



VICE CHANCELLOR'S TRANSITION AND RETENTION TASKFORCE

CONFIRMED MINUTES

A meeting of the VC's Transition and Retention Taskforce was held on **Tuesday 08 February, 2022**, from **2.00 to 3.30 pm** via **Zoom**

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

1.1 Welcome

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

Attendees

Professor Simon Bedford, PVC Learning Futures (Chair)
Natalie Bradbury, Director, Student Retention & Success
Michael Burgess, Chief Student Experience Officer
Associate Professor Jo-Anne Chuck, Head of Teaching and Curriculum
Dr Colin Clark, Project Officer, Learning Futures
Jess Gleeson, Director, Data Integrity, Quality & Operations

1.2 Invitees

Ben Hallett & Mirna Biroja, Vygo (www.vygoapp.com)

1.3 Apologies

Christine Croser, Director, Office of Competitive Intelligence & Analysis
Dr Caterina Tannous, Director of Undergraduate Health Science & STARS/START Lead
Lynnae Venaruzzo, Head, Technology-Enabled Learning

Professor Simon Bedford requested members who are unable to attend to appoint an alternate to attend in their place, as too many absences result in the meeting being non quorate under the Taskforce's terms of reference.

Action: Dr Colin Clark to remind members to appoint alternates when they cannot attend meetings.

1.4 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 1st December 2021 were accepted with minor revisions.

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 Progression Policy / show cause for students (Benn Hallett Vygo)

As part of the new progression policy¹, the Show Cause process states that students may be invited to attend a forum that will guide them towards appropriate academic advice and support services, including counselling and learning support. To this end, the taskforce considered a technology solution to this forum Ben Hallett (CEO) and Mirna Biroja (Partner Engagement) from Vygo (www.vygoapp.com) were invited to present on the services Vygo could provide as a solution.. Specifically, this would be aimed to resolve issues impacting student academic progression.

Under the new Progression Policy, students can use attendance at a student support forum as evidence of their engagement in addressing issues that may have resulted in suspension or exclusion. It was noted that students require access to support or advice at many points in the academic calendar and moreover, bringing together at-risk students raises confidentiality issues. As such, an alternate process to direct students to appropriate support services is required. The Taskforce was interested in whether the Vygo app could be used as an alternative platform that would show evidence of student engagement in addressing personal and academic issues without requiring attendance.

Professor Simon Bedford stated that some examples of how students articulate personal and academic issues impacting progression may give the Taskforce more insight into the difficulties of evaluating student appeals. Some examples of Show-Cause responses would assist the discussion and he requested Dr Colin Clark to obtain several de-identified examples of good and poor student responses from the Pro Vice Chancellor of Engagement and Advancement.

Ben Hallett explained that Vygo works with universities around the world to connect students to support services. The Vygo app connects students to a social community of mentors, tutors, counsellors, advisors, alumni and other students, synchronously or asynchronously. Peer-to-peer services are a speciality of the firm, and the company seeks to make support services simple and engaging for students, as well as cost-effective and scalable for universities without requiring huge investment in human resources.

The app is described as an ‘ecosystem’ of support services, bringing together academic, professional and wellbeing support. It can also link students to external services such as Lifeline or Studiosity.

Most peer mentors or tutors that use the Vygo app work on a volunteer basis, or gain credit towards university awards. Some programs pay mentors/tutors, such as the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme.

Professor Simon Bedford noted the danger of students being led to contract cheating sites. Ben Hallett acknowledged the risk but noted that the app tracks the relationship more closely than alternatives such as WhatsApp or Facebook, which may discourage misconduct, and commented that there have been no such claims to date.

The Taskforce decided there should be an institution-level discussion of how the app might be used and its alignment with Western’s needs for tracking of engagement by students at risk. A useful addition could be a series of questions to triage students and guide them to appropriate support. Ben Hallett noted that the next version of the Vygo app would include this capability. He also remarked that text chat reduced

¹ <https://policies.westernsydney.edu.au/view.current.php?id=00027>

resistance to seeking support as it is less confronting than face-to-face communication.

Western needs to consider whether the app is appropriate for students identified by progression status and whether this would be the only the criterion for engagement with Vygo if adopted.

Action: Dr Colin Clark to obtain examples (good and poor) of Show Cause applications submitted by students who are appealing suspension or exclusion.

Action: (Jess Gleeson) Data Integrity, Quality & Operations to determine whether the Vygo app is a suitable solution to support the progression of students at risk of suspension/exclusion, and propose how it would be funded (e.g., Digital Acceleration funding).

2.2 Research questions and ethics application (Dr Colin Clark/Associate Professor Jo-Anne Chuck)

A draft ethics application has been prepared by Dr Jo-Anne Kelder (external consultant) and Dr Colin Clark, to be submitted for review by the Human Research Ethics Committee on March 5. A developed scoping document has suggested research questions, and a literature review have been prepared. The research resulting from this Flexible Learning EXperience Program of Research (FLEX PoR) is to be used to evaluate the impact of flexibility learning on students and university operations while being curated as part of a guide or a book on flexible learning.

The Program of Research will be presented to the Senate Education Committee to attract scholarly contributions.

Action: Dr Colin Clark to submit FLEX PoR to the Human Research Ethics Committee.

Action: Associate Professor Jo-Anne Chuck to present the Program of Research to Senate Education Committee

2.3 Reopening of campus—flexible learning post-COVID (Associate Professor Jo-Anne Chuck)

Associate Professor Jo-Anne Chuck presented a series of tables showing numbers and percentages of online and face-to-face activities for each School for the first half of 2022.

WSU staff have been encouraged to continue the move from online lectures to flipped delivery, which are better for student engagement and learning. In general, Western Sydney University has adopted flipped pedagogies widely. Although the School of Engineering, Design and Built Environment (SoEDBE) and the School of Computer, Data and Mathematical Sciences (SoCDMS) have persisted with more traditional modes of delivery, although SoEDBE is moving to flipped classrooms in 2022 as part of the NPILF projects.

The data is difficult to interpret as some items appear to be counted more than once if offered on different campuses or in different modes (e.g., the same lecture delivered on three campuses at the same time is recorded as three separate activities). Staff previously shown this table have indicated that some activities captured as “online lectures” are actually flipped classroom activities, but this was not reflected in the data collected from Schools. Schools have also discussed the need for flipped or asynchronous activities to be visible in the timetable, encouraging students to make time for the activity.

For reporting and research purposes, consistent terminology and categories must be used. Research on whether choice of modality assists retention or progression, and whether flexible learning is a success factor requires a clear understanding where and how our students are learning. Some of this information is required from the timetable.

Review of timetable capture at the activity level is currently under discussion. In 2022, there are currently 11,000 subject offerings. Recommendations have been made for online and on-campus subject offerings with a choice of teaching modes previously recorded separately to be grouped under top-level headings, which could reduce the number of subject offerings to fewer than 3,000. Students will then be able to adjust their timetables without changing their subject enrolment.

2.4 Update on STARS/START—Executive paper (Dr Colin Clark/Dr Caterina Tannous)

A paper on STARS Community of Practice has been written for the Executive Committee to make the case for recognition of STARS coordinators by articulating their work and through workload allocation.

Professor Simon Bedford noted that the report was not ready for submission. Amendments suggested included that the request for the endorsement by the Executive Committee to be removed from the Purpose section and addressing the return on investment if Schools are asked to commit resources. The paper would also be strengthened by providing evidence of the impact of STARS coordinators (or equivalent). The benchmarking of the requested workload would further support the paper.

Action Item: Dr Caterina Tannous, Dr Colin Clark and Associate Professor Jo-Anne Chuck to revise the STARS paper to emphasise return on investment and impact.

2.5 Update and School transition and retention workplans (Associate Professor Jo-Anne Chuck / Dr Colin Clark)

In April 2021, Schools were asked by the Taskforce to identify key initiatives from those listed in the [2021 Transition and Retention Strategy](#) and specify impact metrics where possible. School reports on transition and retention activities subsequently delivered to the Senate Education Committee in August 2021, in many cases diverged considerably from the April plans. Therefore, the Deputy Deans were sent templates prepopulated with the details of their plans in the April submissions, and columns to indicate whether the strategy had been implemented, its estimated impact (with metrics if possible) and any narrative surrounding the strategy.

These data will form the basis of a report to the Senate Education Committee on the success of the Transition and Retention Strategy, to determine whether the Strategy should be revised or rolled over for another year. Consistency of reporting between Schools should be improved, and this is an area where STARS coordinators could assist.

It was noted that many parts of the strategy are not within the control of the Schools, so narrowing the focus to the most commonly used initiatives would be useful. This would allow the VC's Taskforce to nominate priorities to focus on each year.

Another suggestion was to establish key success metrics with mechanisms for capturing and reporting on them. These metrics could be at the School level, to identify areas for improvement. For example, success metrics could include retention

at key junctures and progression stages. It was noted that visibility to hard data are more likely to prompt responses than general goals.

Data availability remains an issue, but some data such as proportions of FNS grades are available from School Assessment Reports. Data requests can also be lodged with CIA to provide benchmarks and assess progress.

Action: Associate Professor Jo-Anne Chuck and Dr Colin Clark to draft a paper for the Senate Education Committee on the Schools' use of transition and retention strategies.

Action: A request to CIA will be prepared with the assistance of former CIA director Leanne Yard for appropriate data by which to measure progress against transition and retention strategies.

3 NEXT MEETING

- 3.1** The next meeting will be on Tuesday March 8, 2022, from 3:00 to 4:30pm.