

# THE BOND BUSINESS

Last week's shock resignation of vice-chancellor Raoul Mortley has left Bond in its usual position — the limelight.  
DOROTHY ILLING reports

**‘W**HO is the vice-chancellor?” says a Bond University student, asked his opinion on Raoul Mortley's resignation last week. The turbulence rocking the sandstone citadel apparently hasn't reached the student body.

It's business as usual at Bond this week. Or that's the line being put about by management and the student association — Bond University Student Council Inc. No huddles to exchange gossip in the pristine corridors. No student demonstrations — the students at Bond aren't demonstrative. You don't see even intellectual graffiti across toilet doors. No scraps of paper drift across the empty expanse of sandstone lawn and lake. Cigarette butts are stubbed in ashtrays.

That Australia's first private university dared to be different was brought into sharp focus when vice-chancellor Mortley stunned the higher education community by pulling up stumps last week only 13 months into his five-year term, citing differences with the board over strategic directions.

He is the fourth chief executive to leave Bond since it was established by an Act of the Queensland parliament in 1987. While his departure might please some of the staff and board members who have been at loggerheads with Mortley, it will not enhance the frac-



Departure... Raoul Mortley is the fourth chief executive to leave Bond University —  
Picture: PATRICK HAMILTON

tured image and is likely to lead to further instability.

According to one higher education source, Mortley's return to Bond last year (he was there from 1989 to 1993 before becoming vice-chancellor at Newcastle) was seen as a great vote of confidence in the university's future. Former Mortley colleague Alan Finch also returned last year to become registrar.

Mortley's resignation came days after the appointment of astronaut Paul Scully-Power as chancellor, to succeed Harry Messel on January 1.

Speculation about a potentially difficult working relationship between Mortley and Scully-Power — who showed an interest in the vice-chancellorship last year — was rife. Scully-Power says there is no friction.

Bond, once the smallest university in Australia — now the second smallest — has never been out of the news for long. It was established by then high-flier, now jailed, Alan Bond and EIE International Pty Ltd in the heady corporate 1980s at a cost of around \$300 million.

Many of the staff were hand-picked, attracted by the lure of a new venture, low student-staff ratios, generous resources and a coastal environment.

In January 1991, EIE bought out Bond Corporation, but later went into receivership.

In 1995, tenders were called for the campus land and buildings, and Queensland University was the successful bidder, but a court battle ensued

between Bond and mortgagees, the Long Term Credit Bank of Japan. Since January, Bond has been awaiting a Supreme Court verdict on that dispute over tenure of the site.

The university has attracted a cast of high-profile and controversial identities. The flamboyant Messel, once executive chancellor and soon to exit as chancellor, often clashed with staff over his authoritarian management style.

**T**HE 10-member council includes former NSW premier Neville Wran, merchant banker Malcolm Turnbull, Imelda Roche of Nutri-Metrics and Gold Coast developer Brian Ray.

For eight months last year, higher education powerbroker and former Melbourne University vice-chancellor David Penington sat on the board. A respected academic administrator, Penington is believed to have left over concerns about governance.

Doug Shears, executive chairman of ICM Australia, quit the board in May after about 15 months.

This year the university was back in the headlines with unfounded speculation that Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett wanted to snaffle it for his State.

Mortley announced he wanted to establish Australia's first private medical school — a proposal that drew little support from governments.

A factionalised board and its perceived lack of support for Mortley are thought to be one of the main reasons for his departure. It is understood Mortley tried recently to have five or six

senior executives from big corporations appointed to the board — a move that would have altered the power balance on council — but was rejected.

One higher education observer remarks that any university that has had a series of such rapid changes at the top, is dogged by controversy and is facing a potential 37 competitors in the new higher education fee-paying market must be apprehensive.

An interim management arrangement is in place, with Messel overseeing operations advised by a three-member committee comprising Brian Ray, the university's commercial director John Le Lievre and academic Ben Shaw.

The university says it will move quickly to appoint another vice-chancellor. However, one school of thought is that new chancellor Scully-Power will be eased in as executive chancellor, folding together the two positions as they were at one stage under Messel before his executive powers were curtailed.

That proposition is rejected by registrar Finch, who tells the HES that finding a new vice-chancellor is a high priority for the council.

Scully-Power says he has no ambition to become vice-chancellor.

**W**HATEVER the case, after the turmoil in the senior ranks at Bond, finding a successor to Mortley may not be easy. The job comes with baggage — perceived or otherwise.

Mortley, a philosopher, had academic credibility. The board may opt to go further down the corporate road and make a blue-chip or industry appointment.

Meanwhile, the shutters have gone down at Bond. A blanket of silence has settled over the campus where loyalties to the institution appear to have overridden internal divisiveness.

Messel is not taking calls from the media. Two staff association members say they have given an assurance to Ray that they will not talk to the media. Ray declines to speak to the HES.

One person who is prepared to speak is the president of Bond University Student Council Inc, Charles Hellawell.

He is critical of the media for "dragging the university through the mud so many times" and says despite the perception, it is a unified campus.

The attitude of students — who pay upwards of \$50,000 for a degree course — has not altered because they are getting a high quality education, he says.

Hellawell concedes, however, that even though the students-alumni have an elected representative on council, they have virtually no contact with the board, the deliberations of which remain confidential.