

Sir Zelman Cowen Dean of Law

Classification: Senior Contract

POSITION NUMBER	
POSITION REPORTS TO	College of Arts, Business, Law, Education and IT
PORTFOLIO	Tertiary Education Portfolio
LOCATION/CAMPUS	The position will have a primary campus location at Victoria University's City campus in the heart of the CBD law precinct. The position and incumbent may be relocated to any other existing or future work locations where the University conducts its operations.

OVERALL PURPOSE

The Sir Zelman Cowen Dean of Law of Victoria University (VU) is a pivotal academic and professional leader within the College of Arts, Business, Law, Education and IT, providing strategic, academic and operational leadership to advance the University's impact driven mission and to steward the enduring legacy of Sir Zelman Cowen.

Named in honour of one of Australia's most distinguished jurists, scholars and public intellectuals, the role embodies Sir Zelman Cowen's lifelong commitment to the rule of law, public service, intellectual rigour, civic responsibility, social justice and inclusive education. Through leadership of the VU Law School and the Sir Zelman Cowen initiatives, the Dean ensures that these values are actively expressed through curriculum, research, public engagement and professional formation.

The role is central to delivering sector leading law and justice education, research and engagement that responds to contemporary workforce, civic and societal needs, while providing an outstanding, inclusive and student centred experience. Aligned with the VU Strategic Plan 2022-2030, the Sir Zelman Cowen Dean of Law leads the Law School's contribution to equity led excellence, graduate employability, research with impact and principled partnerships, positioning law and justice as a critical public good.

Reporting to the Executive Dean of the College, the Sir Zelman Cowen Dean of Law is accountable for the strategic and operational performance of the VU Law School across learning and teaching, research and knowledge exchange, industry and government engagement, quality assurance, financial sustainability and people leadership. The role works in close partnership with University service units, research entities, professional bodies and external stakeholders to deliver integrated, future focused outcomes.

The Sir Zelman Cowen Dean of Law will champion the distinctive strengths and public facing contributions of the Law School, including:

- Its location in the Melbourne City legal precinct, enabling deep engagement with courts, the profession, government and industry.
- The VU Block Model[®], delivering personalised, intensive and applied legal education.
- Nationally recognised initiatives such as the award winning Parliamentary Program, industry embedded learning, and strong clinical and experiential offerings.

OVERALL PURPOSE

- The Sir Zelman Cowen Lecture and the Hon. Michael Kirby Justice Oration, flagship events that position VU as a national forum for principled legal debate, democratic values and progressive legal thought.
- A renowned moot and advocacy program, including the annual Michael Kirby Contract Law Moot Competition, reinforcing excellence in legal reasoning, advocacy and professional identity.
- A strong commitment to accessible and connected pathways across diplomas, undergraduate, postgraduate coursework and higher degree research programs.

Reflecting VU's deep commitment to progressive inclusivity and Protecting Country, the Sir Zelman Cowen Dean of Law will lead with integrity and purpose to advance equity, participation and success for a diverse student and staff community. This includes embedding First Nations knowledges and perspectives across curriculum, research and engagement, supporting self-determination, and fostering a culturally safe and respectful environment.

Through visionary leadership, principled partnership and disciplined execution, the Sir Zelman Cowen Dean of Law will strengthen the reputation, relevance and public impact of the VU Law School – locally, nationally and globally – ensuring it continues to honour Sir Zelman Cowen's legacy while contributing meaningfully to Victoria University's ambition to be one of the world's leading impact-driven universities

ORGANISATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

In 2018, VU boldly introduced an innovative pedagogic and curriculum approach: the VU Block Model[®]. This, along with the VU First Year College[®], has redefined the VU student experience and has been one of the most transformative innovations in the Australian higher education sector over the past decade.

VU has nation-leading participation and success rates for students from an equity background, with almost half of VU students being the first in their family to attend University.

VU is renowned for its areas of research specialisation, including Sports and Exercise Science (ranked 7th in the world) as well as Policy Studies; Water Research; Green Research Translation; Immunology, and Early Childhood Education. The University ranks 70th in the Times Higher Education (THE) Young University Rankings.

VU is one of only six Australian universities to proudly offer both Higher Education and TAFE.

Victoria University's **Strategic Plan 2022–2030** builds on these strengths, with a clear purpose and vision to shape its future success.

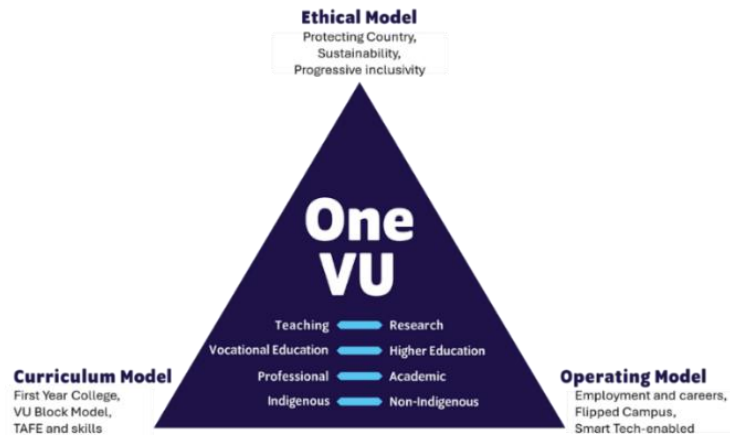
Purpose

We are of Melbourne's west and of the world – championing progressive and excellent education, impactful research, meaningful industry engagement, and a deep commitment to Protecting Country.

Vision

To be one of the leading impact-driven universities in the world by 2030.

One VU



Strategic Drivers

To achieve its vision, VU has five strategic drivers:

1. Learner-centred for Life
2. Partnering with Principle
3. Maximising Research with Impact
4. Protecting Country
5. A Thriving Place to Study and Work.

The University provides educational opportunities to over 52,000 students, including around 12,000 international students both in Australia and overseas. VU has campuses across Melbourne's western suburbs and in the heart of Melbourne's CBD, including the VU City Campus – the tallest vertical campus in Australia – launched in 2022. International students can choose to study at VU in Melbourne, VU Sydney, VU Brisbane, VU India (opening in late 2026) or partner institutions overseas.

MAJOR CHALLENGES / FREEDOM TO ACT

The Sir Zelman Cowen Dean of Law operates with a high degree of autonomy and accountability for the strategic and operational performance of the VU Law School, within University policy, governance and delegated authority, and under the direction of the Executive Dean. Key challenges and accountabilities include:

- Providing integrated leadership across learning and teaching, research, and industry and community engagement, ensuring these activities are contemporary, mutually reinforcing and aligned to workforce, civic and societal needs.
- Driving collaboration and interdisciplinary engagement across law, justice and cognate disciplines within the College, across other Colleges, VU TAFE, VU Research and enabling units, modelling a One VU approach.
- Contributing actively to College and University leadership, including participation in University wide strategic planning, decision making and implementation of Strategic and Operational Plans.
- Leading a clear and compelling strategic mission for the Law School that advances equity, inclusion and participation, strengthens student success and graduate outcomes, and enhances the University's impact driven reputation.

- Ensuring sound financial stewardship and sustainability, including effective planning, resource allocation and performance management, balancing academic quality, student experience and long term viability.
- Advocating for law and justice within the University and externally, strengthening the profile, influence and contribution of the Law School at institutional, community, state and national levels.
- Engaging with the legal profession and peak bodies, representing the University in public and professional forums, and ensuring programs, partnerships and research remain current, credible and professionally relevant.
- Developing and sustaining a strategic international engagement agenda, embedding internationalisation across teaching, research and partnerships in line with the University's global aspirations.
- Fostering a high performing, inclusive culture in which staff and students are supported, engaged and safe, and where excellence in teaching, research and engagement is enabled and recognised.

MAJOR DUTIES

In performing the duties of this role, the incumbent is required to comply with all relevant University policies and procedures, quality assurance frameworks, and legislative and regulatory requirements. Key responsibilities include:

- Providing strategic and operational leadership of the VU Law School, aligning planning, resourcing and performance with the University's Strategic and Operational Plans.
- Ensuring effective stewardship of financial, human, intellectual and physical resources, including oversight of the Academic Workload Model, and exercising program level operational leadership typically associated with a Head of Program, including curriculum delivery, staffing and workload coordination, and quality assurance.
- Serving as Chair of the Sir Zelman Cowen initiative, providing leadership for the stewardship of its legacy and intellectual focus, and leading the planning, governance and delivery of the annual Sir Zelman Cowen Lecture as a flagship public event for the Law School and the University.
- Positioning the Law School as a nationally and internationally recognised contributor to legal education, research and civic impact, including through revenue diversification and strategic partnership opportunities.
- Being accountable for compliance with all internal and external quality assurance, accreditation, regulatory and professional requirements.
- Recruiting, leading and developing high quality academic and professional staff, fostering a high performing, inclusive and collegial culture aligned with University values.
- Leading the design, delivery and continuous improvement of a contemporary, accessible and market responsive Law curriculum across on campus, blended and online modes.
- Strengthening applied, industry embedded and work integrated learning to enhance student pathways, employability and graduate outcomes.
- Leading evidence based strategies to improve student retention, progression, success and completion, with a particular focus on students from diverse and equity backgrounds.
- Cultivating a strong research culture that supports high quality, ethical and impactful research and research training aligned with University priorities.
- Building and sustaining strong engagement with industry, the legal profession, government and community to support knowledge exchange, enterprise and reputation.

- Developing and maintaining a national and international profile, including offshore education and research initiatives aligned with the University's International Strategy.
- Building effective cross University relationships, representing the Law School internally, and championing a One VU approach, diversity, inclusion, wellbeing and occupational health and safety.

SELECTION CRITERIA

1. **Doctoral qualification** in law.
2. **Substantial senior academic leadership experience** in a complex higher education environment, with demonstrated responsibility for learning and teaching, research, industry engagement and operational performance.
3. **Demonstrated understanding of the contemporary tertiary education landscape**, including national and international policy, regulatory and funding contexts across higher education and vocational education, and the professional environments in which law and justice graduates operate.
4. **A clear strategic vision for the future of law and justice education**, grounded in workforce relevance, civic impact, graduate employability and societal contribution.
5. **Proven capability to lead research and research training**, including building research culture and capability, supporting applied and translational research, and contributing to outcomes with local, national and international impact.
6. **Demonstrated financial and resource management expertise**, including experience managing budgets, staffing and resources within a complex organisation, and a track record of delivering sustainable outcomes aligned to strategic priorities.
7. **Strong strategic planning and execution capability**, with evidence of translating strategy into operational outcomes that strengthen academic quality, market position and organisational sustainability.
8. **Highly developed people leadership capability**, with demonstrated success in leading diverse academic and professional teams through change, fostering engagement, inclusion, performance and wellbeing, and communicating with clarity, credibility and purpose.
9. **Well-developed commercial and business acumen**, including the ability to identify emerging trends, assess risk, develop new opportunities, and build viable partnerships that support growth, impact and financial resilience.
10. **A strong national and/or international profile as a leader in law and justice education and scholarship**, with evidence of high-quality publications, research income generation, professional standing and external engagement.
11. **Demonstrated alignment with VU's values and leadership capabilities**, including the ability to:
 - Deliver service excellence through accountability, results orientation and sound judgement
 - Engage effectively with students, staff, industry and community partners
 - Collaborate and partner across disciplines, portfolios and external organisations
 - Innovate through continuous improvement, digital enablement and entrepreneurial thinking
 - Lead with integrity by setting direction, enabling change, and developing people.
12. **Sound knowledge of occupational health and safety obligations**, with demonstrated ability to integrate health, safety and wellbeing considerations into strategic and operational decision making.

ORGANISATIONAL CHART

