WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY

Tips for Writing and Developing Western Sydney University Policies

Avoid internal cross-referencing
Try not to refer to another clause within a policy. If the clause numbering changes due to the insertion or deletion of other clauses, this can make the internal cross-reference incorrect. Consider whether the internal cross-referencing is actually necessary; if so consider referring to the section or part, rather than the specific clause.

Also be aware of referring to a specific clause or part of another policy; if that policy changes, your references may be out-of-date. Again, consider being more generic in referencing such as just referring to the other policy.

Be aware of the effect an amendment might have on the rest of the policy
What might be considered a minor change at clause 37 may contradict, restrict or affect something in clause 47. Read the entire document even when making minor amendments.

Be aware of the requirements of and impact on other policies
No policy is an island. If you are changing a policy look at the associated information to see what other policies are relevant to it and check them to see if the changes you are making result in the need to make changes in other documents.

Be judicious with cross-referencing to other sources
Instead of duplicating information, we suggest cross-referencing to the source document. However using too many cross-references can be distracting and confusing to readers as they will have to jump to another document to get the information they need. Use cross-referencing to support your policy not to be your policy.

Check associated information
Authors should always check that any associated information is up-to-date and relevant to the current version of the policy. If a document is not to be used again, advise PGU that it should be made "inactive".

Associated information is supposed to provides hyperlinks to relevant policies, websites or other important documents such as forms, flowcharts and schedules, but it is not designed to be the repository of supplementary documentation. For example, forms that need to be completed as part of a policy process should be located on the owning unit's web page. However, a schedule that details the amount of money that can be reimbursed in certain circumstances, and which forms part of the policy, can be located within the Policy DDS.

For documents in the second category, PGU prefers all schedules, flow charts and the like to be in PDF, with the University's logo, and a reference to the associated policy, and a date e.g. July 2012. We will add these to the document if you don't.

Generally for forms, we won't hyperlink to the direct form but to the unit's form page.

Clarify days used as a timeline/deadline

For example, "the form must be submitted within five days" – is that calendar days or working days? Apply the same clarification throughout the document, i.e. always use either working days or calendar days not both, e.g. "the forms must be submitted within five working days and the committee will respond within 14 calendar days" is confusing to the reader.

This also applies to other timeframes used in policies such as one month, 4 weeks, 12 months and 1 year. Apply these consistently within the same document.

Clauses don't need to be single sentences

Clauses can be more than one sentence. A document full of one sentence clauses can become very long. Group like ideas together, and use paragraphs.

Committees must have gender balance

When establishing a committee within a policy there must be provision to comply with the Women's Representation on University Committees Policy. Also, consideration should be given to diversity of the committee membership. The easiest way to do this within the policy is to "consider gender balance and diversity when nominating appointments or nominees" or to give the committee chair the ability to appoint additional members to ensure gender balance or diversity mix. In the latter appointments can be done "in consultation" with other members of the committee, with the VC, relevant DVC, etc. Diversity is especially important for committees that are making decisions about a diverse range of cultures or people with a disability.

Delegations must be consistent with the Delegations (Administrative) Policy

Except for academic matters, where there is a delegation or approval process within a policy it should match the delegation as outlined in the Delegation (Administrative) Policy. Don't create a new delegation to override the approved Delegations, refer to that policy. If the relevant delegation schedule is silent, a delegation can be included in the policy but it should be consistent with the schedule, e.g. if the schedule says a DVC must approve something similar, it would be appropriate to nominate a DVC as the delegated authority in the policy, not the School Manager, and vice versa.

Even for academic policies, always consider the hierarchy of delegations that allows for an appeals process that doesn't include positions involved in the original decision-making process. For example, if the Dean is the decision maker at the end of a particular process, the Dean should not be the decision maker for an appeal against the original decision.

Don't define a term that won't be used in the document

The definitions are designed to help readers of the document understand what a term means in the context of the policy document. If the term or words are not used in the document then, generally, it's not necessary for it to be defined. Sometimes however, depending on the target audience (usually for students) it will be appropriate to have an expanded definitions section.

If you define the term in definitions use the same term all the way through the document, don't introduce a new term for the same thing, and don't keep defining it.
Use the same definition for the same term if used in different policies. If your term is defined in several policies – consider placing it in the glossary.

Don't keep referring to Western Sydney University or the University at the beginning of titles

Except where you are trying to make a particular distinction between Western Sydney University and another institution (such as Western Sydney University (The College)) so as to avoid confusion within a policy there is no need to keep referring to Western Sydney University at the beginning of a

document or unit title. It is implied that we are talking about Western Sydney University as we have already identified that at the beginning of the document – it is our policy after all, e.g. Western Sydney University Research Studies Committee, Western Sydney University Research Centres and Groups Policy, the University's Office of Research Services, – just use Research Studies Committee, Research Centres and Groups Policy, Office of Research Services.

Don't over use capitals
Just because a term is defined in the definitions section, there is no need to capitalise it when it is used in the document. No need to capitalise students, academic or general staff, unit head or other generic terms. There will be some exceptions to this, especially where the Office of Legal Services has been involved.

Don't refer to the policy within the policy in the third person
If you want to refer to the policy within the policy don't use its title again, just say "this policy".

Don't use the same heading twice
Sometimes it will be appropriate to use a heading twice but most often it will just confuse readers, especially those who scroll through the navigation bar to find the clauses they need.

Headings should be concise
Headings that are longer than the width of the page are far too long. Plus, they take up too much room in the navigation bar.

Aviod repeating words within parts and sub-headings. E.g.
Part A –Enrolment for Current Students
Enrolments for Current Overseas Students
Enrolment for Current Overseas Students that have Been Excluded
Enrolment for Current Overseas Students that have Been Excluded Returning to Study

Identifying the University
Generally in the purpose and context section, there is a sentence that says something like 'This policy outlines the University's position on X'. In the very first instance when the University is mentioned, always identify it as Western Sydney University (the University). PGU will change it in the document if you don't.

If it's likely to change frequently – don't put it in the policy section
If you have a dollar limit, time limit, telephone number list or the like, that will be reviewed from time to time, consider putting in into a schedule attached to the document. This way a new version of the policy does not have to be approved every time this changes. If your policy requires frequent amendment it's probably not a policy.

Information provided in a list should be in alphabetical order
Unless there is a very good reason not to, e.g. for hierarchy of positions, then all lists should be alphabetical, including definitions.

Numbers
We use the following numbering convention: one to ten – written as text, 11 and over written as numbers. PGU will change them in the document if you don't.
There are some exceptions, for example where a number is used in a title – e.g. 3 Day Loan.

Think about the timing of release of new versions of policies
A new version of a policy relating to students effective in the middle of a teaching session can lead to confusion for students about what version applies to them. Perhaps hold over the date of effect to the start of the next semester, first day of the year etc.

Use tables instead of really long lists
It may not be possible in all cases but consider using a table instead of a long list, e.g. a list of requirements within a unit outline, a list of members for a committee etc.

Use the glossary
Terms included within the glossary can be hyperlinked from the document so you don't need to put in a definition.

Use the template to your advantage
The template has parts and 2 levels of sub-headings that can help readers and authors.

Use parts to break the document up in to relevant chunks, then use sub-heading 1 and sub-heading 2 to break those parts down even further into smaller, digestible and manageable chunks.

Parts, sub-heading 1 and sub-heading 2 are used in a technical sense as well - they populate the navigation bar (or table of contents) in the front-end of the Policy DDS when the policy is published. The navigation bar provides a hyperlink to the appropriate part of the document.

Also, parts and sub-headings provide a hierarchy to the document that assists screen readers (e.g. used by sight impaired people) in ordering the information.