Tributes to visionary leadership

Dr John Hood’s appointment as Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University recognises his “very special talents”, says Auckland’s Chancellor, John Graham.

“It is a brilliant — and to use a much loved John Hood word — ‘stunning’ achievement for a New Zealander to be appointed to such a great British university.”

It reflected his varied experiences and achievements over many years and especially his outstanding leadership of the University of Auckland over the past four and a half years, said Mr Graham.

Enumerating Dr Hood’s qualities he said he had:

- Gathered around him men and women of ability — always the sign of a special leader.
- Stated and carried out with vigour and wisdom a fresh and vital vision for a modern university.
- Set clear goals and directions for the University and taken people with him.
- Never deviated from his demand and search for excellence.
- Won support and understanding of the University from the wider Auckland and New Zealand community, and done much to promote the University on the international stage.
- Unquestionably become the leading national university figure in tertiary education, relentlessly questioning and assessing Government and Ministry policy.
- Defended academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

The Council had totally supported Dr Hood’s vision and goals for the University, said Mr Graham adding: “The direction we have been given and are pursuing under this Vice-Chancellor’s leadership will be continued.”

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Professor Raewyn Dalziel, described the offer to Dr Hood of “this most highly sought after Vice-Chancellorship” as “a tremendous tribute to his understanding of the modern university and its role, to his vision, to his ability to set direction and goals and to motivate people in achieving these”.

That Oxford, for the first time in 900 years, had found a Vice-Chancellor outside of its own ranks was “a signal honour and one in which the University of Auckland can rightly share”.

Professor Dalziel said that as well as feeling a great sense of pride staff would also feel a sense of considerable loss to the University and personally. Dr Hood had, with the help of many people, put it on to a new path towards excellence and international recognition.

“It will be very important for the University over the next year and into the future to maintain that sense of purpose, to continue to strive after the goals that we have set. We have claimed national pre-eminence and we must ensure that we make that claim good. We have set international benchmarks and we must match them.”

Dr Hood’s legacy to the University would be one of outstanding leadership, wise management and prudent financial control, said Professor Dalziel. But the main thing he had done was to “challenge us all to ask the question — are we doing this as well as we might be? And too often the answer was no.

“We were not complacent, but there was a sense that alternatives were not possible. Under his leadership many things have become possible.”

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From 7am on April 28, Hester Mountfield, manager of the Kate Edger Information Commons, was with her staff in their offices on the fourth floor awaiting the arrival of the first students to the brand-new building.

This was the climax of several years work, stepped up to a more and more challenging pace over the previous months.

From around 8.30am, the flow began. Staff watched the surge of students from the interim commons in the Maths/Physics Buildings whose doors were closed to the new Kate Edger Information Commons.

By 9am the computer workstations were fully in use, and they have remained so more or less ever since, at least between the hours of 8.30am and 8.30pm, says Hester.

The Kate Edger Information Commons is the largest facility of its kind in New Zealand, comparing favourably with similar international facilities in terms of size and resources, and offering more than 500 multi-purpose computer workstations, a number of electronic classrooms and an additional 500 plus flexible study and social spaces.

It differs from most other Information Commons facilities in having a separate building of its own rather than forming part of an existing library, says Hester. The real innovation lies in its bringing together three
Comments from student users

**Daniel, a second-year student in Science**

“It gives an extra place to work in addition to the Library, and it’s
good to be able to access email, and do work towards assignments
here. The Information Commons is well-designed because it
feels spacious. It’s also an advantage to have the bank and shops
nearby.”

**Milton, a postgraduate student in Theology**

“The workstations here are very useful because I haven’t got a
PC at home. I’m using it to learn computer skills. Compared with
the facilities offered at the two other overseas universities I have
attended, this is a fabulous and very helpful resource.”

**Rebecca, a first-year student in Science**

“Before the Information Commons opened, I used to study at the
Library. This is better because there are many more computers;
I also use the quiet space upstairs and the group study space
downstairs but the computer stations are the most important for
me.”

The Information Commons provides an enhanced learning
environment for students by co-locating learning support providers
such as the Student Learning Centre, ELSAC and core University
Library Services. A key focus of the Information Commons is on IT,
learning and information skills development.

The IC Help Service, managed by the University Library, is a
new integrated support service that was established by merging the
Electronic Campus HelpDesk with the University Library’s Learning
Services.

This service consists of two
components. The highly visible IC
Help area provides walk-in support
to students, NetAccount sales and
open consultation space, while the
Information Commons Consultants
provide a roving consultation
service, assisting students using the
workstations. Consultants also work
shifts on the IC Helpdesk and assist
with special projects.

These consultants are fellow
students who have a knowledge of
electronic resources, software and
databases in the Information Commons,
on the Internet and on the campus
network.

In the first month, the help service dealt with around 10,000
inquiries, the majority on computing, though help was also sought on
directions, information, research skills and CECIL.

ITSS and University Library staff worked together for almost a year
to plan and implement the IT and support service environments in
the Information Commons. “ITSS staff have been wonderful, working with
us to get everything ready,” says Hester. “We have established a great
working relationship.”

Hester’s staff in the Information Commons consists of an
Information Skills team, which runs training courses to develop
information literacy skills; the IC Help team; and the Short Loan
team, which looks after the short loan collection also located in the
Information Commons.

The building is a very attractive, highly-glazed five-storey structure
on the corner of Alfred and Synmonds Streets, with a stainless steel mesh
crane along the Synmonds Street facade providing a thermal barrier
and privacy from the road. The student areas are large spaces facing
the street with beautiful views towards the Waitemata Harbour and the
Domain.

Hester has already taken senior staff from Otogo and Massey
Universities on a tour through the new building. “They thought it was
great, a beautiful design with a feeling of space and flow, a wonderful
development for the University,” she says.

University librarians and IT managers from Australian universities
have also shown a strong interest in coming to visit after Hester
presented a paper at a recent Australasian Educause Conference in
Adelaide.

The Information Commons is open Monday to Friday from 7am
to midnight and from 8am to 10pm at the weekends.

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**Workstations have been fully occupied for most of every
day since the building opened.**