



VICE CHANCELLOR'S TRANSITION AND RETENTION TASKFORCE

CONFIRMED MINUTES

A meeting of the VC's Transition and Retention Taskforce was held on **Thursday 16 September 2021** from **3.00 to 4.30 pm** via **Zoom**

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

1.1 Welcome

Simon Bedford (Chair) opened the meeting and welcomed members and guest.

Attendees

Simon Bedford, PVC Learning Futures (Chair)

Natalie Bradbury, Director, Student Retention & Success

Michael Burgess, Chief Student Experience Officer

Jo-Anne Chuck, Head of Teaching and Curriculum

Colin Clark, Project Officer, Learning Futures

Christine Croser, Director, Office of Competitive Intelligence & Analysis

Jess Gleeson, Director, Data Integrity, Quality & Operations

Caterina Tannous, Director of Undergraduate Health Science & STARS/START Lead

Note: Jess Gleeson replaces Lizette Delacy as Director, Data Integrity, Quality & Operations

1.2 Invitees

Ana Rodas, Associate Dean, Learning and Teaching, School of Social Sciences

1.3 Apologies

Lynnae Venaruzzo, Head, Technology-Enabled Learning

1.4 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th August 2021 were accepted without revision.

1.5 Action sheet from previous meeting

To assist members with monitoring and controlling the work of the Committee, the current action sheet (incorporating items arising from previous meetings) was discussed.

2.1 Retention in 1H Autumn Semester (Christine Croser)

An Executive Committee paper, *Impact of COVID-19 on Student Enrolment (September 2021)* was shared with the Taskforce. The report covered the first semester of the pandemic in Autumn 2020 in comparison with Autumn 2021 when the COVID prevalence in the community was lower and some teaching activities had returned to campus. In addition, a VC's Transition and Retention Taskforce update on current enrolments requested by Leanne Yard following the August Taskforce meeting was received from Competitive Intelligence and Analysis.

For comparison, 2018 was used as a baseline, as commencing student headcount numbers in 2019 were anomalous. The impact report showed no significant difference in retention between the two semesters. This was also true for undergraduate international students, who were retained at a similar rate to previous years once enrolled, although pandemic restrictions prevented new arrivals. In terms of student lifecycle, enrolment at key academic milestones (enrolment on commencement, Week 3, post-census, and in the following year) in 2021 has been tracking very similarly to previous years. Moreover, Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander student enrolment levels have been maintained.

Of note was the postgraduate international cohort, which has had a significantly smaller intake in terms of headcount 2021 than in previous years because of travel restrictions. However, retention patterns of enrolled postgraduate international students already in Australia were consistent with those of previous years.

When tracking the first cohort impacted by COVID-19 (Autumn intake 2020) across their whole first year and their return the following year, it was noted:

- 65.6% (7,446) of the 2020 Autumn commencing intake returned to their course the following year compared with 63.9% (6,965) for the 2019 Autumn commencing intake and 61% (6,983) for the 2018 Autumn commencing intake.
- 63.6% (7,218) of the 2020 Autumn commencing intake were still in their course after the Autumn session the following year compared with 61.4% (6,691) for the 2019 Autumn commencing intake and 58.7% (6,730) for the 2018 Autumn commencing intake.
- 29.4% (3,337) of the 2020 Autumn commencing intake were no longer enrolled at Western Sydney University, in any course, after the Autumn census in the following year. This is an improvement compared with 30.4% (3,317) for the 2019 Autumn commencing intake and 32.3% (3,701) for the 2018 Autumn commencing intake.

Enabling courses (The College) EFTSL comparison with the same time last year shows a change of -44% in headcount; however, a small base was noted compared with the other cohorts, producing a relatively large change in percentage terms. In terms of EFTSL, enabling course enrolments have only changed by -34.9%.

A drop in student load was also apparent in a number of Schools. In contrast, the School of Health Sciences increased its student load by 100 EFTSL.

Headcounts of students commencing in the largest intake (Autumn) in 2021 were stable, but EFTSL numbers have fallen over the past three years, suggesting that

commencing students are taking on smaller study loads. Because these students will continue, it is hypothesised that they will be more confident, which may correspond to an increased continuing load compared with previous years. It was suggested that it would be useful to segment the students and examine their unit consumption patterns.

It was noted that retention patterns are very complex, and many factors such as demographics of market size and share need to be factored into the analysis. Relative declines can be concealed by apparent increases, so further investigation is warranted.

Ana Rodas reported that Brian Stout, newly appointed PVC of the HASS cluster, wants cluster-level information gathered to improve consistency of approach to measure retention and to compare across schools.

Action: Taskforce members to highlight to school managers that they should now have access to retention dashboards and the managers should notify CIA if they do not.

2.2 Setting of census dates in the academic dateline (Jess Gleeson)

Data Integrity, Quality & Operations is constructing the academic dateline for future years. From 2022, census dates will not align with the traditional dates of 31 March or August.

It is proposed that future census dates fall on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday so support is available for students prior to and following the day, and the date will be on a consistent week within the timeline of the term. This will not be implemented until 2024, as the 2022 and 2023 academic timelines have already been approved.

A consistent date would facilitate scheduling early unit assessments to allow feedback before census date. Moreover, a consistent week for census date would assist forecasting.

It was decided that the proposed rule of census date always falling in week 5 would be acceptable to the Taskforce.

2.3 Kapiche analysis of SFU comments (Jo Chuck/Christine Croser)

The licence for Kapiche qualitative comment analysis software has now been extended by 12 months. Discussions are continuing on which team in Learning Futures can analyse SFU data. It was communicated by the vendor that a broader cohort than unit or course is required (at least 1000 responses) to achieve accurate sentiment analysis. This suggests that school or cluster analyses would be preferable.

CIA can provide the raw data for analysis, provided such use accords with the privacy agreement with students. CIA has a staff member who can perform such analyses, but completion time would depend on workload. The TEL team may be able to assist, and Christine will liaise with Lynnae and Jo to discuss needs and staff time required.

The SEO and Kapiche can provide training in using the tool if required.

Action: Christine and Jo to liaise with Lynnae and investigate capacity to perform sentiment analyses, with results to be presented at the November Senate Education Committee meeting.

2.4 Update on STARS Community of Practice (Cathy)

A meeting was held on 27 August 2021 with school STARS coordinators. Participants appreciated the opportunity to connect and discuss their roles and the future contribution of the network. The attendees identified as priorities the reinstatement of teaching and learning showcases to share teaching practice, coordination of academic literacy support across schools, a review of resources for teachers and coordinators online, and STARS coordinators as a transition and retention resource for their schools.

An MS Teams site has been created, and bi-monthly group sessions are planned.

An executive paper should be prepared to request funding in the form of workload allocation, as the network is an important conduit for the Taskforce's transition and retention work.

Action: Cathy and Colin to prepare a short executive paper on the STARS network, addressing the issue of funding.

2.5 Research week presentation (Cathy)

A committee has been formed to plan a research week presentation on Researching and publishing your teaching, on the 28 October 2021. The event will cover the research process from beginning to publication, START and TEL research at different stages, teaching evaluation frameworks, non-traditional outputs, and ecologies of research. The presentation will conclude with a discussion of the START and TEL ethics umbrella and the CER evaluation framework for teaching. The committee consists of Simon Bedford, Cathy Tannous, Christina Curry (Transforming Teaching Champion at WSU) and Dr Jo-Anne Kelder, Adjunct Senior Researcher with the College of Sciences and Engineering UTAS, Senior Editor, the Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice, and Editor for the HERDSA journal, Advancing Scholarship and Research in Higher Education.

2.6 Reverse transition pathway (Natalie)

The reverse transition pathway has commenced under the name the *Steps to Success* program. Western Success has begun the outreach to students who have either recently resigned or are on conditional enrolment but not currently in units. Communications are being drafted, and Western Success will connect students with The College to commence study in term 3.

Students were identified using a data-driven approach. In future this approach will also be supplemented by advice from ACAs as sometimes the data alone does not always identify the students who would benefit most from such a program.

Action: Natalie to present data on uptake and interest at the next VC Taskforce meeting for feedback on evaluation criteria.

2.7 School reports to Education Committee and alignment with workplans (Jo)

In the most recent Assessment Committee meeting, schools were asked to reflect on the Autumn Semester and their alignment with the retention strategy and the workplans submitted to the Taskforce, although the COVID lockdown appears to have impeded this process. An in-depth analysis remains to be performed.

In relation to this item, APCAC is preparing a standardised template for reporting on Hyflex teaching.

Unconfirmed Minutes – VC's Transition and Retention Taskforce, 16 September 2021

Action: Jo and Colin to complete analysis of alignment between workplans and school reports of transition and retention strategies to Senate Education Committee.

3 NEXT MEETING

3.1 The next meeting will be on **Tuesday 26th October 2.30–4.00pm.**