

# **Massey – Exceptional and distinctive.**

Notes for the Vice-Chancellor's Symposium 2008

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Thank you for coming today.

Thank you also to the organisers and those who will lead our deliberations today.

In particular, I would like to welcome Professor Diana Laurillard. Diana's work encourages us to rethink university teaching – particularly in response to the availability of new learning technologies. I am looking forward to her contribution.

Our focus today is on rethinking what we do at Massey as we work towards ensuring all of our students are involved in learning that is relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

I hesitate to call what we are seeking a “Massey model” – but that is what I believe we need to strive for.

Our strategic plan, that should be available within the next few days, makes it clear that we aim to be New Zealand's defining university and a world centre of tertiary learning.

In relation to teaching and learning, our goal is to ensure an exceptional and distinctive learning experience for all students.

Let's be clear, Massey is already seen as a leader in tertiary teaching as demonstrated by the number of awards won by staff, the hosting of the National Centre of Tertiary Teaching Excellence and the importance placed on teaching within the culture of the University.

We are the pre-eminent provider of distance learning in New Zealand and have pioneered learning within a multi-campus environment.

Our commitment to skills, lifelong learning and access has served many generations of learners from all backgrounds.

This is a proud record.

But the world of learning is changing and if we are to be defining then we need to make our contribution to the future of tertiary teaching.

Here are my first questions for you today: – **what do you think tertiary learning should look like in the future? What would an exceptional and distinctive learning experience for learners at Massey look like?**

These are big questions so let me make some other points and pose some other questions to, hopefully, assist with your thinking. I will warn you that I am going to skip quickly over some difficult and highly contestable ideas in order to create a basis for discussion.

The world of learning is changing dramatically because we are entering the knowledge age.

This does not mean we value knowledge more than other societies, but we do tend to see knowledge in economic terms. It is the primary source of economic growth.

This has large implications for what knowledge means.

Manuel Castells says that knowledge is no longer a “thing” developed and stored by experts and able to be organised into disciplines. Instead, knowledge is seen as a form of energy. It is dynamic and fluid, something that does things or makes things happen. It is defined not by what it is, but what it can do.

Similarly, Jean-Francois Lyotard has talked about our new understanding of knowledge as “performativity” – its ability to do things.

The essential point to be made here is that knowledge is equated with doing.

Let me put this point into practical terms. Sir Ken Robinson points out that when a graduate presents themselves to an employer today, the fact that they have a degree will be taken for granted. The employer will say, “It is nice you have a degree but what can you do?”

It is this emphasis on knowing and doing that has so many implications for tertiary learning.

It has led to many of you rethinking your pedagogical models.

You are not alone of course – a lot of rethinking is going on.

You will be familiar with the Melbourne model. Having proliferated courses and not thought a lot about teaching and learning, Melbourne announced about a year ago that, over ten years, it would develop a new academic programme.

Stated briefly, the new programme is all about focusing on deep broad undergraduate degrees where students get a sound understanding of a particular area of study while touching on a wide range of other offerings. What we would call a major and a series of electives.

At the post-graduate level (Melbourne wants to move from a 75/25 undergraduate/postgraduate split to a 50/50 split) the students would specialise, gain employment related qualifications and be bridged into work.

### **How should Massey organise its academic programme?**

Now let's pick up the pace and pose some other questions.

### **What should our students learn?**

Knowledge yes – but what about values and competencies? Should a Massey graduate have a set of values (like integrity and resilience) and competencies (like written and oral communication) to go alongside the knowledge they have? How about ensuring that graduates have an understanding of what it means to be sustainable or have some international experience?

**How should we teach?** What constitutes effective teaching practice? Does this mean being student centred? Are lectures effective? Should we include real world problems in all of our courses? In a research-led university is it essential that all students have experience research?

**How should we assess?** How much should we assess? Formative assessment? The role of exams?

**What is the role of technology and how does it transform teaching.** Do we want to blend modes of delivery to include face-to-face and new technology?

We are New Zealand's pre-eminent provider of distance education. **What is the future of distance learning?** Is it converging with intramural teaching? How do we maintain our distinctive role when distance/open learning is becoming more common among other universities?

**How should we schedule our teaching?** Semesters? Early evening? Summer schools?

**We are a University that emphasises multidisciplinary approaches – how do we advance this in our teaching programme?**

Our strategy looks at these and other questions. In the years ahead we will need to pick up the challenge of examining the Massey model of learning to ensure it meets the needs of our different learning communities that make up the University in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

So to close - **what does an exceptional and distinct learning system look like?**

For me the guiding light in this debate is the changing understanding of knowledge. In simple terms we are looking to change our approach to teaching because what you can do with knowledge is the outcome we are looking for.

Once again – welcome Diana.

All the best for today.