

TOWARDS A NEW DEFINITION OF RESEARCH-LED TEACHING – AND LEARNING – AT VUW

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VUW's *Strategic Plan 2005-2015* emphasises the need to focus our energies and resources on initiatives which can effectively and successfully highlight Victoria's distinctive teaching and research capabilities. A challenge facing most research universities is how to link research and teaching, and in this context VUW has been working on its own 'Research-Led Teaching' initiative. In this paper we propose bringing *learning* into that equation, by way of a new strategic initiative we call **Research-led Learning & Teaching (RLT)**. We see this initiative as critical to developing the 'productive nexus' between research, teaching and learning in order to enhance the quality and effectiveness of all three in ways which will distinguish VUW both nationally and internationally. Enhanced research productivity in PBRF terms is another anticipated outcome.

In order to recognise, evaluate and reward Research-led Learning & Teaching (RLT) – as well as to develop a national and international leadership profile in this area – Victoria University's academic staff and managers need definitions, models, and examples of RLT. To that end, we researched and developed the draft frameworks and model proposed in this paper, and have begun to gather 'case studies' of good RLT practice already occurring within VUW (see Appendices).

Three distinct approaches to linking teaching and research are found in the higher education literature. We see potential synergies between these three approaches while recognising the distinctions among them:

- A traditional approach, often known as **Research-led Teaching** (or research-informed, or research-based teaching) in which academics share their own disciplinary research with students, and teach them disciplinary research methods. This approach can enhance student learning, including the development of graduate attributes, and lead to increased student enrolments and completions in graduate research programmes.
- A related but perhaps less common approach is **Inquiry-based Learning**, whereby academics actively involve their undergraduate students in carrying out disciplinary research. This approach is widely practised in North America, where it is known as 'undergraduate research', and increasingly adopted elsewhere. Like RLT, this approach can enhance student learning, including the development of graduate attributes, and lead to increased student enrolments and completions in graduate research programmes. Since presentations and publications with undergraduate students as co-authors can result, this approach can also lead to increased PBRF productivity.
- A third approach, **Research on Teaching and Learning**, is one element of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) paradigm developed by Ernest Boyer and the Carnegie Foundation. In this approach – which is also known as 'pedagogical research' or 'action research' - academics themselves (involving students when possible) engage in applied research on teaching and learning in their disciplines. Research outputs such as articles in discipline-specific teaching journals often ensue. In addition to bringing about all the outcomes mentioned in relation to the previous two approaches, this approach contributes directly to enhanced teaching effectiveness.

We propose interweaving these three approaches – Research-led Teaching, Inquiry-based Learning, and Research on Teaching and Learning – into one distinctive, VUW model, which we call **Research-led Learning & Teaching (RLT)**. The model is represented graphically in Appendix I. We feel that encouraging this three-dimensional approach will increase the number of pathways for Victoria's staff and students to engage actively and productively in research that informs and improves teaching – and in teaching that generates new

directions for research. A number of individual staff at VUW are already practising RLT in creative and scholarly ways (see Appendix II). We hope to see an increase in that number.

With input and support from SMT and Academic Board we aim to systematically raise awareness and generate discussion of this proposed RLT model across the University. A session on RLT has already been incorporated into VUW's Orientation programme for new academic staff. In May, we plan to publish a special edition of the UTDC's *Spectrum* newsletter and will run a workshop on RLT. Already advertised as part of a broader 2005 research skills development project, the May workshop will address practical ways in which VUW staff might engage in and document evidence of RLT in order to apply for University-wide RLT awards to be set up later this year. Twenty-two staff have already signed up to attend this workshop, signifying a high level of interest within the VUW community. We have also discussed with Jude Ulrich how best to publicise the RLT project across VUW.

In terms of our own, related scholarly activity, we co-presented a well-received paper on international approaches to academic development for RLT at the first conference of the International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (ISSoTL) at the University of Indiana-Bloomington in November 2004. More recently, we have had a paper on RLT accepted for the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) annual conference, at the University of Sydney in July 2005. The paper will define what might constitute meaningful evidence of effective RLT and describe what VUW is doing to enhance and develop RLT. Responses from peers at this large international conference will directly inform VUW's own strategies for developing and rewarding the effective practice of RLT. In the longer term, an important strategy for developing widespread staff awareness of and engagement in the practice of RLT at VUW will be UTDC's new Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Learning and Teaching.

We look forward to the response of our colleagues at Victoria to this paper and to the suggested model attached.

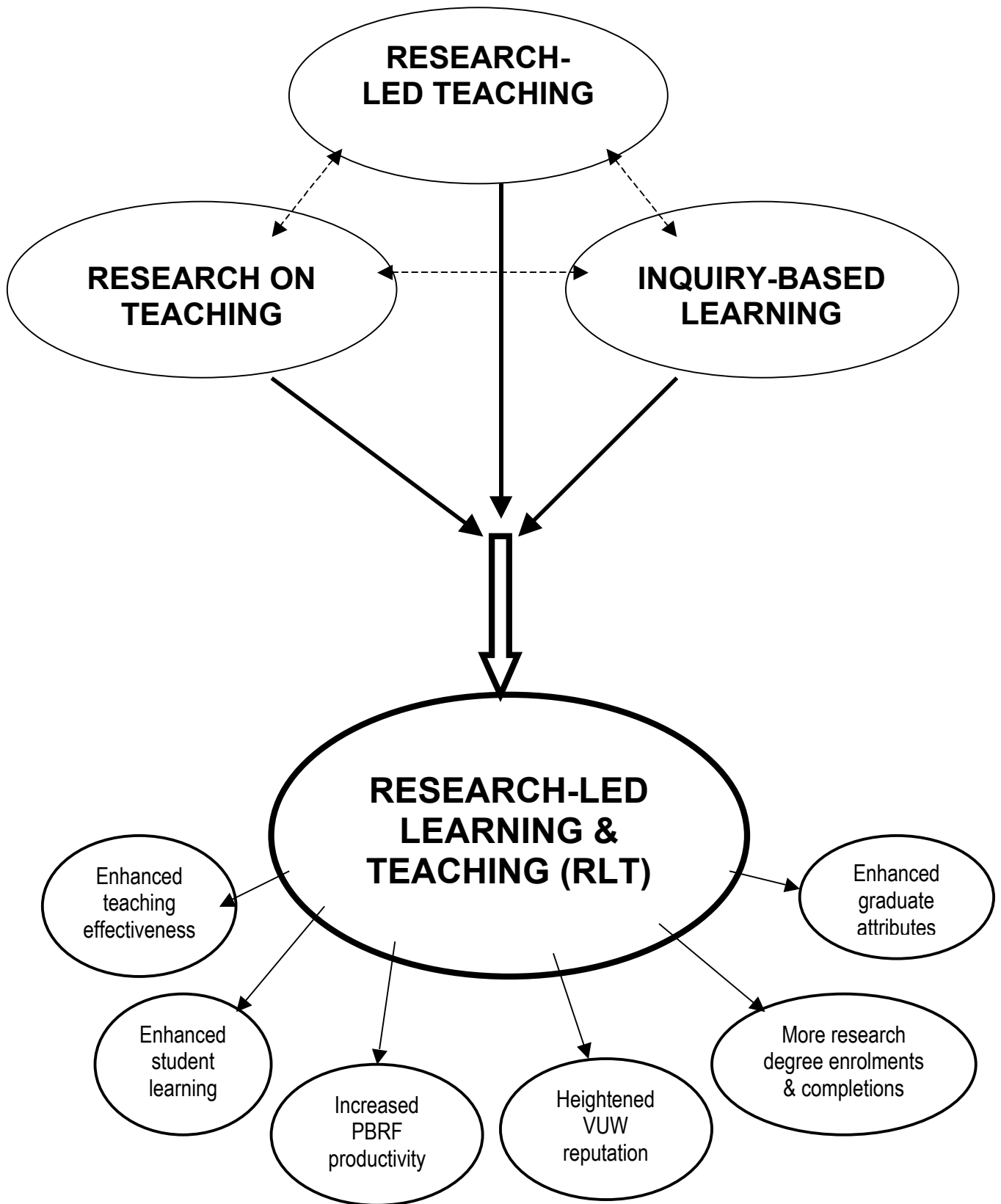
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PROPOSED VUW MODEL FOR RESEARCH-LED LEARNING AND TEACHING



APPENDIX II

CASE STUDIES OF RESEARCH-LED LEARNING AND TEACHING (RLT) AT VUW

[At the suggestion of the AVC, three VUW academics were interviewed for the purposes of collating cases of good practice in RLT for inclusion in this paper. They have not been identified.]

As noted previously, our proposed model of Research-led Learning and Teaching (RLT) incorporates three distinct (but not unrelated) approaches:

- Research-led Teaching
- Inquiry-based Learning
- Research on Teaching and Learning.

The cases of good practice we have briefly investigated on our own campus provide evidence that many academics (and importantly, students) are engaged in activities which encompass more than one of these dimensions. Core elements of those activities, as reported by academics teaching at undergraduate level, are summarised below.

Case 1: Humanities (Level 3)

- Course content changes each year to incorporate the academic's own research as well as the nature of current exhibitions which students are required to critically review
- The academic is able to provide students with privileged access to the field on the basis of her own personal and professional background and expertise
- Each student carries out their own individual research project on a NZ artist. Source material is invariably limited so students 'have to become detectives'
- Students become aware that their own research is in new and contested areas, and that they themselves are contributing actively to 'knowledge in the making'
- At the end of the course students prepare for and take part in a round table discussion with professionals external to the University, to reflect on ideas underlying the course
- Many students go on into Honours or Masters and graduates have good success rates in obtaining jobs in museums, galleries etc.

Case 2: Mathematics, Statistics & Computer Science (Honours)

- Students are engaged with research from the outset because material taught every year must take account of current research, not just that of the individual academic, but that of others leading the field
- Awareness of these developments in the research in turn informs the pedagogy adopted by teaching staff: 'I keep an eye on emerging trends in the pedagogy of the sub-discipline'
- The academic has given a paper on such pedagogical issues at the Computer Science Education conference
- During the full year Honours programme, supervising staff 'introduce students to the international research community' – 'we are outwards looking'
- Students are encouraged to enter international competitions and one Honours student came second in a major international competition in competition against other students at PhD level
- Students end up publishing 'fully international quality research'

Case 3: Humanities (Level 2 and Masters)

- The academic's approach to teaching involves combining her own experience in research with her teaching; sharing their own experience in research methods with students; and 'giving students independence in their own research'
- In one course students carry out a research project on a NZ publisher. Since little material is available on individual publishers, and simply finding sources is a challenge, 'students feel they are breaking new ground'
- As part of this project, students write a Marsden grant proposal to train them not only in how to carry out research but also in how to present it succinctly
- Students also 'enfold their own experience into their research', for example by way of research on downtown graffiti where they log, categorise, and carry out content analysis as well as researching related issues such as censorship
- Assessment in the major develops a range of academic, professional and generic skills by way of requiring an oral presentation, a group printing project, and an essay
- Former students are readily employed in a wide range of occupations both in NZ and overseas, including libraries and museums
- Students entering at Masters level now regularly upgrade to a PhD