



VICE CHANCELLOR'S TRANSITION AND RETENTION TASKFORCE

CONFIRMED MINUTES

A meeting of the VC's Transition and Retention Taskforce was held on **Tuesday 26 October 2021** from **2.30 to 4.00 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

1.2 Invitees

Joel Walker, Director, Support Services, The College

1.3 Apologies

Lynnae Venaruzzo, Head, Technology-Enabled Learning

1.4 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th September 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 GENERAL BUSINESS

2.0 Impact of COVID-19 on assessment and RMT update

Two papers were distributed to the Taskforce by the Chair: *Impact of COVID-19 on Assessment* (28/9/2021) and *RMT Update* (20/9/2021). These had been discussed at the Alternative Assessment Working Party on 26 October 2021. These reports present similar findings to those of the Autumn, Spring, and Summer COVID Teaching and Learning reports/reviews.

Two findings were of interest. First, there were significant differences in retention of students in programs. Schools teaching STEM content and subjects with practical classes and groupwork, such as the SoNM and SoEDBE, had the largest negative impact on retention. Second, analyses of student support indicators indicated that international students were significantly affected by the COVID pandemic, with the suggestion that a 'digital divide' may have affected students without suitable equipment for online learning at home. The need to identify and make up any lost student load was also recognised.

An analysis by CIA provided the Deans with quantitative data on student consumption of subjects in terms of EFTSL and headcounts. Identifying the programs with low EFTSL yield will assist with planning for domestic fee-paying students, Summer term subject offerings and the preferred delivery mode (online/hyflex delivery).

Action item: Christine to request that an Indigenous student filter be added to the Deans' load dashboard, and that Taskforce members be given access to the dashboard.

2.1 Step to Success update (Joel Walker/Natalie Bradbury)

Joel and Natalie shared the progress of the Step to Success program. Three cohorts of students were offered the opportunity to pivot to equivalent subjects offered by The College as an alternative to attrition: resigned students, those conditionally enrolled but not enrolled in subjects, and those currently enrolled in subjects.

Of the 111 resigned students targeted, 48 were contacted: 37 were not interested in the program, two were unsure and nine were interested. Of the 137 conditionally enrolled students, 69 (50%) were contacted, of whom 29 were interested in learning more about the program. Six were booked to meet the First Year Experience Co-ordinator (FYEC) and 21 were sent a link to a recorded information session.

Of the currently enrolled students with conditional enrolment restrictions, 248 were contacted by email and 11 interacted with the link to book a meeting with the FYEC. Five did not attend this meeting, one was not suitable (as the student's performance in the mainstream subjects had improved), one enrolled in the program, and one student's status was pending.

To improve engagement with the pilot, the importance of 'just in time' referrals, program-based restrictions, other barriers (such as College/WSU calendar alignment), responding to the Job-Ready Graduates initiative and expanding the program to international students was discussed. The ACAs and DAPs are seen to be critical to identifying students for referral in addition to those identified by data. The need for a provision for students to self-refer is also required. This targeted assistance may help students to re-engage with their education and gain confidence.

It was noted that the Program (Course) Advisors' Forum can be used to highlight the program well before final student results are known, enabling more timely intervention before student disengagement.

Some issues remain in regard to progression and HECS entitlements.

It was suggested that the Working Group prepare an executive paper on the outcomes of Phase 1 and plans for Phase 2; however, this was considered to be premature.

Action item: Jo and Natalie to promote Step to Success to the Program Leaders' Forum.

2.2 T&R Strategy: Alignment of School updates to Senate Education Committee (August 2021) with Workplans submitted in April 2021 (Jo Chuck)

Jo-Anne Chuck provided a summary of school workplans submitted to the Taskforce in April 2021 in relation to the WSU Transition and Retention Strategy document. This was compared with progress reports provided to Senate Education Committee (SEC) (August 2021).

Of the 14 Schools (including the Graduate Research School (GRS) and The College), all but two—the Schools of CDMS and Psychology (SoP)—submitted workplans to the Taskforce. All but three (GRS, HCA & SoP) reported to the SEC in August.

Most schools (n=11) mentioned measures of student transition/retention in their workplan but only The College and SoSS reported quantitative results to the SEC.

It was noted that Schools need to use metrics for demonstrating impact (e.g., improved retention, pass rates, or student feedback data) to show the success of their interventions. In the intervening period, it was noted that the COVID-19 lockdown may have affected their intended work in this area.

Action Item: Jo and Colin to prepare a report for the Senate Education Committee.

2.3 Withdrawing students not engaged with studies (Jess Gleeson)

To encourage students to withdraw from their program when they have not engaged in their studies, several indicators are being considered to trigger contact. This includes students who have not logged into the learning management system by census date or logged onto Zoom. The barrier for the Student Experience Office has been accessing data, but it is now working with the Data Warehouse.

Top priorities of Western Success were to take vUWS engagement and other measures as proxies for engagement and to respond quickly to student disengagement. This work is currently progressing. This work was intended to be part of the use of the Advise module, and a pilot is scheduled to begin soon.

2.4 Flexible learning research questions, timetabling and data (Jo Chuck/Jess Gleeson)

It will soon be possible to track students across delivery modalities for activities, which will permit research on the impact of flexible delivery on student experience and success.

A list of draft research questions based on a literature review that address the impact of flexible learning on transition and retention were circulated to the group. When key questions are identified, an ethics application under the START program of research will be developed.

Action item: Taskforce members to give feedback to inform a research proposal to be submitted for ethics approval.

2.5 Update on Research Week presentation (Cathy Tannous)

The *How to Research and Publish Your Teaching* Research Week presentation is scheduled for Thursday 28th October. Preparation is nearly complete, and a good range of speakers were ready to provide advice on planning research.

3 NEXT MEETING

3.1 The next meeting will be on **Wednesday 1st December 3.00–4.30pm.**