



New kid on the block proves a hit

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Victoria University's senior academics are "very pleased indeed" that substantial numbers of students are voting with their feet to learn via the institution's controversial block teaching method this year, deputy vice-chancellor Marcia Devlin says.

According to 2018-19 Victorian Tertiary Admission Centre figures, she said, there had been a 9 per cent increase in numbers year-on-year in early round and round one offers from the university.

In VU's block teaching program, introduced last year and the first of its kind in Australia, only one subject is taught at a time, in four-week blocks and classes of about 30 students, so students received individual attention from academics.

The new method seemed to suit most students and results had been good across many categories, Professor Devlin said.

"The results are really quite remarkable," she said. "Every single indicator is up: pass rates, grade averages, number of distinctions, higher distinctions." This success, she added, probably led more students to choose VU.

"The word is out that it's a new way of doing things. It's different and students like it. They all talk to each other and students have



Marcia Devlin

siblings and cousins and friends and so forth. It's just extraordinary, in a market where it's gone down 11 per cent overall, that we're up so much."

Declan O'Brien, 19, from Footscray, has been studying for a bachelor's degree in sport and exercise science at VU. The block teaching method suited him well.

"I found it more personalised," he said. "There are only maybe maximum 30 students in a class, rather than a lecture theatre of 120 where you don't really get to speak to anyone. It was a bit more engaging, I felt."

Before enrolling at VU last year Mr O'Brien did his homework on the block teaching method. "I'd heard about it but I wasn't too sure, so I went away and asked a lot of questions and found out a lot more about it. I thought it would be something different, something unique."

He made the right choice, he said. "A lot of the friends I made

really enjoyed it. Some of them had been to other unis in the past and they wanted something different. They found it to be a lot more practical in a sense."

Meanwhile, Professor Devlin said although the enterprise agreement negotiations had yet to be finalised at VU, the university was ready for a second year of the block teaching program.

"It won't be a problem," she said. "We're very committed to getting a good outcome for staff and the university."

A survey conducted last year, along with informal talks, had made it clear that VU staff were not happy with VU's original salary offer and they didn't like a proposal to force staff to take their holiday leave over the Christmas close-down, she said. So VU had dropped the Christmas close-down idea and was awaiting last year's finalised financial data to decide what could be offered in a new salary plan.

"We will get (an enterprise bargaining agreement) in eventually, but we're hopeful it will be sooner rather than later," Professor Devlin said.

"We're hoping the staff will accept the next version of the agreement we put out, where we've demonstrably listened to their feedback and responded to it."

The next version would be on the table as soon as possible, she said.