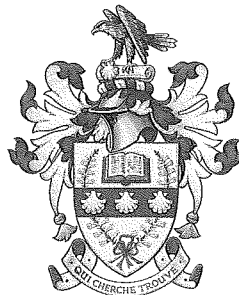


Office of the Vice-Chancellor and President

Vice-Chancellor and President

Professor Paul Johnson

MA, D.Phil, AcSS



LA TROBE UNIVERSITY
AUSTRALIA

Postal address:

Melbourne, Victoria, 3086 Australia

Telephone: +61 3 9479 2000

International +61 3 9479 2000

Facsimile: +61 3 9471 0093

Email: P.Johnson@latrobe.edu.au

1 AUG 2008

8 August 2008

The Honourable Christine Campbell MP
State Member for Pascoe Vale
416A Bell Street
PASCOE VALE 3044

Dear Ms Campbell

Thank you for your letter of 15 July 2008 together with the report "Supporting Choices".

I was concerned that there were factual errors in the report with respect to services provided at La Trobe University. It appears the only interview conducted was on the phone with the Bundoora campus Community Childcare Centre receptionist.

La Trobe University has a range of support services and I have taken the opportunity to provide you with comprehensive information on support services for pregnant students and families.

I detail below the services which are provided across the University:

Childcare Centres

The following campuses have on-campus childcare facilities available: Bundoora, Bendigo, Albury-Wodonga, and Mildura. Undoubtedly, the reduction in fees subsidy following the voluntary student unionism legislation is seriously affecting students and making it more difficult for students to pay the high child-care fees and attend university. Many of these families are studying in order to get themselves out of the poverty trap. Any additional assistance would be of great value to the students and the community in general.

The Bundoora campus Community Childcare Centre offers sessional childcare. Students who require childcare during practicum placements and other such university requirements find it difficult to secure adequate childcare.

The Bundoora campus is the only campus of the University where the University owns and manages the childcare centre. The centre offers all-day care as well as sessional care. Since the introduction of voluntary student unionism the university is only able to subsidise the sessional childcare. The sessional childcare is predominantly used by students (98% student usage) with 98 families accessing this form of care. All day care is utilised by staff, students and the community with a student usage rate of 35%, that is 40 student families utilising this form of care.

Unmet demand is large but fluctuates throughout the year. On occasions there have been 250 families on the waiting list from staff, students and the community. First offers always go to La Trobe university staff and students except for high priority access which must be accommodated under government legislation.

The Wodonga campus childcare centre is owned and operated by the Wodonga TAFE and by arrangement with the University provides both all day care and sessional care for staff or students. There are no subsidies for staff or students. No priority access is given for staff or students when places become vacant except if they fall under the mandated priority access scheme.

The Jira-runga Children's Centre is managed under a lease agreement with the University. It is licensed for 60 places and is available to the children of students and staff of the University and also to the community. Since the reduction of the subsidy from the University post VSU there is no priority access for staff or students of the university. It offers all-day care between 7 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. with no sessional care provided.

The Sunraysia TAFE/La Trobe University Mildura campus has a Long Day Care provider, managed by a Committee of Management which caters for up to 60 children at any one time. It provides childcare for families using TAFE facilities and from the community. No priority entry is given to university staff or students but the centre has a high priority access policy for Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander families. Out of 102 families who utilise the centre 7 families who are students of La Trobe University utilise the centre, some of these families have more than one child using the centre.

Counselling on La Trobe University Campuses

Free counselling services are available to all students on all campuses except the City Campus. This campus is primarily a location students attend for part of their program. However, students from this campus can access free services at Bundoora.

Medical Services

La Trobe University has a bulk billing medical practice on the Bendigo campus. Students at Bundoora can utilise the La Trobe University Medical Centre which bulk bills La Trobe University students.

Breast-Feeding and Parenting Rooms

Breastfeeding and parenting rooms are available to staff and students on the Bendigo, Bundoora and Wodonga campuses. These rooms are provided with wash-up facilities and access to a refrigerator.

Financial support

Financial support for pregnant students and students with children is available in the same way as for other students via an interest free loan.

Support for Academic Study

Students are able to apply for special consideration in relation to their academic study. Extensions on assignment due dates and adjustments to examinations is available to all students through their departmental processes if any issue significantly affects their ability to achieve their academic requirements.

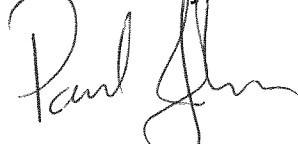
In summary, La Trobe University is committed to an environment that is free from discrimination and endeavours to support student's particular needs. Although the University has support services available your report has highlighted that information for students who are pregnant or who are breastfeeding needs to increase and action will be taken to improve this situation.

In terms of the overall study, La Trobe University would welcome increased government support to students who are pregnant or parents in the following areas:

1. The Job Education Training Childcare Fee Assistance program be expanded to cover the length of a university degree.
2. The Government investigate ways of supporting students who require childcare for practicums and placements, especially for the priority areas of students undertaking teaching and nursing degrees.
3. Restoration of funding for campus services to assist childcare, health care, financial aid and advocacy for students.

I hope the above information is of assistance, and if you would like to discuss this matter further please contact Dr Kerry Ferguson, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Equity and Student Services). Amanda Martin or Brenda Cooper from Kerry's office would be happy to schedule an appointment and can be contacted on 9479 1869.

Yours sincerely



Professor Paul Johnson
Vice-Chancellor