



VICE CHANCELLOR'S TRANSITION AND RETENTION TASKFORCE

CONFIRMED MINUTES

A meeting of the VC's Transition and Retention Taskforce was held on **Wednesday 13th April 2022**, from **9.00 to 10.30 am** via **Zoom**

1 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

1.1 Welcome

Professor Simon Bedford (Chair) opened the meeting, welcomed members and guests, and acknowledged the traditional custodians of the land.

Attendees

Professor Simon Bedford, PVC Learning Futures (Chair)
Michael Burgess, Chief Student Experience Officer
Associate Professor Jo-Anne Chuck, Head of Teaching and Curriculum, Learning Futures
Dr Colin Clark, Project Officer, Learning Futures
Jess Gleeson, Director, Data Integrity, Quality & Operations
Dr Caterina Tannous, Director of Undergraduate Health Science & STARS/START Academic Lead
Lynnae Venaruzzo, Head, Technology-Enabled Learning, Learning Futures

1.2 Invitees

Danielle Elmasri, Strategic Insights and Analytics Lead, SEM (For Natalie Bradbury)
Karen Harvey, Academic Director – WSU Online
Greg Higgins, CEO and Co-founder, IN2ITY Labs
Steve Nouri, Co-founder and Chief Data Scientist, IN2ITY Labs
Gina Saliba, Lecturer & Academic Lead, Professional Learning, Learning Futures

1.3 Apologies

Natalie Bradbury, Director, Student Retention & Success

1.4 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 8th March 2022 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 GENERAL BUSINESS

2.1 STARS/START update (Dr Caterina Tannous, Dr Colin Clark)

Workload for STARS coordinators will depend on return on investment and will be included in a VC Taskforce report to the Senate Education Committee. Financial information must be added to this paper so costs of giving workload to coordinators relative to the size of the schools can be assessed.

Action: Dr Caterina Tannous to review the STARS business case and present to Deputy Deans for support.

2.2 SSAF-funded support modules (Karen Harvey)

Karen Harvey, Program Coordinator of WSU Online, was asked to report on the success of promoting modules to WSU online students.

The three projects are:

- Positive Study Habits webinars
- WesternLife WSU online platform
- Mental Health and Wellbeing module

Karen Harvey described the positive engagement of students in the Positive Study Habits Webinars but commented that the cohorts were too small for the discipline-specific webinars that were offered. The feedback was very good.

The WesternLife Platform was also very successful with high engagement (87–94%), and 20% of commencing enrolments registered for webinars and either attended the sessions or listened to the recordings. Karen Harvey noted that offering the subjects in the evenings made them accessible to non-traditional students. Students were also offered the option of weekend sessions, but they expressed no interest. Student survey respondents indicated that the webinars were highly engaging (87–94%) and very useful (92–97%), although these figures are based on a very small response rate.

The *Trimester 3 2021 Report to WSU Online Operations Management Group* notes that student reach in Trimester 2 was 1071 students, which was 74% of WSU Online student enrolments, and 1219 students in Trimester 3, which was 84% of enrolments; 28% of students reached (298 students) also accessed other parts of the WesternLife Platform.

The Wellbeing pod is offered to WSU online students, and the above report notes that 873 students (68% of 1278 enrolments) had accessed the subject by the end of trimester. The pod is also offered at Western, and the coordinator, Associate Professor Arianne Reis, provided the following information in a report circulated to the Taskforce:

The Engaging Students for Community Wellbeing module is freely available to all enrolled students; however, students need to register to have the site uploaded to their vUWS homepage (due to grade centre limitations), making accessibility less straight forward and dependant on promotion of the module to students.

So far, 226 students have enrolled and accessed the module. An optional survey included recently in the module found that 67% of participants found the module extremely useful, 74% indicated the module gave them a better understanding of mental health and wellbeing, and 67% indicated they now feel more confident than before they started the module that they know what to do if they are struggling with their mental health.

Danielle Elmasri noted that a similar project directed at student mental health, Project Care, was conducted by the Student Experience Office in 2021, as part of which supportive text messages were sent to students.

At the end of the current trimester, OES plans to compare attendees with their peers to assess outcomes in terms of completion, uplift, progression, and retention. So far in trimester 1, there appears to have been a dip in retention overall, attributable to a number of factors.

Action: Dr Colin Clark to speak to Natalie Bradbury to determine what can be transferred from three support initiatives (Positive Study Habits webinars, WesternLife WSU online platform, and the Mental Health and Wellbeing module) to WSU.

2.3 Outcomes of SSAF-funded project 'YOUiversity Success@Western' SSAF social media campaign and Learn2Learn module (Lynnae Venaruzzo, Gina Saliba)

The Learn2Learn module was developed by Learning Futures in 2021 to develop students' self-regulated learning and make them active agents in learning in different modalities. Students learn to manage procrastination and develop skills in time management, help-seeking, preparation, and peer learning. The development of the module was informed by data gathered through internal research in the Schools of Business, Nursing and Midwifery and Social Sciences.

The module has chunked content accessible on a range of devices with gamified elements. Instructors can embed Learn2Learn lessons into subject vUWS sites. Feedback from academics and students has been positive, with constructive suggestions for improvements.

Gina Saliba, Academic Lead of Professional Learning, reported on the SSAF-funded YOUiversity Success@Western project to produce a portfolio of artefacts and a campaign to foster academic success through self-reflection and self-regulated learning, allowing students to adopt a mode of study that best suits their learning style. The main planks of the campaign were:

- A communications plan to promote Learn2Learn and reach out to other networks such as MATES, MESH and PASS
- Video resources developed by students to engage them with mentoring and reflect on their student journeys
- Instagram and Facebook posts and stories, also created by students

Taskforce members were very impressed by examples of student work.

Learning Futures will be conducting a research project to evaluate the student experience of Learn2Learn and discover how academics use it.

It was noted that a remaining challenge for the Student Experience Office is creating a customer strategy to combine all the resources from WSU, such as Learn2Learn and the planned student-facing learning analytics dashboard, and those from third-party providers. At present they are fragmented, so SEO will diagnose where gaps exist to align with a view to consolidating all the existing parts into one platform.

The suggestion that students could be given rewards such as bonus points or badges for completing modules was discussed. Students in the School of Health Sciences are encouraged to submit completions of modules in the form of certificates or badges in an e-portfolio, linked to their assessments. Bonus points would need to be linked to learning outcomes of subjects if they are to be recognised. Moreover, some modules on learning styles are best completed before semester rather than as part of a subject.

A useful first step would be to map the existing modules to determine which would fit into the wider Analytics for Student Success project led by Michael Burgess and Professor Simon Bedford.

2.4 Sourcing retention data (Michael Burgess, Associate Professor Jo-Anne Chuck)

As noted above, the Analytics for Student Success project led by Michael Burgess and Professor Simon Bedford will provide a source of learning data.

2.5 Step to Success update (Associate Professor Jo-Anne Chuck)

Step to Success has reached out to DAPs and APAs for student potential referrals and gathered feedback from them. There have been difficulties in obtaining data from the SMS on cold calling of students.

2.6 FLEX research: Ethics, research question and modes of study (Associate Professor Jo-Anne Chuck)

The Flexible Learning Experience Program of Research (FLEX PoR) umbrella ethics application is currently before the Human Research Ethics Committee for consideration at its April 19th meeting.

The FLEX PoR will be launched on Friday 29th April during Learning and Teaching Week.

Action: Professor Simon Bedford & Associate Professor Jo-Anne Chuck to present the FLEX Program of Research to the Senate Education Committee in April, and at the launch on April 29th, 2022, during Teaching and Learning Week.

2.7 IN2ITY LAB: Deep knowledge tracing SaaS platform, DEEPTRACE (Greg Higgins and Steve Nouri)

Greg Higgins of IN2ITY Lab was invited to introduce the firm's 'Deep Learning' technology to identify students at risk of non-completion and the factors and behaviours that contribute to students dropping out and those who would be more responsive to intervention.

IN2ITY is a start-up company launched under the Antler investment / accelerator firm. The company seeks to make data more accessible, as lack of data tends to limit the success of good retention initiatives. The company has retained the services of data analytics, machine learning, education, and business specialists.

The sharp increase in the number of blended/online learning students makes it difficult to identify those at risk of attrition, so IN2ITY has constructed a predictive modelling tool to analyse learning analytics. The company proposed working with a 'problem cohort' of students or school at WSU with high attrition to build a predictive model that can then be extended and used to monitor the impact of interventions.

A draft project outline was provided to demonstrate how WSU might collaborate with IN2ITY to develop such a tool. The company is working with UNE and a small number of other universities and would like to collaborate with WSU in the development process. Validation of the model would be required to identify the particular challenges of a school or program. This would entail initial consultation with teaching and technical staff on a subject with known challenges in retention/attrition. Data are drawn from the LMS to show how students access material, and from other sources such as third-party systems.

The tool can cope with students changing programs or School, and the more data added over time the more sophisticated the dataset becomes. Student feedback can also be incorporated to capture less tangible factors, such as sense of belonging.

Action: Professor Simon Bedford to schedule a follow-up meeting with IN2ITY and a group including other potential WSU stakeholders.

2.8 ECU Program Award, Support Framework (For noting)

PowerPoint slides from an Edith Cowan University presentation at the Taskforce meeting on 8/3/2022 were circulated to the Taskforce, with a link to the presentation in the minutes.

3 NEXT MEETING

- 3.1** The next meeting will be on Wednesday May 18, 1.30–3.00 PM.