

# The VC who saved Bond

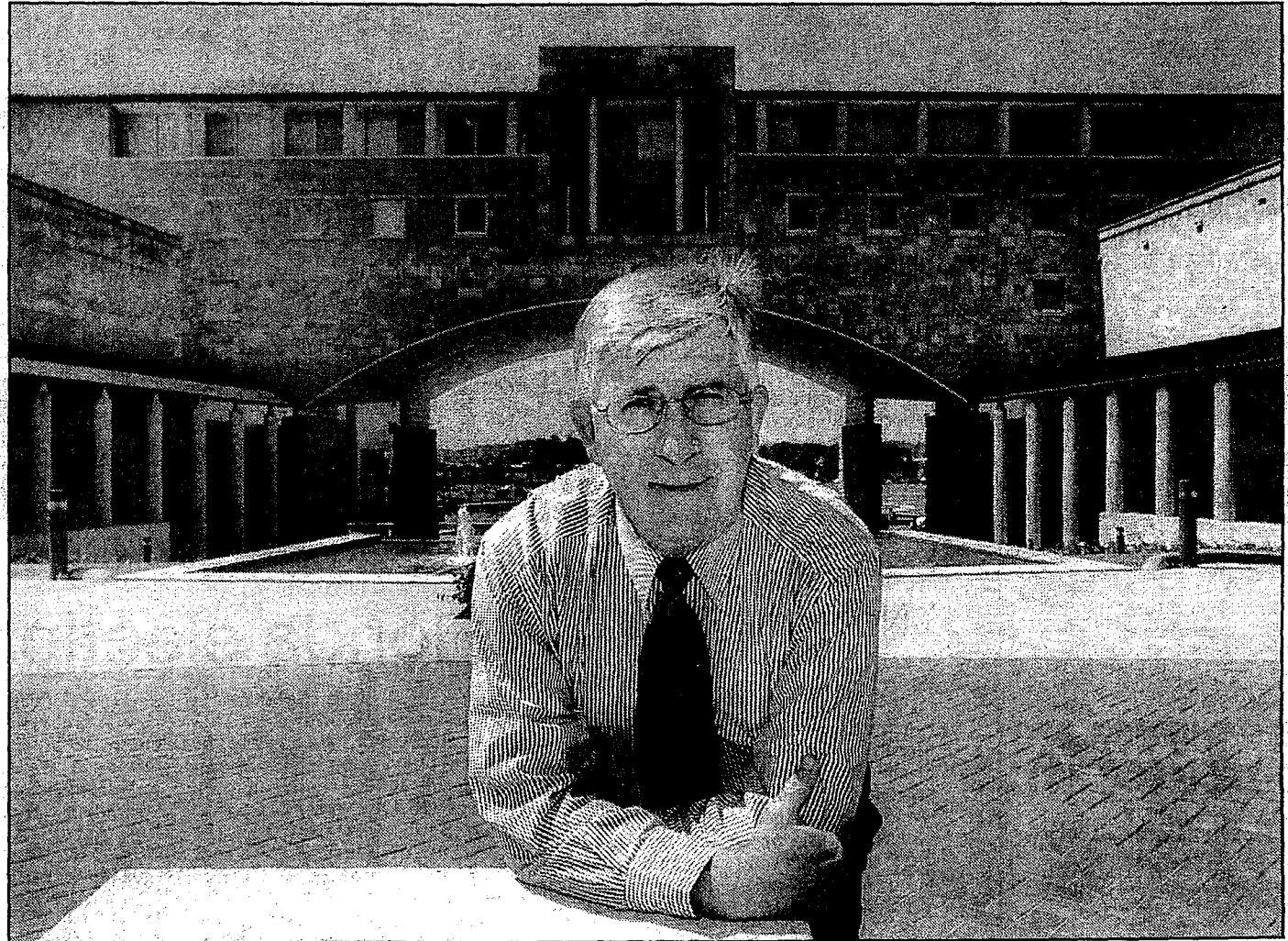
Bond University vice-chancellor Professor Ken Moores is the institution's reluctant hero. He airs his views on his role, and university education at Bond to *Bulletin* chief reporter **Peter Gleeson**.

**K**EN Moores never wanted to be Bond University's vice-chancellor. In his own words, the position requires 'a priest, a visionary, a business planner and an entertainer . . . all wrapped up in the one person'.

But fate got in the way.

Three weeks before the university opened in 1988, the man who was to head up the business school at Bond, American Steven Johnson, tragically drowned when his car was swept off a bridge at Mudgeeraba.

Professor Moores was asked to take on the position. He had come to Bond University to teach, and the bureaucratic burden of heading up a department did not appeal.



Bond University vice-chancellor and acclaimed miracle worker Professor Ken Moores

Reluctantly, he agreed.  
A decade later, with proven business acumen,

Professor Moores was once again asked by the university board to do them a favour.

They wanted him as vice-chancellor. Again, reluctantly, he agreed.

Now, four years down the track, Professor Moores is being touted as a miracle worker. He's taken the university from the brink of collapse to its first accounting profit since it was established.

Professor Moores, 53, has just been invited by the board to stick around for a few more years to usher the university into what he calls the 'growth to greatness' phase.

It's a far cry from his early years in Brisbane, where he spent too much time playing rugby and trying to make the long-distance running squad at St Laurence's.

"When I came to this place I wondered why anyone would ever want that job (vice-chancellor)," he said.

"When I came here, I thought back in 1988 that I really don't want this (Dean of Business).

"But I said I'd do it for a few years to set the school up. I did that during 1989-90. I then went off to do research and set up the Family Business Studies centre.

"Then, when I came back in, within the space of 24 hours they prevailed on me to take the job back as Dean of Business. That was October 1997, and I did that for two months before being asked to do this job.

"I must admit the university did have a reputation for chewing them up (vice-chancellors) and spitting them out."

When Professor Moores was appointed as vice-chancellor in December, 1997, the university was a takeover target and was about to lose the lease on its Robina campus and buildings.

There were many outside the institution who firmly believed that the university would not survive that period.

"In fact it was the intention of some people that it would not survive that period," said Professor Moores.

"I had a counter view. I never doubted the survival of Bond University as an institution.

"Perhaps there was a doubt as to whether we could necessarily survive on this site.

"But we had the name and reputation, and it would have been very sad to have lost that.

"During 1999 I investigated a number of alternative sites and had plans drawn up for other sites. The forces certainly railed against us."

Relying heavily on his accountancy background, Professor Moores began negotiations to buy the land, valued at \$90 million, and the buildings. It was a painstaking process.

Ultimately they emerged into the light at the

\$60 million, Professor Moores had saved the Gold Coast's first university from the guillotine.

He put a memo out to all staff this week describing 2001 as a good year, with record enrolments and the consolidation of the university's financial position.

"The next stage of the strategic development of Bond is a truly independent tertiary institution of international reputation while maintaining our Australian character ethos," said the memo.

Sitting in his office, Professor Moores reflected on those long and difficult days when the university came so close to disintegration.

He said five days after he took over as vice-chancellor the long-awaited court decision came down, with the judge ruling that no long-term lease existed.

"He gave us three years on site," he said.

"The \$90 million was deemed to be a subordinated debt and we didn't have to pay it until all the running costs were paid.

"It certainly focussed my attention that first week. I sought to resolve it commercially rather than in a litigious way, and started negotiations.

"It was a slower process than anticipated and when we lost the appeal, it got worse.

"It wasn't until August, 1999, that we were able to sort it out."

The underlying opposition often came from the established universities that were notionally against private university education.

"In recent years that level of opposition to the private status has dissipated," he said. "Quite frankly, I didn't have time to ponder whether it was a tall poppy syndrome because I had to get on with solving the problem."

Professor Moores has subsequently added an Institute for Health Sciences and is currently negotiating to introduce a School of Medicine and a post-graduate education program.

Part of the university's vision is to become one of Australia's best tertiary learning experiences, and Professor Moores also hopes to see a marriage of sorts between the university and the Gold Coast community.

He believes in 10 years the university will be playing a major role in redefining the Gold Coast as an innovation city.

"If I have my way, education will be the mortar that brings all the industry blocks together to help the Gold Coast," he said.

"Industries on the Gold Coast have a tremendous opportunity to adopt education as their defining difference.

"It can change this city and we can make it the entrepreneurial capital of Australia. We can redefine entrepreneurship.

stable, secure institution which has made giant leaps in teaching and research.

"In 50 years' time we would have established that position across the university spectrum and have a research quality about us that recognises us internationally.

"Much depends on the way people respond to us. There are enough opportunities for us and Griffith University to move forward.

"We obviously haven't the research reputation of some of the universities that have been around for 150 years. But we are getting there."

Prof Moores and his wife Tricia they have two children, Anthea, who studied commerce at Bond, and Christopher, who is now a physiotherapist in Rockhampton.

He sees a strong link between sport and business. This belief was forged during his secondary schooling at St Laurence's, Brisbane, where he was dux of his Year 11 class but found his love for rugby and athletics was taking his eye off the academic game.

"I believe in balance in life," he said.

"I was dux of my class, but then I got very heavily into First XV rugby and running.

"I eased off the studies. It taught me you have to balance things.

"I think you can apply a lot of qualities to sport as you do to business. With distance running it was not about winning the race, but about my time versus the distance.

"It's the same when I play golf. It's me against the course. It's all about taking it to a higher plane. The same applies to business."

Professor Moores says he never really had the opportunity to savour the achievement of becoming vice-chancellor.

"I never had any expectations of the job because, quite frankly, I never coveted it," he said.

"I've worked my way through it in a systematic way. It is rocks and diamonds. Some days are just such a buzz and some days I wonder why the bloody hell I bother. When I took over, the priorities were clear and obvious.

"It was to ensure we bought the place, to fix the governance and professionalise the management. Dealing with intellectuals is a challenge.

"That is far more difficult to manage.

"This is an intelligent workforce who typically don't want to be involved in anything to do with detail until such time as it affects them.

"Then they want to know all the detail retrospectively and why they were not involved.

"These are articulate people. That's par for the course. You accept that.

"In most business organisations when the boss says jump, the employee says: 'How high?'. Here they will say 'why?'"

Professor Moores said that last year, for the

first time, the university received appreciation and interest.

"We are a not-for-profit entity, so any profits go back into the university," he said.

"It has taken us a while to get the cash flow right and strengthen the balance sheet."

Professor Moores says he believes good education is about quality, not necessarily quantity.

"I believe you are better off doing a few things well, rather than expanding into areas that you may not be so good at. 'I'm a bit of a traditionalist in that regard.

"Bond classes are small and students interact and build up their expressive skills, both verbal and written.

"Much of the system in Australia relies on increased throughput which makes class sizes bigger. It can see the alienation of students. I'm not about selling degrees.

"We're about providing a value-added education environment"

Do parents respond to that sales pitch?

"Yes, I think they do, but the challenge for us is whether they are prepared to pay for the differentiation," he said. "We don't expect to be a university for 40,000 students."

Professor Moores said about half of Bond's students were from overseas.

"The international market is very important at Bond," he said. "We are third in the world behind the UK and US in overseas students. At most Australian universities the ratio is maybe 10 per cent overseas and 90 per cent Australian. Here it is 50-50."

Professor Moores says Bond University provided Australian students the opportunity to study alongside the overseas pupils.

"It's part of the defining difference here," he said. "In the end, if you are mixing in class with Norwegians and Asians, it changes your life. That's what the university experience is."

Professor Moores said most Gold Coasters had tremendous warmth and affection for Bond University.

"We were the first university on the Coast with a head office here," he said.

Professor Moores said he wanted to work on ways to give students greater access to Bond University, but this would not mean lower fees.

The university now has 2400 students, up 1000 from when Professor Moores took over.

He has a simple philosophy when it comes to answering the tough question of whether Bond gives value for money.

But considering the average degree will cost \$60,000, it's a valid question.

"My attitude is that long after the pain of the cost is gone, the quality remains."