QUALITY & ACCESS
THE BIG ISSUES

Professor Keith Lester on quality assurance, the strategic plan, funding and Newcastle

PLUS
Campaign attracts 8000 calls

AND
Boots 'n' all approach of Professor Jetse Kalma
AND NOW...A NEW VGE

In this issue of VGE we profile the new Deputy Vice Chancellor, Professor Keith Lester. Professor Lester has hit the deck running and we hope you will find this interview both interesting and revealing.

In addition we have interviews with the new Chair of Environmental Management, Professor Jetse Kalma, and the Dean of Architecture, Professor Barry Maitland, reveals his sideline interest - writing detective novels. Professor George explains the Physics Department's passion and Professor Terry Lovat from Education discusses a recent conference on national strategies and directions. The University has two new Cooperative Research Centres and the Student Recruitment Campaign has been pronounced a success.

We also introduce a new section in VGE: Fax your Say. This is your opportunity to get those little frustrations or queries off your chest and let the rest of us know how you really feel. So, don't mumble, come right out and FAX it. Details below.

DON'T MUMBLE IT - FAX IT!

In the next edition of VGE we will introduce a new section: Fax your Say. This is your chance to really have your say on any University related issue. Just pound out a few choice words on your computer and FAX it to us for publication in VGE. Ask us questions, damn us, praise us, whatever issue is irking you at the moment will get some space.

We are aware that many of you feel voiceless in this increasingly large organisation so, please, let us know what you think.

Keep your contributions to about 100 words, attach your name and tell us where you work. No need to attach a cover sheet. Address your Fax your say to, the Editor, VGE, Fax No. 21 6400.

Naturally we are still anxious to receive your Letters to the Editor. These should be about 300 words with your name attached. And mark these words, published in the very first edition of Van Gogh's Ear: "We will not, under any circumstances print unsigned Letters to the Editor. Nor will we print in these gentle pages any material that is demeaning of a person; destructive of agreed strategies; incites class or factional warfare; or brings pustulence upon the organisational health of this splendid place to whose achievement and growth we are all committed." However, anything's worth a try.
COAL UTILISATION AND MARSUPIAL CONSERVATION

The University has been successful in attracting two of the 10 new Cooperative Research Centres (CRCs) announced recently by the Minister for Industry, Science and Technology, Senator Peter Cook.

The CRC for Black Coal Utilisation and the CRC for Conservation and Management of Marsupials received funding from the Federal Government as part of a program established to encourage collaboration between science and industry in world class research. The State Government is also expected to provide seed­­-funding funds for New South Wales centres.

The CRC for Marsupial Conservation and Management, headed by Professor John Rodger from Biological Sciences, was funded for the next seven years at $1.8 million annually and has three main areas of research: reproduction and genetics; conservation of endangered marsupials; and management of population problems.

"The announcement of this centre means we have come down from our ivory tower and can now make a concerted effort, combining resources and people, to care for our national heritage," Professor Rodger said. "But it is not only conservation but management of problem species which requires our attention, particularly in New Zealand."

The centre will integrate fundamental and applied research to develop practical techniques for the appropriate management of captive and wild populations, he said.

"We have to figure out ways for Australian native animals and humans, with their agriculture, to co-exist. We are only just beginning to find ways, such as contraceptive techniques, to manage marsupial populations. If we get to the trial stage in the next seven years, we will be doing very well."

Professor Terry Wall, Program Manager for the CRC for Black Coal Utilisation said the centre will become a focus for research into uses for black coal as well as technology transfer to the coal, power and metallurgy industries.

In announcing the funding, Senator Cook said that Government support for the centre, which will carry out long term, quality scientific and technological research, is vital for achieving an internationally competitive industry.

"Australia must continue to be competitive in world energy markets and ensure that coal is used as cleanly as possible. To achieve these aims, the CRC for Black Coal Utilisation will bring together and enhance complementary, but currently uncoordinated, research.

"It will develop strategies to address the full range of environmental issues, including global climate change, and be responsive to the needs of industry," he said.

Australia now has 61 CRCs with resources totalling $478 million: $150 million provided by the Federal Government; $92 million from industry; $75 million from universities; $145 million from government departments and agencies; and $16 million from other sources.

"We have come down from our ivory tower and can now make a concerted effort."

Professor John Rodger with an Australian marsupial, subject of research to be conducted by the Cooperative Research Centre for Marsupial Conservation and Management.
IT’S CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT THAT COUNTS

The University of Newcastle’s new Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Keith Lester, took up his position recently after five years as Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Administration) and Registrar at James Cook University of North Queensland. Professor Lester was captain of Newcastle Technical High School, studied dentistry at Sydney University, travelled extensively, and has had a distinguished career as both a practitioner and academic. In his first interview since taking up the appointment, Professor Lester talked to VGE about continuous improvement, the University’s strategic plan, funding and Newcastle.

The University’s new Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Keith Lester, isn’t one to waste time.

Before he had taken up his appointment officially, he had helped organise a weekend strategic planning exercise with senior academic and administrative staff and had set up a Quality Management Committee to advise the Vice-Chancellor on all aspects of quality assurance.

“I suppose it’s inevitable that some will view the weekend exercise with a degree of healthy cynicism, but as far as I’m concerned it will be an invaluable experience. It will be the first step in the revisiting of existing plans and the formalising of a much needed institutional strategic plan for the University. Ultimately, the overall plan will be developed in a process involving the entire University community and in doing so we will determine our purpose and values as an institution. Such a process, if it is done properly, will mean they are shared values. This is crucial - there has to be ownership”.

“I’m also very excited about the Quality Management Committee which, apart from senior academic and administration staff, will include postgraduate student representation and a Quality Manager from BHP.”

And lest anyone should think that the Committee is nothing more than a knee jerk reaction to past reviews and that it will be working on a short term basis from one quality assurance round to the next, Professor Lester is adamant that this won’t be the case.

“Last year’s Higher Education Council’s quality assurance review focused on teaching and learning. This year we believe it will cover research and community service. That does not mean that the University can say to itself, ‘OK we can forget about teaching and learning and simply move on to whatever is chosen next’. It won’t work like that. The committee must and will be taking the long term view. It will be working on continuous quality improvement throughout the University.”

“There’s a whole new competitive world out there and we are being forced to examine ourselves against international benchmarks. I think it’s a very healthy thing and it gives us a great opportunity to use it as a force for good inside the institution. Even given the inherent ambiguity within universities, it is hard to argue against quality and improvement.”

“Of course it’s no secret that in the first quality assurance round the University did not have a happy time of it. The second one, just released, confirms we have quite a bit to do. Such news does not appear to faze Professor Lester. On the contrary, the challenge of helping make substantial improvements was one of the attractions of the position.

“The Higher Education Council has said that our Vice Chancellor’s detailed plan of action for improving the University’s performance is an impressive one and I’m more than happy to be instrumental in ensuring that it is followed through.”

“I think having been from Newcastle originally but returning to it with fresh eyes, as it were, that I’m in a good position to make a positive contribution. I should add, too, that the Vice-Chancellor’s philosophy for the University of continuous improvement I find appealing. He believes strongly that we need transparent processes and it will be my job to see that they exist and are implemented.”

Professor Lester, who sees University administration as something of a contradiction in terms, has an interesting view of the University of Newcastle which some may not like but which will ring true for many others. He sees it, he says, as a huge, talented, resourceful giant that perhaps just nodded off for a year or two at a time of increased public scrutiny and accountability.

“It is now beginning to stir as healthy giants can,” he says. “One of the problems may be that Newcastle itself is such a comfortable place in which to live that many of the staff have not taken up opportunities to move to other universities, either in Australia or overseas, to broaden their outlook. It is unfortunately very easy to become insulated and concentrate on pressing internal matters. If you have staff with a wide experience of what goes on in other places, then you have a more dynamic institution and one better able to deal with whatever external pressures may arise and then turn those to advantage.”

Professor Lester believes that things may well be uncomfortable for a while but gradually the inevitable changes will begin to pay off.
“There’s a saying that, biologically, irritation is very close to stimulation and I think it’s quite apt,” he said with a broad grin.

Professor Lester also has a strong view about diminished recurrent funding and the present debate over university fees. He sees fees as politically a very sensitive issue but, in the long term, inevitable.

“Australia simply can’t afford to fund universities at a level higher than it is at present. The same applies to health and social welfare. We haven’t yet reached the crisis stage that, say, many hospitals are facing but, to avoid such a crisis, we are going to have to come up with new and creative ways of funding ourselves. Some universities already have their recurrent funding levels down to around 60 percent of their overall budget – we are going to have to follow suit. Expanding offerings to overseas students and providing attractive and educationally sound fee paying courses, undergraduate and postgraduate, to Australian students who otherwise would not have this opportunity are two ways of achieving it.”

Professor Lester in younger years, a member of the Newcastle Technical High School Rugby League First XIII (back row, second from the right), with Terry Charlton, the Chancellor’s brother (second from the right in the middle row).

READERSHIP SURVEY

In February this year we commissioned Dangar Research in Sydney to conduct a readership survey of opinions on Van Gogh’s Ear. A random selection of academic and general staff and University Council members were asked to give their opinions on a number of issues related to the publication during a 15 minute telephone interview. Thanks to those who agreed to participate.

The results were very interesting and will be used to plan future directions for, and make improvements to, VGE.

As a result of the survey, we will abandon our series of features on individual faculties. Just under three-quarters (73 percent) of those surveyed favoured a more general approach and found the faculty focus “boring” and “heavy going”. In general, respondents said that too much attention was given to research commentary and the sciences and that they would like to see more space devoted to issues relating to general staff and students.

A high 73 percent liked the idea of introducing a diary of on-campus events, 68 percent favoured the inclusion of books and film reviews and 65 percent wanted more convocation news.

On the positive side, eight out of 10 respondents claim to read each edition of VGE, although not necessarily “closely”. The publication is thought to be “accessible” (85 percent), “professional” (82 percent), “well written” and “informative” (73 percent). However only four out of 10 class it as “thought provoking” and only 45 percent said it was a good read.

We receive many negative comments about the name, “Van Gogh’s Ear”, and 57 percent of those interviewed said they would prefer the name to be scrapped. Eighteen percent said they “didn’t know”. The general feeling is that the name is irrelevant and unrelated to the University. However, we feel reluctant to change the name after only two years and are very conscious of the fact that the publication is well known outside the University perhaps because of its unusual name. The media enquiries we get within a week of its distribution suggests it has a profile out there. The issue remains open to discussion if anyone wants to make a further comment.

Anyone interested in reading the survey results in more detail is welcome to do so by contacting the Information and Public Relations Unit on 21 6444.

As far as is possible, we will endeavour to make the changes and improvements you have asked for and look forward to your comments.
Contrary to what you might think, the universe is made up almost entirely of hydrogen (90 percent) and helium (nine percent), with all the other heavier elements put together accounting for the remaining one percent.

The material required to produce the Earth and the other planets was produced by the process of thermonuclear fusion in the hot interior of the sun many billions of years ago. A lot of the solar system’s hydrogen is ionised, that is it consists of a plasma of separate protons and electrons. Because of the Earth’s magnetic field, these are swept aside in the equatorial regions and can only get close to the Earth near the poles. The study of this hydrogen has been a long standing passion of the University’s Physics Department.

It all started in the University-College days, when a young Honours student by the name of Bob Eather went to Kensington in order to study the metastable (abnormally long lived) states of hydrogen atoms for his Honours project. Obtaining First Class Honours, the next step was a PhD in the same area.

At that time, the Australian National Antarctic Research Establishment (ANARE) was offering support for young scientists to work in the Antarctic, and since there was all this hydrogen plasma available down there for free, Bob set sail for Mawson. He spent a couple of years collecting data on the optical spectrum of the eerie green light of the Aurora Australis, returning to write up his PhD thesis during the following year. Bob became so enamoured of the Aurora and snow and icy conditions that he became a Professor of Physics at the University of Colorado in Boulder, Colorado, and is now one of the world authorities on the subject. His book Majestic Lights is a standard text.

Present day research in the department is carried out by a team led by Professor Brian Fraser and comprising two other staff members, two Research Associates, technical staff and six research students. They manage and record data from a whole string of magnetic field recorders (magnetometers) located throughout Australia, New Zealand and the Antarctic. They also receive and use magnetic and electric field data from several spacecraft operated by US and Japanese collaborators.

Since this plasma consists of charged particles, its movement forms an electric current which in turn generates a magnetic field which is detected by our magnetometers. By comparing data from these widely spaced instruments it becomes possible to give a “fix” which indicates the bearing, distance and magnitude of these transient currents in the plasma.

The Sun feeds energy into this plasma in both a steady manner by means of the so-called wind (a steady stream of plasma emanating from the Sun), and in a chaotic manner associated with sun-spots and solar flares. The steady input causes steady oscillations in the plasma much like blowing across the end of a flute. The frequency is determined by the density of the plasma and the strength of the magnetic field produced by the Earth. It turns out to be quite low, of the order of one oscillation per second or even lower. The corresponding magnetic oscillations are easily identified by our magnetometer network, and are recorded on a day-to-day basis. Thus by monitoring
them we are keeping our finger on the pulse of the plasma out to distances around 100,000 km.

The irregular energy input associated with sunspots and flares is somewhat chaotic, is of much greater magnitude and can be quite devastating. For example, satellites are much used in accurate surveying these days. The accuracy depends on the ability to exchange synchronised signals. During a magnetic storm, the speed of light in the plasma shifts a little and the reliability of the satellite surveying system goes to pot!

Our team hopes to be able to warn the southern hemisphere of such an impending disaster. Depending on the strength of the storm, it is possible for there to be a radio black-out, and indeed whole cities have lost electric power due to surges on the main power lines.

Fortunately, these disasters do not occur frequently and they vary with the sun-spot cycle, but the work of our team is aimed at understanding these processes and how to give an advance warning of a few hours of their imminent arrival.

The protons in the plasma do not all have the same energy and, on the whole, their energies are pretty low, and they all come from the Sun. Mixed in with them is a much smaller number of protons with much higher energy, which do not come from the Sun but from somewhere distant in our galaxy. Possibly they acquire their high energies in pulsars, quasars, black holes or other exotic objects. These high-energy protons are the cosmic rays, and have also been investigated by us.

Here the aim is quite different. By studying the results of collisions between these cosmic rays and atomic nuclei in the upper atmosphere we are able to probe the very nature of the proton itself. With the explosion of the atomic bomb and the consequent demonstration of the very great power of nuclear energy, it became relatively easy to get money in order to build large particle accelerators. These could produce a much greater flux of high energy particles than was obtainable from the cosmic rays so that in the last few decades most progress in this field has come from the accelerator teams, winding up with the picture we now have of the proton being made up of three quarks.

However, with the outbreak of the Cold Peace, money for bigger and better accelerators has dried up. Russia hasn't got any and the US Congress recently voted to cancel the billions of dollars appropriated for the Large Proton Collider (LPC) by the previous administration, thus leaving hundreds of highly trained physicists in the lurch!

The next logical step in this field is to look for the so-called Higgs particle, a particle associated with the allocation of the characteristic masses of particles. Why, for example, is the proton two thousand times as heavy as the electron? At the moment nobody knows, though there is a theory due to Higgs that it is the result of an unknown field of force, which has a rather heavy particle associated with it. The Higgs particle is so heavy that only the very highest energy accelerators could hope to find it. With the demise of the LPC, it's just possible that, in order to find it, we may have to go back to the cosmic rays, thus completing the full circle!
BOOTS ‘N’ ALL RESEARCH

Professor Jetse Kalma, the new Hunter Water Corporation Chair of Environmental Engineering, believes in the boots ‘n’ all approach to research. Researchers, he said, should get their hands dirty and their feet wet in the course of their work, rather than isolate themselves in an office without any sense of what’s happening in the real world.

The new Chair is in the Department of Civil Engineering and Surveying and Professor Kalma believes he has come to a department with a strong research foundation and many talented, boots ‘n’ all researchers.

That’s not to say, however, that he has no grand plans for Environmental Engineering at this University. With 25 years experience in the CSIRO’s Water Resources Division and university experiences around the globe as well as collaborative work with the WMO and UNESCO, he has a wealth of experience to share and intends to extend the group’s reputation in teaching and research, nationally and internationally.

The grand plan also includes further developing the department’s teaching capabilities and strengthening collaboration within the University. “My first two degrees were in agricultural engineering which included a broad range of subjects, such as climatology, soil studies, botany, plant nutrition as well as land and water management. It was a beautiful introduction to the broad perspective, the holistic approach to engineering which I think also applies to environmental engineering,” he said.

“It’s important for environmental engineers in this University to be forming links across the Faculty of Engineering and with departments like, geography, biology and physics as well as industry and community groups. This is the kind of broad perspective I would like to bring to the department.

“The fact that industry has sponsored this chair should be applauded and it presents great opportunities for interaction between academics, students and industry.

“Of critical importance will be the achievement of excellence in teaching and training. An equally important imperative to the researcher will be striking a balance between hands on, community based research, solving local environmental problems and further developing one’s own narrow disciplinary expertise,” he said.

“We should not be just doing esoteric research, in my opinion. There are specific local environmental problems where researchers can make a contribution and people from this department are already involved in the Ironbark Creek and Kooragang projects. But researchers must also keep up to date in the more specialised areas. They must develop skills in the narrow disciplines, such as hydrology, erosion and meteorology,” he said.

Professor Kalma is no stranger to Newcastle’s environmental problems. Fifteen years ago he collaborated with Associate Professor Howard Bridgman (Geography) on Newcastle air quality studies and through a number of other studies has developed a deep interest in issues relating to power generation, water resources and mining in the Hunter Region. He has also published widely on energy issues which relate to the environment.

“I have a long standing awareness of the Hunter’s environmental issues, they hold great interest for me,” he said. “Mining, agriculture, industry, tourism and urban development have conflicting interests in this region. It will be a challenge to get out and contribute to the resolution of some of these conflicts.”

Which brings us to another of Professor Kalma’s strongly held beliefs: that engineers should have a predictive, anticipatory role as well as the ameliorative, responsive role they have always had.

“Engineers are often accused of being reductionists. They draw a somewhat arbitrary circle around a problem and tend to deal only with what is inside that circle, sometimes forgetting what effect their actions may have outside that circle,” he said.

“We should be predicting what may happen as well as responding to existing problems. That means developing a wider skills base and being more aware of the whole picture, looking at the total environment.”
PROFESSOR GETS TOP MARX

As anyone who has ever tried to get a first novel published will tell you, it can be a soul destroying experience. You may think you’re the next Thea Astley or Tim Winton but how do you get the people who matter to agree with you? Australian publishers are sinking under the weight of unsolicited manuscripts so never mind publishing your magnum opus. How do you convince them to take the first step of actually reading the thing?

Someone who has some insight into what is needed to get one’s foot in the door is Professor Barry Maitland, Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, who had his first attempt at crime fiction published last year by Hamish Hamilton (initially in England and then in Australia) and whose second will be published later this year.

“I’ve always enjoyed writing. I’ve written a number of books on architecture, but in writing that sort of non-fiction you are very much controlled by the subject matter. As a kind of release, I suppose, I’ve followed each architectural book by writing a novel. This was the fourth, the first in this particular genre.

“After going through the usual process of sending the manuscript off to a succession of publishers, I realised that, as with earlier attempts, I was just collecting an impressive pile of rejection slips. It’s very sobering. They’ve never heard of you, and, as I subsequently discovered, sometimes they are so inundated by unsolicited manuscripts they return them unread.

“A friend advised me that I needed an agent, someone who could persuade the publisher that the thing was worth looking at. They told me who was considered the best agent in Australia, but warned she would never take me on, because she already had a stable of top authors.”

But with nothing to lose Professor rang Jill Hickson, spoke to her associate and tried to persuade her to look at the manuscript.

“It’s not something I feel comfortable about doing, but I realised you have to sell the thing. After we’d talked about it for a while she told me to send her a chapter and she’d try to find time to read it over the weekend. I said that wouldn’t be any good because after she’d read the chapter she’d be so desperate to know what happened next that her weekend would be ruined. She laughed and said all right, send me the lot. On the Monday she rang back and said she hadn’t been able to put it down.”

The book, The Marx Sisters, has had tremendous reviews and is soon to be published in Germany and Japan. It will be issued in paperback by Penguin later this year.

“I’ve always enjoyed reading that form of fiction, from Raymond Chandler through to PD James, Sara Paretsky, Michael Dibdin, and so on. Also, it happened that I had a niece who was working with Scotland Yard’s Forensic Science Laboratory in London, and I was fascinated by the original research material she showed me from the cases they were working on.

“My colleagues may laugh at this but in some ways crime fiction is rather like the way we teach architecture at this University - it’s problem based,” he added with a chuckle. “You have the same issues of character and psychological development that you have with other novels, but the plot is driven along by the need to find some resolution of an initial problem, the violent act which precipitates the story. I find that intriguing.”

Professor Maitland’s venture into crime fiction has had some unexpected results. A few weeks ago he answered the phone to find Barry Jones, the former Minister for Science, on the line. He just wanted to let him know how much he’d enjoyed the book. It happened that Barry Jones collects letters written by famous people, and he had just acquired two letters from Eleanor Marx, daughter of Karl. He had asked his bookshop if they had a biography of Eleanor Marx and they had said no, but he should try this new novel that had just come in.

“It was a very odd coincidence,” Professor Maitland said. “The Marx Sisters is partly about letters and other documents relating to Marx which mysteriously appear in an old street in Central London being threatened by developers, and a series of murders which springs from these events. Eleanor Marx is a background figure in the story, not only for the influence her life still has on the elderly people living in the street, but also for the remarkable circumstances of her death, back in 1898.”

How did Eleanor Marx die?

“Sorry, you’ll have to read the book!”

The critics both in the United Kingdom and in Australia have raved about The Marx Sisters but Professor Maitland said modestly that writing crime fiction isn’t real work, it’s just a form of therapy.

On the other hand how many people know that Thomas Hardy was an architect?

Professor Barry Maitland: the plot thickens.
CONFERENCES OF EARTH SHAKING SIGNIFICANCE

The experiences of the 1989 earthquake, the Hunter Region's long history of underground mining and the highly reactive soils in the region made Newcastle the ideal location for two recent conferences.

“Buildings and Structures Subject to Ground Movement” and “Engineering Geology of the Newcastle-Gosford Region” were jointly organised by the Mine Subsidence Technological Society and the Australian Geomechanics Society and drew substantially on the University's expertise in these areas.

“Newcastle has become a centre for research into reactive soils, earthquakes and their effect on structures, especially masonry structures,” said Associate Professor Scott Sloan from the Department of Civil Engineering and Surveying. “It has also become a major area for the study of the effect of mine subsidence on structures.”

“Reactive soils, soils that shrink when dry and expand when wet, cause damage to structures worth hundreds of millions of dollars. Fifty percent of houses in the Newcastle region are built on soils which are classified as either highly reactive or extremely reactive, so it is an important area of research.”

The issues of climate change and the effect on reactive soils and instability problems in slopes and embankments, particularly in the Lake Macquarie area, were discussed at the Engineering Geology conference.

An analysis of earthquakes in Australia compared to those that occur elsewhere, given by Professor Harry Poulos from the University of Sydney, revealed that Australian earthquakes were very different.

“Our earthquakes are intra-plate, occurring within the plate, and those that occur in Japan and the United States are inter-plate, occurring between plates,” explained A/Professor Sloan. “The effects of those two types are quite different and so prediction of damage will also be different.”

In his paper Professor Poulos referenced material by the University of Newcastle’s Professor Rob Melchers, who initiated this theory.

The volume of proceedings from this conference was edited by A/Professor Sloan and Dr Mark Allman and provides, for the first time, a comprehensive reference for regional engineering and geology practitioners. Sales of the book have been tremendous, said A/Professor Sloan.

During the two and a half days, 50 papers were presented to approximately 150 delegates, including leading lights from industry, academia and government who came from NSW, VIC, QLD and SA.

“Newcastle has become a centre for research into reactive soils, earthquakes and their effect on structures, especially masonry structures.”

In his opening address the University’s Chancellor, Mr Ric Charlton, stressed the importance of relationships between universities and industry and the need for Australia to remain at the cutting edge in terms of technology and efficiency.

He was followed by Mr Greg Cole-Clark, Chief Executive Officer of the Mine Subsidence Board of NSW, who spoke on issues related to mine subsidence. Dr David Branagan from Sydney University’s Geology and Geophysics Department, provided an entertaining tour, by way of slides, of some of the highlights of Newcastle’s rich engineering and mining history.

Dr Mark Allman (1 to r), with the Chancellor Mr Ric Charlton and Associate Professor Scott Sloan.
YOSANO AKIKO AND LOVE

My black hair
A thousand strands of my hair
My hair all a-tangle
And my heart all a-tangle
My heart all a-tangle

When the young female poet Yosano Akiko wrote this poem, published in a volume of poetry called Tangled Hair in 1901, Japanese women married out of duty and served three masters - father, husband and son. Akiko’s poetry shocked her readers and introduced notions of romantic and passionate love that challenged traditional thinking. In his Inaugural Lecture, Professor of Japanese, Leith Morton, discussed the poetry of this remarkable, revolutionary woman and its influence on Japanese literature.

Explaining the history of the notion of love in Japanese literature, Professor Morton said the word meaning romantic love as distinct from love for family members or humanity in general, first appeared in Japanese literature around 1870, sparking a debate about the morality of romantic love. In 1891, he said, Tokutomi Roka argued against romantic love saying, "If we wish to achieve our ambitions of worldly success, we must abandon our notions of romantic love". Another poet of this era, Kitamura Tokoku, established a discourse on love with his work Woman and Pessimistic Poets (1892), which opens by saying "Love is the secret of life", Professor Morton said.

It was against this conservative background, in a society beginning to discuss passionate love, that Yosano Akiko published her poetry. Now acclaimed as one of the masterpieces of modern Japanese poetry, Tangled Hair is influenced not only by traditional poetry but by art nouveau, Professor Morton said. Many of her images, including black hair, have deep and rich echoes in Japanese literary tradition which increase their sexual overtones. Her eroticism caused a backlash from critics of the day, with one saying of her work, “Tangled Hair vomits obscenity found in the mouths of streetwalkers and whores and promotes licentiousness”.

Professor Morton read 13 of the 399 poems that comprise Tangled Hair in both Japanese and English, demonstrating to his audience the lyrical nature of the Japanese language (Akiko’s poetry is often sung in Japan today). Many of the poems were based on the relationship of the poet with two other young poets, her friend Yamakawa Tomiko, and her lover, Yosano Hiroshi (Tekkan). Professor Morton quoted Akiko on the influence of her affair with the married Tekkan, “Through my verse, my love was able to achieve its fullest expression and through my love, my poetry started to make remarkable progress.”

The poet’s relationship with Tomiko was also complex, Professor Morton said. Her mixture of deep affection, jealousy and sympathy towards Tomiko is reflected in the poems in the White Lily chapter of Tangled Hair, he said.

Professor Morton, who worked as Visiting Research Fellow in the Department of Japanese Literature at the Tokyo Metropolitan University in Japan before taking up the inaugural chair in Japanese at Newcastle, said Yosano Akiko had invented an entirely new psychic space for Japanese women, where they could stand on the same level as men.

“She stated quite boldly in her poetry that women were capable of feeling romantic or passionate love in the same way men could,” he said. “Even the title, Tangled Hair, was highly provocative and shocking at the time, suggesting an erotic symbol of a woman with her hair let down in a time when Japanese wives were expected to bind their hair. Yosano Akiko’s verse violated the norm, not only in Japan, at this time. She was the first poet who celebrated not simply romantic love in her verse, but erotic or sexual love.”

BRIEFLY

Emeritus Professor John Keats, Foundation Chair of the Department of Psychology, has recently been elected an Honorary Fellow of the Australian Psychological Society. This is a very prestigious award as the number of Honorary Fellows is limited to a particular number at any one time.

Dr Peter Pfister, from the Department of Aviation, has recently been elected to a Fellowship of the Australian Psychological Society.

RIP: Mr Grahame Louis Hardy, much respected member of the Convocation Management Committee, died suddenly on Friday, February 17, aged 48. A hard working volunteer, Grahame’s contribution to the University through Convocation will be sadly missed. Sincere condolences from the University community to Grahame’s widow, Elaine, and family.
By Associate Professor Terence Lovat, Education

"... this is a Conference of ideas: it is by way of a think tank, a discussion among a very wide range of Australians about where our opportunities lie, what our ambitions should be, and what are the best ways to realise them. It is a means of creating some national strategic ferment. If we create enough of it, new policies will follow in due course."

These were the words of the Prime Minister, Mr Paul Keating, at the opening of the National Strategies Conference, to which I was invited as a delegate late last year. It was the first of many proposed national dialogues organised by the newly formed Economic Planning and Advisory Commission (EPAC). The conference comprised 200 of the country's leaders in the professions, business, politics, media and the arts, and special interest groups, including strong representation from the Aboriginal community. The APEC Bogor Summit had concluded only a week before and the Prime Minister made consistent reference to its significance. He proffered that Australia's future rests on the following: its identity and self-identity as global; its grasping the potential to be innovative, economically, socially and environmentally; its commitment to ecological sustainability; and its re-definition of a social charter which guarantees social security, and personal and community development. Many of these themes were taken up by the conference.

I was mindful throughout the conference of making connections with Newcastle and the University, on the basis of which I offer these thoughts:

First, there was an overwhelming education agenda with, interestingly, only a handful of professional educators present. This in no way deterred the conference from addressing questions of what should and should not be happening in schools, universities and TAFE. Apart from TAFE, which was publicly lauded on a number of occasions, there seemed to be a general air of criticism towards our educational structures, and especially our universities, for their hidebound traditions and lack of engagement.

Second, the global cum Asia/Pacific agenda was impressive, sufficient at least to impress on me that, while many Australians owe much to Europe, especially Anglo Europe, our future clearly does not lie there. The very positive, fairly ahistorical view of APEC contrasted in my mind with the relatively gloomy way in which delegates at two European conferences I attended last year were approaching the EEU phenomenon.

History seems to have proven that Europe cannot live at peace, whereas we are either still to learn the same lesson or, with better communication and greater cultural sensitivity, we just may prove the opposite. This optimism infected me with thoughts of the counter-productivity of our university system seeing itself still as an Oxbridge fledgling. By doing so, we may well be doing ourselves out of business in this new Australia.

We must be an Australian university moving innovatively into 21st century Australia, rather than paying homage to something which is very much of the past and probably does not exist anymore even in the UK.

Third, the role of Sydney in this new global, Asia oriented Australia and, within this, the symbolic value of the 2000 Olympics, was a striking and recurring theme. Some of the Sydney hype is clearly just that, but some of it makes sense, and presents as tangible. Arguably Australia's most international and exciting city, it serves as the gateway to this new Australia. Especially in the next five years, the vast majority of people who come to this country to stay for a while, or for good, will come through Sydney. An increasing number will stay in Sydney, at least for a time.

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ern-most point of Sydney could not be overstated. Similarly, the potential for this University to project itself as an attractive alternative for the much larger Sydney undergraduate and graduate market (in the manner of Wollongong) carries with it the potential to enhance our student profile and, in terms of our graduate profile, to help establish ourselves indubitably as one of the top grade universities.

The twin-pronged attack must be good marketing and having something to market. In the latter domain, we need to ensure the sort of curriculum development and evaluation which ensures that our courses are designed to do the job which is necessary but in the shortest reasonable time and with the smoothest possible pathways through. Speaking partially for a moment, I believe the new four-year double degrees in the Faculty of Education's pre-service teacher education program are a case in point. In contrast with Sydney University's new turgidly long, non-practitioner oriented, non-integrated five year program, our four-year concurrent double degree promises to bring to the faculty the same blend of academic rigour with practicenership which has made our medical pre-service course so famous. I believe, with the right marketing, this double degree program could well serve to attract to the Hunter high quality students who, like most vocational students, want also a taste of their chosen professional life as soon as they can.

Reference

MEETING OF TWO TRIBES

The Igorots are the indigenous people of the Philippines' mountainous Cordillera region. Anthropologists have described them as intelligent and fierce people whose head-hunting ancestors resisted the American and Japanese colonisation of the Philippines. No wonder then that, when the Igorot people met with Newcastle's Aboriginal people recently, they found much in common.

Bao-In McCann, a member of the Igorot tribe and a tutor in Aboriginal Studies at Wollotuka, first met an Australia Aborigine at a meeting of women in Northern Ireland. "She told the story of the destruction of her culture, tradition and her people. I felt very close to her, perhaps because she was a black woman and I was the only other black woman at the conference, and we were both Aborigines," said Bao-In.

"We shared similar beliefs, culture and traditions such as the spiritual relationship with our land, kinships, respect for elders, caring and sharing, living as members of a group and not as individuals."

Bao-In looked for the woman she met when she came to Australia 10 years later but never found her. "But I found her people, at Wollotuka," she said.

Having almost completed her Masters in Social Science on the history of the Igorot people in Australia, Bao-In organised for her people, who live in Sydney and the Blue Mountains, to visit Wollotuka.

The meeting of the two tribes, as she called it, was a great success and a spiritual experience for all those who attended. The Igorots performed their traditional rituals, ceremonies and dances accompanied by a didgeridoo. An Igorot elder wrote a song especially for the occasion.

Rice wine was offered to the Igorot god, Kabunyan, for the blessing of their meeting. The Igorots also asked Kabunyan for the blessing of all Australian Aborigines, for their welfare and the well being of their ancestors. After the event Wollotuka's Paul Gordon invited men from both Aboriginal groups to camp the night at a sacred site near Wollombi.

"It was a very special event. I am most grateful to Wollotuka's Director, Tracey Bunda, Deirdre Heitmeier, John Health, Ray Kelly and many other people who responded with such warmth to my people," said Bao-In.

"This is the first time in history that our people have met a tribe from another country, in another country."

The purpose of the meeting was to consolidate a 'peace pact'. Traditionally the Igorots have formed peace pacts, called bodong, with tribes living near them in the Cordillera. It is an agreement of non-aggression and can only be negotiated by a prominent member of each village. The Igorot villages of the Cordillera are all still linked by peace pacts today.

This system worked very well in the 1970s when the Philippines Government tried to build a dam in the area, potentially flooding the surrounding villages. In a celebrated battle with the government, and with the United States which backed it, all the Igorot villages banded together and succeeded in halting the development and saving their land.

"We are a very fierce people," said Bao-In.

The Chico Dam project has since been abandoned and the Igorots have an agreement with the now democratically elected Government of the Philippines not to pursue the project.

The Igorot people of the Philippines perform traditional rituals accompanied by the didgeridoo during a special meeting with Aboriginal people at Wollotuka.

BRIEFLY

Dr Roy Green from the Department of Economics has been appointed Editor of the Australia Health Review, Australia’s leading health management journal, which is published by the Australian Hospitals Association in Canberra.

Dr Slade Warne, formerly Associate Professor and now Honorary Associate in the Department of Geology was the winner of the 1994 Mettler Award. This is an international award presented annually by the Mettler Instrument Company for "outstanding achievement in the field of thermal analysis".

The award, the premier one in this field of science, consists of a return air ticket to the Thermal Analysis Society’s annual conference, the presentation of the Mettler Award Lecture and a prize of $US2,000.

This is the first time in its 27 year history that the award has been won by an Australian, or anyone from the southern hemisphere.

This recognition follows the publication of a special volume of the international Journal of Thermal Analysis which was issued to commemorate the scientific achievements of Dr Warne on the occasion of his 60th birthday.
An invitation to ‘Get it Together’ or to ‘Explore New Directions’ was extended at the beginning of the year to encourage potential students to make the most of the opportunity to gain a university place in 1995. The campaign, aimed at HSC candidates as well as mature age people, was successful and resulted in nearly 8,000 enquiry calls through the University’s Freecall Information Line.

A brochure, direct mailed to all HSC candidates who had applied through the Universities Admissions Centre for a university place as well as to non HSC candidates, invited them to ask all their questions about university study by telephoning the Freecall Line. Linked to this, newspaper and radio advertising and a series of information sessions for people considering tertiary study, rounded off the promotional campaign. At the same time, the University decided that the Open Foundation Course, should change from a fee paying course to a free course.

The University was responding to a trend towards decreased applications for university places in New South Wales. Caused by a general shift in demand throughout the university sector, lower HSC retention rates and changing employment patterns in the Hunter Region, the situation created a unique opportunity for people who might have considered enrolling at university, but hadn’t as yet made the move.

Not only did the University reach its targets for enrolments in undergraduate courses, but it doubled enrolment in the Open Foundation Course.

Deputy President of the Academic Senate, Professor Brian English, said that according to the latest census, 67 percent of all people in New South Wales go on to complete their HSC. However the figures are approximately 10 percent lower in the Hunter than the State average. He said the census figures also show that amongst the adult population there are far fewer people with university degrees in the Hunter than there are in the same age groups right across Australia.

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THE EVEN MORAL GROUND OF PEER REVIEWING
by Associate Professor Terence Lovat,
Human Research Ethics Committee

"......but what right have these people to tell us what to do?" ...(or some such sentiment) is often heard in response to yet another Ethics Committee injunction. It implies a view that the Ethics Committee enjoins from the high moral ground, as might be assumed of a mass of mullahs or an assembly of ayatollahs. Even people who are well accustomed to the processes and peskiness of being peer reviewed see the Ethics Committee as something apart. Perhaps, it is partly the novelty and partly the nature of ethics peer reviewing which makes the difference.

The nature is not so much that it is entirely new (for research ethics in some form has been with us for some time) but where it was once little more than an ancillary nicety in good research, in now implies a legal and practical imperative before research can begin....and that in itself creates more latitude for giving offence. The nature is in the connotation that ethics is all about high moral ground events, rather than the sorts of expedients that can be sorted out by the peer reviewing process.

In contrast with these popular perceptions, members of the Human Research Ethics Committee of Academic Senate see themselves very much as peer reviewers. The agonising and torrid discussions which so often accompany decision making clarify, if ever anyone was inclined to forget, that this is not the work of an especially enlightened elite. On the contrary, the work of the Ethics Committee functions on hardnosed application of informed yet essentially subjective judgment.

Ever self educating, the Committee attempts to balance, on the one hand, its ethical-legal responsibilities to new community standards, (especially in relation to the privacy, confidentiality and non-discrimination rights of individuals) with, on the other hand the legitimate needs of university researchers to have reasonable access to prospective clients. It is not an easy balance to maintain across 320 protocol reviews per year (1994 figures January-November), protocols drawn from the full variety of research types and discipline areas which characterise the University itself. If occasionally we overbalance towards the rights of individuals, it is probably because the tradition in the research culture has tended the other way. Where the effect of this has been to give offence, we beg your indulgence.

The Ethics Committee wishes everyone a prosperous research year in 1995.

AVCC TELLS GOVERNMENT: PROTECT UNIVERSITY QUALITY AND ACCESS

The forthcoming Budget must not decrease people's chances of participating in higher education, nor threaten the quality of the university system, according to the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC).

Responding to reports that Budget cuts were proposed for higher education, AVCC President Professor Don McNicol said there was a risk that the Government would be tempted to cut higher education funding following a small drop in demand for university places this year.

Professor McNicol said the Government should be careful not to spread university resources too thinly through Budget cuts which would compromise the quality of Australia's higher education system.

"Significant quality and efficiency gains have already been made throughout Australia's universities, and there is no fat left to trim," he said.

"Higher education has been one of the most responsive sectors in answering the Government's call to structural reform. Universities have undertaken significant amalgamations, provided substantial levels of growth within tight financial constraints, developed one of the nation's largest export markets, as well as introducing performance indicators and undergoing quality audits.

"The AVCC is committed to the quality processes which underpin the work of the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CQAHE). The focus on quality must continue and we argue strongly for the retention of the discretionary funding allocated to quality beyond the next triennium.

"If savings must be made within the higher education system, or funding found to resource vital university infrastructure, the AVCC believes that the discretionary funding allocated to areas such as the National Priority (Reserve) Fund, or the Evaluation and Investigations Program is the most appropriate place from which resources could be taken."

Professor McNicol said the AVCC strongly urged the Government to drop its requirement for universities to meet a target number of school leavers in each yearly intake.

"These targets represent a suppression of opportunity for other groups in the community who have not had the chance to go straight from school to university. This has the effect of seriously distorting unmet demand figures.

"A target for 'first time students' would be far more acceptable, allowing access to a much greater range of people and providing education and skills necessary for continued economic recovery," he said.
Believe it or not, the University’s Security Officers have better things to do than issue parking infringement notices. According to the Manager of Security Services, Mr Peter Boyd, monitoring parking is less than five percent of officers’ workload and, contrary to popular opinion, it is not a job they relish.

The University of Newcastle has a good security record. Recent statistics reveal a drop in crime rates, apprehension rates for the crimes committed have risen and the costs associated with crime have fallen. “Compared with other universities we’re doing well and compared with the general community we’re doing very well,” Mr Boyd said.

The reason, he explained, is a combination of more security staff with a better security strategy as well as an increased awareness by users of the campus.

Last year security staff numbers were increased by one third to 14 permanent and five relief officers. They operate rotating shifts to cover the campus seven days a week, 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year. Officers are committed to providing safety for people first and property second and offer an escort service when possible.

Officers operate from two main locations: one in the Great Hall and the other on the lower level basement of the Auchmuty Library (access from the Library ringroad). They can be contacted in emergencies on 21 5888 or at other times on 21 5728 or 21 5729. Officers can also be contacted using one of the six emergency telephones located strategically around the campus. These phones can be used for internal emergency calls as well as the external 000 services.

Security Officers cover the length and breadth of the campus in any one shift, including the peripheries. Their aim is to create a presence. However, no one can be everywhere at all times so Security Services encourages people to be their own security officers.

“Staff, students and visitors to the campus need to protect themselves and their property,” said Mr Boyd. “It’s important to be responsible for your own safety. Remember where you will be when you come out of lectures at the end of the day. Think ahead and make arrangements to meet and walk with friends. Use lighted walkways and main roads and avoid potentially risky situations.”

“It’s also important not to provide incentives for thieves by leaving doors unlocked, valuables on car seats or parking in unlit areas at night,” said Mr Boyd. “And reporting incidents and suspicious circumstances is helpful because it can save someone else the cost and inconvenience of having property damaged or stolen.”

But back to those parking infringement notices. “It’s important that people park in the appropriate places because careless and inconsiderate parking not only adds to the frustration of the University community in general, it also impacts on the surrounding campus landscape which is gradually being nurtured back to its original bushland splendour,” said Mr Boyd in explanation of Security Officers’ vigilance.