff to perform well on all fronts.

In this challenging context, the activity of teaching and learning is an area of central importance to the achievement of many of the University's strategic goals. The working group focused on a broad consideration of teaching and learning at the University, starting with the earlier discussion document and engaging in further consultation with a number of people in the University and extensive discussion that drew on the varied experience of the members of the group. Our recommendations follow.

Summary of Recommendations

The 2006 Undergraduate and Honours Degrees Working Group recommends:

Considering the structure of degree programmes

1 That the University prepare a generic characterisation of each level from 100 to 400 for presentation to Academic Board with a view to establishing a common reference point for programme and course design.

2 That the Academic Board adopt the following broad principles and apply them in considering new courses, programmes and programme reviews:

- That 100 and 200-level courses are largely preparatory in nature building towards subject specialisation in 300 and 400-level courses; and
- That the number of 100 and 200-level courses be generally limited to a small number of high quality courses.

3 That the University retain its current 3+1+1 degree structure, but continue to monitor compatibility with international tertiary degree reforms such as the Bologna model, in order to facilitate mutually beneficial exchange between New Zealand and Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

An integrated system of learning outcomes

4 That the *Prospectus* of each undergraduate major and honours programme identify the specific graduate attributes of that major – and related core knowledge and skills outcomes – and identify the specific levels and courses in which those attributes are developed and related outcomes assessed.

5 That all honours programmes indicate in the *Prospectus* how students will both develop appropriate disciplinary research skills and demonstrate academic distinction through the honours experience.

6 That the *Prospectus* of each undergraduate major and honours programme make explicit how the University graduate attributes of Communication, Creative and Critical Thinking, and Leadership are realised in the specific graduate attributes of that major.

7 That the Course Outline for each undergraduate and honours course that is a part of a major state how the course objectives relate to specific graduate attributes of the major.

8 That each undergraduate major and honours programme include student self-direction in learning as a specific graduate attribute and identify strategies to achieve and assess it.

Mapping pathways in the Undergraduate and Honours programme

9 That the University undertake a project to communicate, in a standard way, clear pathways through all undergraduate majors and honours programmes, for the benefit of all prospective and current students and staff.

10 That the University develop an automated, online system for informing students of their progress toward their intended degrees, including current information on the completion of all required elements.

Good course design and effective teaching practices

11 That the University establish and promote informed principles of good course design and teaching practices in undergraduate and honours courses through all available policy, process, and academic development means. Particular attention should be paid to the quality, timeliness, and use of feedback.

Measuring quality

12 That the University develop University-wide measurable indicators of teaching and learning effectiveness and quality in undergraduate and honours courses.

13 That all Faculties report annually on results achieved against those teaching and learning effectiveness indicators, as well as on analyses of, and responses to, those indicators and trends.

14 That the University develop agreements with selected universities with which it can benchmark its teaching and learning effectiveness and quality.

Focusing on the first-year experience

15 That the University set up a specific project to focus attention and adequate resources on developing and enhancing the quality of the overall experience of our first-year students – including engagement in learning and connection to the University community – and of their academic success.

16 That an externally validated survey of student learning engagement and experiences – focusing in particular on first-year students – be carried out as a key element in the University's academic quality evaluation and enhancement efforts.

Implementation

17 That the University provide sufficient resources – in terms of funding, infrastructure, and staff support – to enable Faculties and Schools to implement recommendations arising from this report with no increase to the workload of current staff.

1 Pathways to Success

A key concept for the working group has been the notion of ‘pathway’. A pathway can refer to the route taken through a degree and the relevant signposts. It can also refer to a pathway beyond the first degree into honours and subsequent research degrees, or onto a career. Provision of the ‘big picture’ or a map is an important responsibility of the University and the majors it offers. A big picture would include not only the courses that constitute a major but also the coherence of the skills and knowledge that are to be developed at each level, and the paths that lead to higher degrees or to employment opportunities. Thus our first concern is that these possibilities and expectations be made as transparent as possible.

In addition to mapping the pathways, it is important to provide systems that promote success at the various stages of those pathways. The responsibility of the University is to provide reasonable support along the way to facilitate an understanding of the overall intention and expectation in completing a university degree and to provide the best opportunities to meet those expectations. Therefore our second concern is that the quality of these opportunities be defined and fostered.

Overarching these concerns is the commitment to social engagement. As a University, we should be committed to social engagement in learning and teaching in at least two ways:

- Our majors need to demonstrate commitment to our students as members of our academic communities. At a minimum level this means that we need to foster participation by students in collaborative scholarly interaction that leads to developing understanding and the ability to express that understanding.
- We need to produce graduates who are already socially engaged in that they are experienced in the participatory creative and critical thinking required of leaders in a complex society.

In discussing the ways in which pathways might be defined and managed, the group came to the conclusion that the key focus was the programme of the majors offered at the University. The major is the largest coherent programme of study within a discipline and is usually managed by a group within one School.

Outcomes and progression

Learning outcomes and progression towards those outcomes are two important elements in characterising the nature of degrees. The working group takes the view that the outcomes and progression within a major must in all cases be transparently communicated. This transparency is important for a number of reasons:

- Students need to have a clear idea of what is expected of them, not only as future graduates, but also as students moving through levels of increasing knowledge and skill towards graduate status. Greater clarity of process and expected outcomes lead to more focused performance;

- Teaching staff need to have a common view of the range of capabilities that are being aimed at in their graduates and how those capabilities are fostered in order to establish collective and coherent action in designing courses;
- There needs to be accountability of Schools to the University to demonstrate the quality of what is being offered in their majors. A statement of target outcomes and progression seems to be the minimum required to do this;
- The academic audit process requires accountability to CUAP that what is being claimed is in fact being demonstrated through evidence.

Outcomes

Several outcome statements already exist at different levels in the University's repertoire of teaching and learning documents.

- At the University level, there is a statement of generic graduate attributes (communication, creative and critical thinking, and leadership).
- At the major/programme level, there are statements of specific graduate attributes that are written for each major at the CUAP proposal stage.
- At the Course level, aims and objectives are specified in the Course Outlines for every course.

Although the course objectives are taken seriously and monitored for their relationship with assessments, it is fair to say that the major-specific graduate attributes and the generic University graduate attributes have yet to be used in any way other than as valued aspirations, or at worst, as required bureaucratic statements.

The 2005 Academic Audit Report supported a proposal that the University map 'the development of graduate attributes within programmes of study' and 'seek to align course learning outcomes and graduate attributes within selected programmes' (Section 5.2 p. 28). We propose in the present report that the University now take a serious and systemic view of learning outcomes and produce a template that integrates outcomes at different levels of specificity. This issue is discussed further in Section 3.

A further focus in specifying attributes is potential activity after graduation: employment or further academic research. The main link made between majors and employment is in the CareerView publications about future careers for those majoring in specific subjects. We believe that serious consideration needs to be given by programmes to how their majors prepare students for different pathways beyond the degree. Some do this already.

Progression

While there are statements of outcomes in the system, albeit no integrated statement, there is less evidence of a statement of progression in majors. While there are instances of good practice in this regard, there is certainly no widely available information on how a student might incrementally move from one level to another,

and the expected development of skills and knowledge at each level. The identification of pathways through a major and into honours, and of the skills and knowledge picked up on the way, is an important illumination of the undergraduate experience for all involved in the process. Moreover, there is a need for the university to monitor the success rate in moving along those pathways, indicating the need for well developed measurements of progression through retention rates, grade distribution etc.

In the sections of the report that follow, we address the following key areas:

- the structure of the undergraduate degree,
- the systematic integration of learning outcomes at all levels,
- good course design and teaching practice,
- mapping pathways in more detail for greater transparency to staff and students,
- identifying appropriate measures of quality in the curriculum,
- the nature of the first-year experience – the first important step in the progression towards graduate status,
- implementation of change in teaching and learning.

2 Structure and content of degree programmes

In attending to outcomes and progression, it is clearly important that we establish some common features for the structure of our undergraduate degrees. None of the features we recommend is particularly new or radical but, taken together, they provide a unity of approach that will strengthen discussion about degrees and establish a Victoria perspective on the undergraduate degree experience.

Characterising the levels of study in undergraduate and honours degrees

As students progress through their major(s) there is an opportunity not only for further development of subject-specific knowledge and skill but also for generic life-long learning skills and for the enhancement of a sense of group identity. Subject-specific learning and the experience of being part of a wider world of study should be essential characteristics of being a student at Victoria.

Some majors have core (and compulsory) elements in which all major students will meet, although this is more common with vocational degrees, or in degrees with professional validation. It would seem desirable for all majors to contain at least some defined core element at 200 and 300-levels.[2] From an academic standpoint, the core element should entail the study of fundamental knowledge and skills of the particular discipline – with assessment that is appropriate to the learning outcomes at that level.

There should also be a transparent *connection* and *progression* between core elements at 200 and 300-level that demonstrates the notion of developing expertise.

[2] Where 'core' is defined by more than simply a certain number of credits or courses.

Progression from level to level is central to the idea of connected and incremental learning. We believe that core skills and knowledge covered at 300-level should complete the undergraduate experience while simultaneously providing an appropriate preparation for honours-level study, and should therefore be designed to achieve this effect. The core provision should also incorporate, in an appropriate form, the graduate attributes established by the university.

In order to guide and to some extent set a standard expectation at each level, the group feels that there is a case for a generic characterisation of what is expected at the different levels of the three-year undergraduate degrees. Four-year degrees (and majors that begin at 200-level) might spread the progression somewhat differently but we would expect the range to be similar. It would be helpful in characterising the Victoria undergraduate degree if Academic Board developed and adopted a broad characterisation to guide the development of programmes and courses at different levels. An example (only for illustration of what is intended, not a proposed wording) of the generic character of a three-year degree and honours degree is provided below:

100-level

PREPARATION

Teaching and learning emphasises broad and introductory enquiry in key areas.

Introductory levels of knowledge; an ability to communicate clearly an understanding of the key concepts, theories and ideas within a subject; basic discipline skills; location and use of evidence; synthesis and evaluation of information from a number of sources.

200-level

CONSOLIDATION

The focus is on enhancing skills developed at 100 level and preparing students for the more research-focused, or in some areas, applied approaches of 300-level. Emphasis is on:

Communication of an understanding of a greater number of concepts, theories and ideas and/or a deeper engagement with several of them; the application of theories and concepts to a greater number of instances; enhancement of the students' acquisition and use of core skills of the discipline.

300-level

SPECIALISATION

The emphasis is on research-focused learning with a deeper knowledge of specialised subjects.

Developing an understanding of how source materials or data are gathered and interpreted; an ability to communicate complex ideas through various media or genres; an ability to demonstrate independence and self-reflection as well as collaboration in various tasks; engagement with research questions or applied problems.

Undergraduate degree completed

400-level

ADVANCED SPECIALISATION

Drawing upon the 300-level experience, the focus is on enhancing subject skills and knowledge to the extent that the best student output is of publishable quality.

A specialised knowledge of particular areas of enquiry; application of theories, skills, concepts and methods to research questions and projects; the understanding of varied research methods; enhanced critical awareness of new knowledge in the discipline; the clear representation of disciplinary problems; expression through more extensive written work.

Honours degree completed

In this example, it will be noted that 300 and 400-levels have been grouped together as a period of specialisation that is continued beyond the first degree into the second. We believe there needs to be a strong bridge between 300 and 400-level. (In many cases recruitment into honours should be encouraged from 200-level as already happens in Law at VUW, and in other subjects at other universities.)

Characterising the degree structure in this way represents a strengthening of the connection between the levels of study. In this schema, the introductory nature of 100-level becomes more apparent; the way this is sustained and enhanced at 200-level provides that level with a particular relevance; and overall 100 and 200-levels act as a platform for progression to a research-orientated 300-level into honours and beyond.

Recommendation 1

That the University prepare a generic characterisation of each level from 100 to 400 for presentation to Academic Board with a view to establishing a common reference point for programme and course design.

A generic characterisation of the undergraduate degree such as outlined above suggests a particular configuration of the courses that make up a major. In order to ensure that students are exposed to the core elements of the discipline, the choice of 100 and 200-level courses should be limited. A core of large first year courses will be complemented by a limited number of second-year courses that also have large

enrolments and which, like 100-level courses, are generally team-taught[3]. Fewer courses, though with larger numbers, will enable programmes and schools to focus specifically on the quality of the first-year experience, thus enhancing retention rates. The group is aware that larger 100 and 200-level courses will present their own challenges in terms of teaching and assessment.

Limiting the numbers of courses at 100 and 200-level enables more specialised courses to be developed at 300-level and beyond, when the students already have a broad foundation in the discipline and are ready to apply that knowledge and skill to specialised areas of study. These courses with smaller enrolments will provide a much better environment within which to encourage a focus on research-based learning, building on the foundation laid down in the preparatory levels.

The result will be a more logical, progressive majors system, with an appropriate acquisition of skills and subject knowledge and understanding, and a strong basis for proceeding to honours.

Recommendation 2

That the Academic Board adopt the following broad principles and apply them in considering new courses, programmes and programme reviews:

- **That 100 and 200-level courses are largely preparatory in nature building towards subject specialisation in 300 and 400-level courses; and**
- **That the number of 100 and 200-level courses in a discipline area be generally limited to a small number of high quality courses.**

Transferability

It is desirable that the structure of our degrees is compatible with practice elsewhere in New Zealand and internationally in order to encourage student mobility through exchanges and continuing postgraduate study. In the case of NZ degrees, compatibility is ensured largely through CUAP and NZQA guidelines. In the case of international degrees, it is important for us to monitor international standardising models and to judge whether these models have implications for VUW. The principal model is the Bologna agreement (see Appendix A).

The review group agreed that Victoria's current provision needs no major reform to be compatible with the Bologna system.

[3] This may have implications for streaming classes and timetabling, factors that would have to be taken into account in an implementation plan.

Recommendation 3

That the University retain its current 3+1+1 degree structure but continue to monitor compatibility with international tertiary degree reforms such as the Bologna model, in order to facilitate mutually beneficial exchange between New Zealand and Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

3 An integrated system of learning outcomes

As suggested in Section 1, we believe that it is essential that the University build a strong systemic framework for integrating the various levels of learning outcome. Currently we have the university graduate attributes (which have yet to be made operational), graduate attributes for recent majors (which appear to be rarely taken account of), and aims and objectives for each course (which are used to guide the assessment used in those courses). A system is needed that integrates the different levels of goal and ensures that these goals are assessed either directly or indirectly. The system needs to be coherent and useful. In this section we cover the various levels and at the end make a series of recommendations that we believe will meet these criteria of coherence and usefulness.

Our approach to the integration has been to link university graduate attributes to major-specific graduate attributes, which in turn are linked to knowledge and skills that are assessed in each course at each level of the major.

Graduate Attributes: university and major-specific

Over the last two decades universities around the world have begun to work with graduate attributes (sometimes known as key competencies or graduate capabilities) as important statements of expected educational outcome. During the early 1990s a number of reports were produced on the importance of graduate attributes to University curricula. Since that time, much of the effort surrounding graduate attribute projects has been towards the embedding of appropriate skills or capabilities into curricula and their mapping against study pathways. While discipline specific skills remain important, it is understood that graduates also require generic skills, which ensure that graduates are flexible and adaptable, able to solve problems, to communicate effectively, and to think critically and creatively.

In the Victoria University of Wellington Strategic Plan (2005-2015) the following Graduate Attributes have been adopted by University Council:

- Communication;
- Creative and critical thinking; and
- Leadership.

Examples of how these graduate attributes might be broken down into constituent skills are provided in Appendix B. However, graduate attributes are context-dependent. The way in which the three generic attributes are realised and assessed will vary, therefore, from discipline to discipline. For this reason, the first step in

making university graduate attributes operational is to ensure that there are specific graduate attributes for each major, and that each level of the major is characterised by listing the specific attributes that are expected to be developed at that level.

The University graduate attributes then need to be mapped onto the major-specific graduate attributes, which are ultimately translated into learning activities and assessment in courses at the different levels. In this way, graduate attributes should be developed as an integral part of the curriculum goals of the major.

Our main recommendations in this area are, therefore, that these relationships between goals at different levels be made explicit by each major, recognising the distinctive nature of honours.

Recommendation 4

That the *Prospectus* of each undergraduate major and honours programme, identify the specific graduate attributes of that major – and related core knowledge and skills outcomes – and identify the specific levels and courses in which those attributes are developed and related outcomes assessed.

Recommendation 5

That all honours programmes indicate in the *Prospectus* how students will both develop appropriate disciplinary research skills and demonstrate academic distinction through the honours experience.

Recommendation 6

That the *Prospectus* of each undergraduate major and honours programme make explicit how the University graduate attributes of Communication, Creative and Critical Thinking, and Leadership are realised in the specific graduate attributes of that major.

Course Objectives

Courses specify the only objectives against which students are assessed. These objectives need to combine the specific learning outcomes that the discipline considers important together with the general ones valued by the University. It is essential that each discipline consider the aggregate of the objectives that a student will meet during the courses of their major, and evaluate whether they make up a satisfactory set of knowledge and skills for the discipline, as well as encompassing the generic attributes set by the University. Course outlines must describe clearly to students how course objectives relate to generic and programme specific attributes.

Recommendation 7

That the Course Outline for each undergraduate and honours course that is a part of a major state how the course objectives relate to specific graduate attributes of the major.

Considering the importance of self-directed, independent and collaborative learning

A sustained programme of self-directed study is a key element in a student's successful completion of the major. Self-directed learning leads to the achievement of learning goals through effective exploitation of available learning opportunities: lectures, library resources, field trips, experiments, assignments, engaged interaction etc. The culmination of self-directed learning is to be found in advanced tasks in which students need to demonstrate considerable independence. For this reason, the 300-level core element should emphasise research-based or problem-orientated assessed work which is prepared and researched over a longer period than is usual at 100 or 200-levels. Such work constitutes an appropriate experience in preparation for progression to Honours-level study or employment.

Self-directed and independent learning is not contradictory to collaboration in learning. There is considerable evidence that collaboration, particularly through dialogue, is an important element in developing new understandings. Self-directed learners are likely to use collaboration to their advantage. We believe, therefore, that academic programmes should not only explicitly adopt self-direction as a major-specific graduate attribute (leading to independent work), but should provide extensive opportunities for interaction, collaboration and other means to achieve that attribute.

Recommendation 8

That each undergraduate major and honours programme include student self-direction in learning as a specific graduate attribute and identify strategies to achieve and assess it.

4 Mapping pathways in the Undergraduate and Honours programme

In order to achieve greater transparency, we propose that the University undertake a process of 'mapping' its majors in a simple, standardised way. The mapping would clarify the pathways that can be taken, in particular the combinations of courses that make up the major and lead on to honours, together with the generic outcomes to be achieved at each level. We recognise the dangers of over-standardisation and we certainly do not want to propose busy work that is bureaucratic and ineffective. But nor do we accept that it is adequate in a large teaching institution that we do not provide as much transparency to students and staff as possible. This is a communication issue and if the communication is standardised across majors, it

makes for easier comprehension by students who are making important choices. The process of mapping is a project that would require central support.

An example of how Graduate Attributes can be integrated into the Course Objectives is included in Appendix C. In addition to mapping pathways for greater transparency, it is important that students have access to up-to-date and accurate information on their progression along a particular pathway, and whether they have completed required elements. The ideal is that this be automated and available to students on-line.

Recommendation 9

That the University undertake a project to communicate, in a standard way, clear pathways through all undergraduate majors and honours programmes, for the benefit of all prospective and current students and staff.

Recommendation 10

That the University develop an automated, online system for informing students of their progress toward their intended degrees, including current information on the completion of all required elements.

5 Good course design and effective teaching practices

This report so far has commented on the structures within which teaching and learning take place, and has recommended a clarity in expressing expected outcomes at different levels and an integrated approach to defining those outcomes. The key issue for tertiary level education is the facilitation of student progression through those structures. The University already has a number of strengths in this regard:

- Student learning support, providing consultations workshops and other services;
- Other student services including career counselling for longer term goals, counselling and medical services, accommodation and childcare services;
- A reasonably high average in student evaluations of courses;
- A number of nationally outstanding teachers;
- A new Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Learning and Teaching;
- UTDC support for academics through special courses and individual consultation.

There is still much to be done, however, in the task of ensuring that good practice is widespread in all Schools, and that staff and Schools as a whole are sufficiently supported in building good practice. Good learning opportunities, particularly in the first-year experience, are likely to increase retention rates with a significant effect on income.

Feedback is one area of teaching practice that is consistently marked as low in student evaluations. Whether this is a perception issue, or whether feedback is only poor, relative to other aspects of teaching, it is an area that needs to be looked at closely. In particular, expectations on the appropriate quality and timeliness of feedback, and the constructive use of this feedback need to be established. Feedback needs to be efficient for staff and effective for students.

Another element is standardisation of procedures. Although there are expectations of standard practice with regard to assessment for example, this is not monitored systematically and nor is it always well communicated.

Recommendation 11

That the University establish and promote informed principles of good course design and teaching practice in undergraduate and honours courses through all available policy, process, and academic development means. Particular attention should be paid to the quality, timeliness, and use of feedback.

6 Measuring quality

Measurement should be carried out primarily in the interests of those responsible for whatever elements (teaching, relevance of course content, achievement of outcomes, etc.) are being measured. If energy is being put into doing something efficiently and effectively, then those who put in the energy need to know the results. Thus personal teaching evaluations, grade distribution data, and peer review all provide useful information to academic staff in addressing the task of teaching and assessing.

At the same time there is a need for public accountability for the institution as a whole, particularly for the purposes of funding. The Performance Based Research Fund is an instance of this. The 2005 Academic Audit report comments on the lack of data to support claims that Victoria is a leading university with an international reputation. Evidence for our reputation in fostering good learning is not perhaps as easy to measure as research outputs.

There are therefore a number of reasons for taking a systemic view of measurement in teaching and learning:

- To know whether/how current learning and teaching policies are being implemented and with what effect;
- To survey current teaching and learning practice as a baseline;
- To know whether changes that have been implemented have been effective over time and therefore worth maintaining;
- To provide a basis for comparisons across the University and with other institutions, both nationally and internationally.

Measuring, once baseline data is established, almost inevitably leads to comparison, either comparison with internal norms or standards (e.g. the average student evaluation rating for teaching quality, or a target evaluation rating set by a School), or comparison with external norms or standards (e.g. the average number of New Zealand scholarships gained by Victoria students).

The group believes that we, as a University, need to undertake a systematic and serious study of measurement and of internal and external benchmarking. In particular we need to know which measurements would provide the best information to individual staff members, Heads of Schools, and Senior Management. Where appropriate, we also need to establish benchmarks within those internal measurements, to investigate external benchmarking systems, and to integrate all of that into a system of measurements that serve the purpose of setting productive goals, monitoring and providing useful feedback. International benchmarking is an important component in this system to underpin Victoria's reputation as an international university.

It is beyond the scope of this review to decide on measurements but we would expect them to refer to such areas as assessment practice, the quality of learning opportunities, resources, retention, and achievement of stated learning outcomes. A list of illustrative measurements is provided in Appendix D.

Recommendation 12

That the University develop University-wide measurable indicators of teaching and learning effectiveness and quality in undergraduate and honours courses.

Recommendation 13

That all Faculties report annually on results achieved against those teaching and learning effectiveness indicators, as well as on analyses of, and responses to, those indicators and trends.

Recommendation 14

That the University develop agreements with selected universities with which it can benchmark its teaching and learning effectiveness and quality.

7 Getting Started Successfully: The First-Year Experience

Once students have been accepted and admitted into a degree programme, it is in everyone's interests to ensure their success, not only in completing the degree but completing it in a way that leaves a sense of personal achievement and of membership of the academic community – a sense that should continue after graduation as alumni. Attrition rates in New Zealand first year university study are currently quoted at around 24% and higher for Maori students (35%) and Pasifika students (29%)[4]. Although this partly reflects the national open-entry policy, it no doubt represents an inefficient use of talent and resources.

The group believes, therefore, that considerable effort should be made to establish both success and the sense of community membership from the first year of the undergraduate degree. There is a supporting evidence that student success is strongly related to the academic and social integration of undergraduate students into the university culture and learning community, and that the first-year experience is critical to this. Becoming connected or embedded in the university and disciplinary community is also important in terms of retention of students through their undergraduate years into graduate and postgraduate studies. This has considerable financial implications for the University. An improvement of 1% in the attrition rate has been calculated to represent around $1.5 million in income[5].

Improving the opportunities for engagement and connection is a challenge. The student population is an increasingly heterogeneous group and the time available to be involved in extracurricular activities has diminished for many students as they work more in paid employment, spend time commuting to the university, or are mature students who have established social networks outside of the university. The one experience common to all students, however, is their participation in academic courses, and their connection and engagement with the university community should be embedded in this academic experience. Providing orientation programmes, mentoring schemes and a range of student support systems, while important, will only lead to student success and retention if the educational setting in which students learn also promotes engagement and connectedness. This is a more radical proposition and calls for a questioning of how teaching and learning take place from the first year through to post-graduate studies.

This is not to say that the first year is not working reasonably well for the majority. A June 2006 survey of first year students[6] conducted by Marketing found that 80% of the students agreed that they 'really liked being a University student', around 30% described their first trimester as 'really enjoyable' while a further 36% found it 'fairly good'. 21% had 'a few ups and downs' and 6% were not enjoying it much. Only 1% thought it was 'a disaster'[7]. Nonetheless, the group believe that these figures can be improved to everyone's advantage.

[4] Government Education Counts website:
http://www.educationcounts.edcentre.govt.nz/statistics/tertiary/index.html
[5] Figure provided by AVC (Academic)
[6] Rachel Grant 2006 'First Year Student Survey – June 2006'. VUW Marketing. A similar survey was conducted in 2005.
[7] The sample over-represented female students (61% rather than 54%) and those studying full-time.

It is clear that in focusing on the first year we need to identify factors that are likely to enhance the first-year experience. If Recommendation 2 is accepted, and there is a trend towards larger and fewer first-year courses, then an opportunity is created to focus resources on developing elements in those courses that make for very high quality. Appendix E lists a number of elements indicated by research as contributing to a positive or negative first-year experience.

Enhancing the first-year experience

Taking the view that the first-year experience is the most productive focus in the short term, the group believes that the best way to do this is to set up a project with a specific goal to enhance the first-year experience of students. The project is likely to identify a number of areas for action covering issues such as:

- Fostering good teaching and learning practice in the first-year experience of courses, particularly in the area of assessment and feedback;
- Early identification of difficulties (as evidenced by missed assignments, poor or deteriorating grades, non-attendance) and, in particular, immediate and effective response to early problems with assignments;
- Availability of clear and accessible information in a standardised format;
- Setting up helpful measures that provide feedback on the quality of the first-year experience.

One important measure of the first-year experience is the degree of 'engagement' of the students. Instruments are available to measure engagement (and even perhaps benchmark it against similar institutions). For this reason we particularly recommend that a base-line understanding of student engagement be carried out as a part of the project to enhance the first-year experience.

Recommendation 15

That the University set up a specific project to focus attention and adequate resources on developing and enhancing the quality of the overall experience of our first-year students – including engagement in learning and connection to the University community – and of their academic success.

Recommendation 16

That an externally validated survey of student learning engagement and experiences – focusing in particular on first-year students – be carried out as a key element in the University's academic quality evaluation and enhancement efforts.

8. Implementing change

The working group has not identified who should carry out the recommendations and by when. These are management issues best decided once recommendations have been accepted in principle by Academic Board and by SMT. However, it is clear that for the University to make any substantive progress in implementing these and subsequent changes to ensure quality of learning and teaching, infrastructure and resources are needed to lead various projects and to put them into effect.

The group noted that the Learning and Teaching Committee, set up some years ago and later disbanded, was responsible for drawing up a Learning and Teaching Plan. We understand that although the group produced valuable proposals in the area, it did not have an effective enough mandate to ensure a consistent quality of teaching and learning at VUW. To establish principles of good course design and teaching practice is a relatively straightforward matter. To implement these principles and practices across the University is a greater challenge.

Recommendation 17

That the University provide sufficient resources – in terms of funding, infrastructure, and staff support – to enable Faculties and Schools to implement recommendations arising from this report with no increase to the workload of current staff.

Appendices

A The Bologna Agreement
B Characterisation of Graduate Attributes and Notes on Building and Teaching Leadership Skills
C The Integration of Graduate Attributes into Course Objectives – Mapping Pathways and Attributes of a Major
D Examples of Quality Measures
E Factors considered to contribute to success in university study

The Bologna Agreement **Appendix A**

In recent years, a principle of transferability has become prevalent in reforms of higher education cultures in Europe. One notable example has been the concerted efforts of the European Community (EC) to create a common framework of higher education that will allow for the transfer of students and academics between national systems.

The Bologna Agreement (1999)[8] seeks to facilitate a common educational structure which mirrors already strong economic and cultural linkages between the partner peoples of the EU. Given the size and power of the EU, there is now pressure upon countries in other regions to ensure that their higher (i.e. tertiary) education systems are compatible so that exchanges and connections can be maintained, developed or enhanced. The University of Melbourne offers a recent high-profile example of a university in this region which may be considering that question of transferability through a process of reform to degree structures. Melbourne is creating a new 3 or 3+2 system, whereby general degrees are offered in five areas of study,[9] before the most talented students move on to a two-year master's degree. Although the system is principally designed to separate teaching and research-led teaching functions as befits a global leader, the reforms will enhance transferability with European countries. The Melbourne Model can be expressed like this:

Taught (general) bachelors	= 3 years
Taught plus research masters	= 2 years
Total period of study to MA	= 5 years

The Bologna model, which is compatible with both Melbourne and Victoria models, can be expressed thus:

Stage 1: the **bachelor** degree comprises 180 and 240 ECTS points, accumulated over 3-4 years of study[10]

Stage 2, the **master's** level study constitutes 90-120 credits studied over 1-2 years
(In the UK, Ireland and the USA, the norm is: graduate with a master's degree after one-year full-time.)

Total study period = 3-6 years

The present Victoria model recognises a norm:

[8] In June 1999, European Ministers of Education convened in Bologna and agreed to construct a 'European Higher Education Area'
[9] 1 Arts; 2 Sciences; 3 Economics, Commerce, Business; 4 Natural and Built Environment; 5 Music, VPA.
[10] (In the UK and Ireland, the norm is: 3yrs f/t study to graduate with honours.)

Taught Bachelor's	= 3 years
Honours	= 1 years
MA (taught or research)	= 1 years
Total study period	= 5 years

Understanding the synergies between these systems requires us to recognise that the Bologna system, which has to accommodate numerous countries' cultures, is based upon total numbers of credits, not a number of years.

The advantages of a system which is rationalised to accord with the Bologna principle are essentially five in number.

Such a system will:

1. Integrate New Zealand or Australian provision into a Higher Education Area which is compatible with Europe;

2. Clarify two clear tiers within the tertiary system: bachelor's and master's;

3. Enhance the prospects for mobility among students and academics;

4. Sharpen product recognition in the form of undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications;

5. Increase the facility for lifelong learning participation in a globalising world.

The ultimate aims of the system are:

- To ensure quality and ease of transfer/conversation via common standards;
- To make degrees equally saleable in world markets;
- To ensure the mobility of young people in the 21st century.

Characterisation of graduate attributes **Appendix B**

Communication

This attribute looks to effective and appropriate communication both in a general and discipline specific sense, including reading, writing, listening and speaking skills.

Students who display this attribute are able to:

a) Summarise complex information in writing and/or orally;
b) Interpret an author's position as expressed in their writing, and explain that position;
c) Present an extended argument coherently and with clear and accurate expression;
d) Concisely present key ideas, conveying the meaning clearly to a reader, viewer or listener; and
e) Establish and maintain audience interest.

Creative and Critical Thinking

This attribute looks to the ability to think creatively and critically about claims, problems and questions, to analyse and evaluate these, and to logically and coherently respond to them.

Students who display this attribute are able to:

a) Analyse and evaluate information, claims, ideas, problems or questions;
b) Summarise an argument, the assumptions it makes, and determine to what extent that argument and its assumptions are valid in a given context;
c) Develop an argument in response to a problem or question;
d) Synthesise information from different sources in a way which identifies similarities and differences.

Leadership

Leadership is a more complex graduate attribute to define, teach and assess, but no less important to use as an aspirational target. There are numerous ways in which leadership qualities can be developed and displayed, both within and outside formal learning environments. These could include taking a lead in tutorials or group exercises, working well in teams, showing initiative, and developing independent research skills. Examples of some of the ways of teaching leadership attributes, and of activities which can be used to build leadership skills, are included in the notes below.

Students who display this attribute are able to:

a) Work well with others;

b) Engage in constructive discourse, both within and without the academic environment;
c) Understand and accept social and civic responsibilities;
d) Manage time effectively;
e) Be a good listener and ask open-ended questions to clarify others' ideas; and
f) Show initiative and responsibility in the learning environment.

In determining graduate attributes it may be helpful to consider what level of achievement is required at each stage across programmes. Although it is up to the individual majors to determine their own standards against which benchmarking can occur, these should be aspirational, with a degree of stretch, while remaining realistic, relevant and measurable. An example is provided below. This example integrates communication skills with critical and creative thinking skills.

100-level

- Comprehends straightforward or explicit meanings or claims in text and can undertake simple analysis of a line of reasoning;
- Analyses and categorises straightforward information to identify basic problems and make straightforward inferences;
- Can present a précis or simple critique or analysis of a given author's position or of other primary material;
- Can apply such material to solve straightforward problems;
- Can effectively communicate the précis, critique or analysis either orally or in writing, using appropriate style and register.

200-level

- Comprehends implicit meanings and claims in text, and makes reasonable inferences about these;
- Analyses and uses inference to identify moderately complex claims, lines of reasoning, assumptions or arguments;
- Evaluates the validity of, or expose the underlying assumptions of, such claims;
- Can present a moderately complex critique or analysis of an author's position or of other primary material;
- Can prepare and present a coherent and cogent refutation of moderately complex claims and problems presented in texts;
- Can solve moderately complex problems;
- Can effectively communicate these critiques or refutations either orally or in writing, using discipline appropriate language and appropriate style and register.

300-level

- Comprehends complex meanings and claims in text;
- Analyses and uses inference to identify and synthesise complex claims, lines of reasoning, assumptions or arguments;
- Can prepare and present a coherent and cogent refutation of complex claims and problems presented in texts;
- Applies primary material to solve relatively complex problems, including demonstrating a capacity to construct and apply original or innovative solutions to given problems;
- Can effectively communicate this information either orally or in writing, using discipline appropriate language and appropriate style and register (including appropriate referencing).

Notes on Building and Teaching Leadership Skills

Activities which can be used to build leadership skills include:

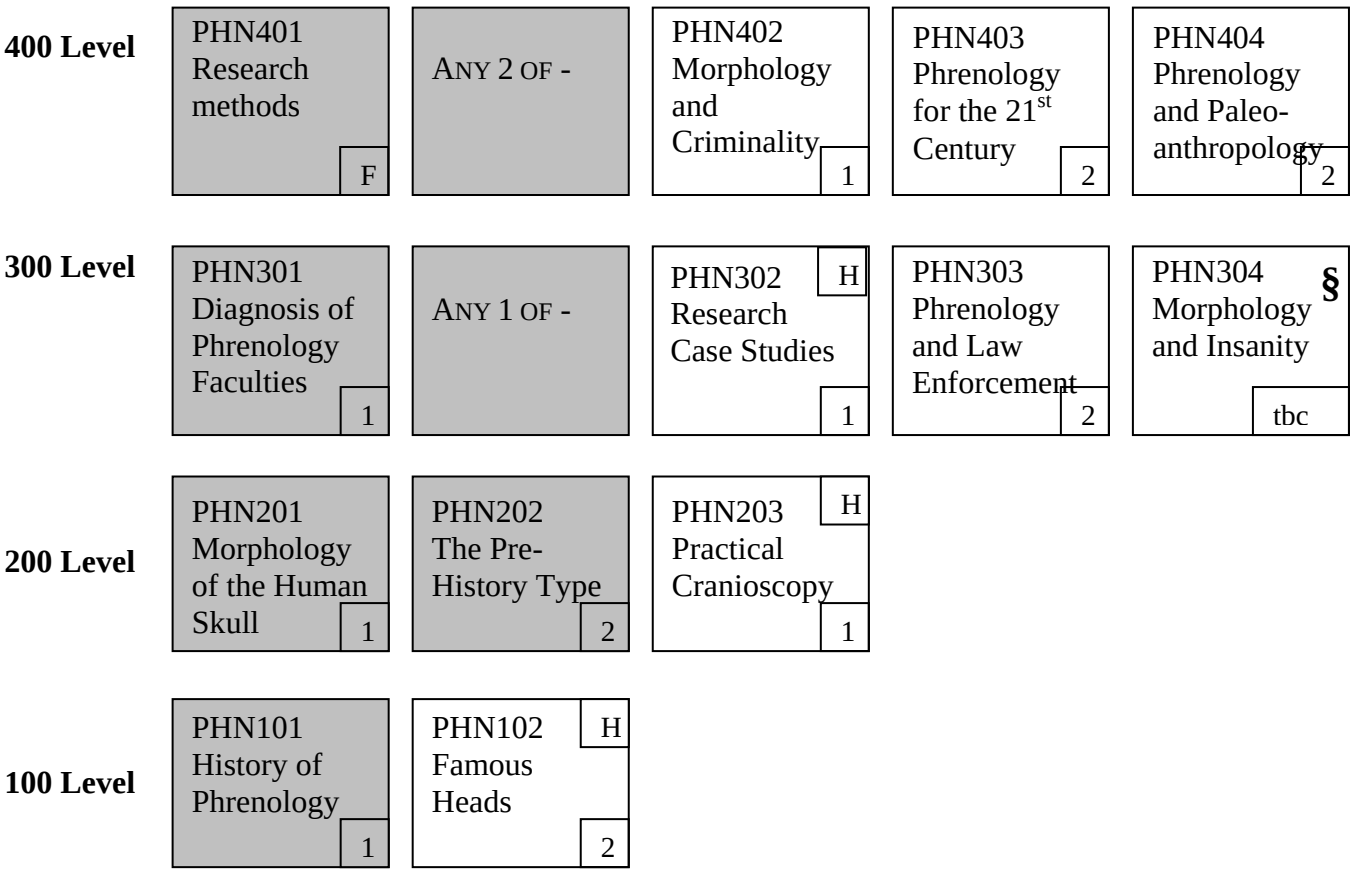
a) leading a tutorial or group exercise;
b) reporting back to a larger group;
c) independent choice of own topic;
d) opportunities to lead, for example, the facilitation of small group discussions or activities;
e) presentation of ideas back to a plenary;
f) contribution of ideas for improvement to the tutor or lecturer in a constructive way;
g) positions of responsibility in clubs, teams or ensembles;
h) competing in events such as business case competitions, music competitions, debating, writing competitions.

Ways of teaching leadership might include:

a) role modelling leadership qualities as a teacher, both within and outside the classroom;
b) providing opportunities for students to show leadership;
c) sharing stories about successful graduates;
d) having past students back to speak to classes;
e) organising alumni events.

Mapping Pathways and Attributes of a Major in Phrenology

Appendix C



Core Knowledge/Skills at this level

- be able to apply material to solve relatively complex problems, including demonstrating a capacity to construct and apply original or innovative solutions to given problems
- be competent in effective research strategies using state of the art technologies to retrieve material

- have developed a generic expertise of critical analysis and evaluation
- be able to work effectively and productively as a member of a group, including in leadership roles
- be able to understand and critique key debates within the discipline
- have developed the ability to undertake independent lifelong learning, to make well-reasoned decisions

- be able to identify the key concerns of the discipline of phrenology
- be able to precisely and effectively communicate knowledge, and debates matters to both others within the discipline and those external to it

- have a broad and systemic knowledge and understanding of the history and schools of the discipline of phrenology
- be able to relate discipline knowledge and key issues within the discipline more broadly

Attributes of the Major

The Phrenology major has identified the following attributes for a Phrenology Graduate:

University Graduate Attributes	Phrenology Graduate Attributes
Critical and Creative thinking	• Able to develop an argument in response to a problem or a question. • Able to summarise an argument, the assumptions it makes and to what extent it is valid in the original context and in other contexts. • Able to synthesise information from different sources in a way that identifies similarities and differences.
Communication	• Able to summarise complex information in writing and/or orally. • Able to interpret an author's position as expressed in their writing. • Able to present an extended argument coherently and cohesively and with clear expression. • Able to write for different audiences and in a number of genres appropriate to the purposes of writing.
Leadership	• Able to present and discuss the significance of a particular task or question to the discipline and/or to society. • Able to identify and communicate persuasively a clear solution path to a problem presented. • Able to break tasks down into prioritised and linked components.

Examples of quality measures **Appendix D**

Quality/Distinctiveness

The percentages of students from defined catchment areas:

- Highest academic achieving (NCEA?) school-leavers who choose VUW;
- Highest fine and performing arts achieving school leavers who choose VUW;
- Highest athletics achievers who choose VUW;
- Highest achieving Maori and Pacific students who choose VUW;
- Well-qualified International school leavers who choose VUW (perhaps targeted by country of origin and or segmented by English scores?);
- Adult working students in certain fields who choose VUW.

The percentages of VUW BA graduates who:

- Win local, national, and international honours and prizes;
- Gain scholarships to pursue UG study at VUW and at overseas universities;
- Gain acceptance into Honours/PG programmes at VUW and at other universities;
- Gain scholarships to PG study at VUW, at other NZ universities, and overseas;
- Have performed, presented or (co)published in recognised venues;
- Are employed one year after graduation/Employed in certain industries;
- Are employing others within five years of graduation;
- Have contributed to their communities in significant ways;
- Regard the overall academic quality of their major programme as "Very High" or "More than Adequate";
- Regard the overall 'value for investment' of their major programme as "Very High" or "More than Adequate";
- Would recommend VUW "without hesitation" to a relative or friend;
- Can name VUW's graduate attributes and explain how they have developed in those three (or four) areas as a result of their VUW experience.

  N.B. Scale used in programme reviews: Very High, More than Adequate, Adequate, Less than Adequate, Very Low.

The percentages of VUW Honours graduates who:

- Are well-qualified recruits from other universities in NZ and elsewhere;
- Win local, national, and international honours and prizes;
- Gain acceptance into Master's/PhD programmes at VUW and at other universities;
- Gain scholarships to Master's/PhD study at VUW, at other NZ universities, and overseas;
- Have performed, presented or (co)published in recognised venues;
- Are employed one year after graduation/Employed in certain industries;
- Are employing others within five years of graduation;
- Have contributed to their communities in significant ways;
- Regard the overall academic quality of their major programme as "Very High" or "More than Adequate";
- Regard the overall 'value for investment' of their major programme as "Very High" or "More than Adequate";
- Would recommend VUW "without hesitation" to a relative or friend.

<u>Quality/Effectiveness</u>

The percentages of VUW entering first-year students [broken down by ethnicity/nationality, etc.] who:

- Complete all their first-year courses successfully;
- Choose to return for Year Two after having completed Year One successfully;
- Choose to enrol in certain "target/distinctive" VUW majors;
- Complete their BA/BSc in the nominal three-year period;
- Complete their BA/BSc in four years;
- Regard the overall academic quality of Year One at VUW as "Very High" or "More than Adequate";
- Regard the overall 'value for investment' of Year One at VUW as "Very High" or "More than Adequate";
- Would recommend VUW's First-Year Experience "without hesitation" to a relative or friend;
- Can name VUW's graduate attributes and explain what they mean.

Appendix E

Factors that are considered to contribute to success in university study

Research by Hall and Kidman indicates that students at VUW value:

Content: *Content that is well selected, relevant and up-to-date.*

Information: *Clear information about the course, its objectives, its content, the assessment requirements, and constructive feedback on work.*

Engagement: *Delivery that is engaging, whether through lectures, seminars, tutorials, computer-based learning, or other methods.*

Assessment: *Tasks that are relevant, fair, and promote understanding.*

Support: *Access to lecturers, tutors and other persons who can provide support and clarification when blocks occur and more information is needed. Approachable teachers are a must.*

(Hall & Kidman, 2004, p. 337)[11]

This list shares a lot in common with such lists from a number of studies at the tertiary level. One study frequently cited in the literature is that by Chickering and Gamson (1987)[12]. From a distillation of 50 years of research on teaching and learning in higher education, they identified seven principles of good practice. Such practice ...

- *encourages student-faculty contact*
- *encourages cooperation among students*
- *encourages active learning*
- *gives prompt feedback*
- *emphasises time on task*
- *communicates high expectations, and*
- *respects diverse talents and ways of learning.*

Factors that might contribute to attrition

Among students, and especially those in their first year of university study, the main academic concerns relate to:

- Manageable workload, with some concern expressed about the viability of four Courses per trimester;
- Dealing with deadline clashes;
- Lack of productive feedback; and early monitoring of difficulties.[13]

Specific social and personal problems dealt with by the VUWSA Education Office include:

[11] Hall, C., & Kidman, J. (2004). Teaching and learning: Mapping the contextual influences. International Education Journal, 5 (3), 331-343. (http://iej.cjb.net)

[12] Chickering, A., & Gamson, Z. (1987). Seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education. AAHE Bulletin, 39, 3-7.

[13] Student Learning Support Oral Submission 26 April 2006

- Communication with lecturers and tutors;
- Plagiarism and cheating;
- Fear of failure;
- Lack of understanding of university processes and facilities;
- Lack of feedback;
- Workload;
- Homesickness and loneliness.

Among those reported in the Marketing surveys were:

- Lack of academic and social confidence;
- Doubts about the appropriateness of courses;
- A lack of clear goals;
- Emotional health problems;
- Balancing study, work, and family;
- The university experience;
- Not meeting expectations.

Other factors:

- Limited or no sense of student identification with the culture of the institution;
- Personal circumstances (various);
- Financial pressures;
- Need for learning support;
- Quality of teaching, inadequate course and assessment information, poorly framed assessment tasks, lack of constructive feedback, and other factors linked to pedagogy;
- Teacher and system inflexibility in dealing with student difficulties;
- Quality of computer, IT and library support;
- Administrative systems that are both confusing and lack a customer focus.