

# Nurses answer the call

**A**TENDING a dual-sector university had key advantages for Victoria University nursing students Rachel Nin and Elyse Smith.

For Rachel, 23, who left school without a career path in mind, VU offered an opportunity to test the waters through a TAFE program.

And for Elyse, 22, the TAFE side of nursing with its immediate hands-on training was more appealing than theory-based higher education.

She had previously studied for a nutrition degree but realised it was not for her.

Both women knew their one-year nursing certificate four would qualify them as a highly employable division-two registered nurse even if they didn't go further with their studies.

Once enrolled, training in VU's simulation lab and practice ward, followed by eight weeks of clinical placement, sparked passions that made both young women realise that nursing was their calling.

"I loved it as soon as I started. There was so much hands-on learning with real results, so it made the experience a lot less daunting when it came time to treat real patients," Nin says.

"Mum tells me I wanted to be a nurse from when I was little. I can see one day perhaps continuing in this field to even become a doctor," Smith

says. After completing their certificate four, Rachel and Elyse crossed over from ATFE to higher education by enrolling in VU's bachelor of nursing program to train as more highly skilled division-one registered nurses.

Nin is now on placement at the Royal Melbourne Hospital working at its John Cade Acute Mental Facility, and Elyse is working at Ardeer House, an aged-care home in Deer Park. Both will graduate later this year.

Their progression from vocational training to higher education is one they share with about one-quarter of VU's nursing students.

Kristine Martin-McDonald, Head of VU's School of Nursing and Midwifery said the path was particularly common among mature-age women.

"Women who haven't been in the workplace for a while may not have the confidence or know about their capabilities," she says.

"The diploma program is a good starting point to learn about yourself."

Gerard Glennon, acting head of VU's School of Health says paths from TAFE to higher education are among the university's major points of distinction.

"We are continually working on developing links between our higher education and TAFE programs so students can have the flexibility to transfer between courses," he says.



**Hands-on:** training made Rachel Nin and Elyse Smith enjoy nursing.

"The students receive a broad range of placement experiences during both programs, including acute care, emergency training, aged care and mental-health nursing."

Nin says she has found most fulfillment in mental-health nursing, whereas

Smith has been inspired by appreciation she feels working in aged-care nursing.

Nursing studies have traditionally contained a significant practical component, and VU has now embedded learning in the workplace and community as a feature of all courses.