30 May 2011

Ms Kerryn Riseley, Executive Officer
Education and Training Committee
Parliament of Victoria
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002
email: etc@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Ms Riseley,

Please find attached the University of Melbourne’s submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Education of Gifted and Talented Students, Parliament of Victoria.

Yours,

[Signature]

Professor John Dewar
Acting Vice-Chancellor

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Inquiry into Education of Gifted and Talented Students

Scope of the Inquiry in relation to Universities Australia

• Programs currently provided to gifted and talented students;
• Experience and issues surrounding these programs;
• Views about the concepts of giftedness and talent;
• Mechanisms to improve the capacity of teachers to identify and adequately respond to gifted and talented students; and
• Broader implications for school communities arising from education of gifted and talented students.

1.0 Programs currently provided to gifted and talented students

The University of Melbourne has a number of programs which are aimed at academically gifted and talented students. The major programs which target gifted and talented school aged students are: the University of Melbourne Extension Program (UMEP) and Kwong Lee Dow (KLD) Young Scholars Program. Equally, through a special admission program, the University rewards elite athletes and performers. A summary of these programs follows.

University of Melbourne Extension Program (UMEP)

www.futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/umep

The University’s Extension Program offers an opportunity for high achieving secondary students to undertake a first-year university while in Year 12. Subjects offered through the Extension Program build on VCE studies and extend to first-year university level.

The Program has been in operation for 19 years and is available to both Year 12 domestic and international students. Academically able students are eligible to apply however when considering the program applicants are reminded that their Year 12 studies are of the utmost importance and thus take precedence over any Extension studies. Applicants require the support of their schools as well as parents/guardians.

Subjects offered in the Extension Programs are endorsed by the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA).


It is not possible to study more than one Extension Program subject area.
Kwong Lee Dow Young Scholars Program (KLD)

http://futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/info/school-students/kld

In July 2007 the University ‘recruited’ 700 year 11 and 12 students into the inaugural KLD Program. Since then each year 700 Victorian and border New South Wales and South Australian students are recruited in October of their Year 10 studies. A student’s application is supported by their school and applicants are required to be in the top five per cent of their year level in terms of academic performance while also demonstrating leadership potential, active citizenship and community involvement. The Program is available to high achieving domestic and international students.

Nominated high achieving students were offered a program of on campus events and academic enrichment activities to support them with their secondary studies and to expose them to the opportunities of further study.

All Kwong Lee Dow Young Scholars who subsequently enrol at the University of Melbourne are invited to take part in the Kwong Lee Dow First Year Program. This program provides further opportunities to improve their academic and leadership capacity and to be involved in the University community.

Admissions/Selection Programs

Elite Athlete Undergraduate Entry Scheme

http://www.futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/admissions/entry-requirements/other-entry-options/elite-athletes-and-artistic-performers

The University’s Elite Athletes and Artistic Performers Entry Scheme assists eligible undergraduate applicants gain entry to our degree programs. It aims to assist students whose education has been affected by elite level training, competitive practice or performance commitments during Year 12.

Assistance for elite athletes and performers (once enrolled)

The University encourages a flexible approach to the provision of assistance for elite athletes and performers through our University's Elite Athletes and Performers Policy. Melbourne University Sport also offers a range of services through their Sports Scholarship program including cash and in-kind support for elite student-athletes. The University of Melbourne is a member of the Australian Elite Athlete Friendly University Network (EAFU).

Guaranteed Graduate Pathways for very high achieving students

http://futurestudents.unimelb.edu.au/admissions/entry-requirements/guaranteed-entry

The University has progressively established a guaranteed entry policy for high-achieving school leavers. This policy guarantees eligible students entry into a selected graduate professional Masters program (such as graduate Law, Medicine, Dentistry, Physio, Optometry, Engineering, Architecture, and Veterinary Science to name a few) following their undergraduate studies. Guarantees are set for school leavers who achieve a certain ATAR and they are subject to performance in throughout their undergraduate degree.
Scholarships for high achieving students

http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/scholarships/

The University, as well as faculties and graduate schools, offer a range of academic merit based scholarships for high achieving commencing and current students in undergraduate and graduate coursework and research programs. Criteria and eligibility vary.

The following are programs conducted at the University involving high achieving and gifted students.

**Trinity Young Leaders’ Summer School** (offered by one of the University’s Residential Colleges)


Trinity College (a residential college of the University of Melbourne) conducts enriching one and two-week residential programs for Australian and international students aged 14-17 under its Young Leaders’ banner. The programs offer outstanding academic and personal development opportunities and give students an intellectual and social edge for their final years of schooling.

All of the Young Leaders courses incorporate an action-packed program of classes, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Designed for high-achieving students that exhibit leadership qualities and an interest in developing these skills, these programs offer unique preparation for college and university life through:

- Living on campus at Trinity College, the University of Melbourne
- Immersion in university-style teaching methods
- Academic programs that encourage students to develop critical thinking skills
- Learning and socialising with students from diverse cultural backgrounds
- Mentoring from high-achieving university students
- Extra-curricular activities and excursions around Melbourne

**Australian Brain Bee Challenge**


This is a national competition for Year 10 students to motivate them to learn about the brain and science. Around 7000 students from all around Australia, and 1800 from Victoria, enter the competition every year. The University of Melbourne hosts the Victorian chapter of the state finals in July. About 80 students from 20 schools made it to the state finals last year. The major sponsors of the event are the Melbourne Neuroscience Institute and the Florey Neuroscience Institutes.
School Mathematics Competition


The competition has been in existence since 1972 and is wholly organised and run by volunteer staff of the Department of Mathematics and Statistics, Faculty of Science. The competition is of a demanding standard, designed to identify real mathematical talent. Between 3000 and 5000 students enter, and some 150 are awarded prizes. The nature of the problems is different from that encountered in school mathematics syllabi, being less mechanical and requiring a higher level of mathematical insight and creativity. As such, participation is likely to be rewarding only to those students who have a real love for, and ability in, mathematics.

The competition is separated into three divisions:
- **Junior Division** - Students in years 7 and 8 sit a two hour exam
- **Intermediate Division** - Students in years 9 and 10 sit a three hour exam
- **Senior Division** - Students in years 11 and 12 sit a three hour exam

The competition is open to all students in secondary schools in Victoria. Over the years the number of participants has steadily increased from around 2500 students to the current level of approximately 4000 students, all coming from about 120 Victorian

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### 2.0 Issues and Experiences in Working with Academically Gifted Secondary School Students

The University’s Kwong Lee Dow (KLD) Young Scholars and Extension Programs are the two formal channels through which the University engages with high achieving secondary students. This total cohort represents over 1,700 Year 11 and Year 12 students in any given year. Observations from staff along with feedback/surveys from participating students and those who influence them (parents, teachers) have revealed the following:

- Many secondary school staff have difficulty identifying their ‘brightest and best’ students from a wider cohort of all-round high achievers. They find current measures of pure academic performance too narrow and not representative of the overall picture of a student’s abilities across multiple years of schooling.
- These high achieving students are generally time poor with multiple academic and extra-curricular activities.
- The influence of their parents/guardians in many cases has a significant impact on their choice of immediate course of study after secondary school. Their parents/guardians also like to network among themselves allowing comparison of schools, study programs and knowledge of opportunities for their son or daughter.
- Many of these students like to have certainty in selecting their tertiary study course with a confirmed path into a chosen profession identified well in advance.
- In participating in the University’s prospective student programs the students generally enjoy opportunities to extend themselves academically and keenly seek any opportunity to gain an academic edge in their school studies or a ‘head start’ with university life. Likewise the opportunity to meet other like minded students is important, particularly for students from smaller, disadvantaged or isolated schools.
Academic Research into gifted education

The University of Melbourne’s Graduate School of Education (MGSE) has researchers in the field of gifted and talented education. Dependent upon the outcomes of the inquiry possible opportunities that may arise for future collaboration include the following:

- Assistance in differentiating curriculum provision in schools, particularly given contemporary international trends in defining gifted learning in terms of ‘excellence in outcomes’.
- Mentoring: this could have the dual foci of academic and ‘adjustment’ mentoring.
- Assistance in identifying gifted students, particularly given contemporary international trends in using diffuse problem solving to identify gifted students.
- Providing individual assistance to gifted learners to develop their knowledge in particular domains that are studied at a high level in the University.

Acronyms:

- ATAR  Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
- EAFU  Australian Elite Athlete Friendly University Network
- KLD   Kwong Lee Dow
- MGSE  Melbourne Graduate School of Education
- UMEP  University of Melbourne Extension Program
- VCAA  Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
- VCE   Victorian Certificate of Education