



VICE CHANCELLOR'S TRANSITION AND RETENTION TASKFORCE

CONFIRMED MINUTES

A meeting of the VC's Transition and Retention Taskforce was held on **Wednesday 18th May 2022**, from **1.30 to 3.00 pm** 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)
Natalie Bradbury, Director, Student Retention & Success
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
Dr Caterina Tannous, Director of Undergraduate Health Science & STARS/START Academic Lead

1.2 Invitees

Dr Liz Thyer, Associate Dean (L&T) and Senior Lecturer Paramedicine, School of Health Sciences
Radhika Bhandari, Senior Manager, Curriculum Data Quality (For Jess Gleeson)

1.3 Apologies

Jess Gleeson, Director, Data Integrity, Quality & Operations
Lynnae Venaruzzo, Head, Technology-Enabled Learning, Learning Futures

1.4 Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 13th April 2022 were accepted without revision. The Chair thanked Dr Colin Clark for the format of the action points.

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 EAB Navigate Student Management Success System (Michael Burgess, Professor Simon Bedford)

The guest originally invited to speak on this item (David Brett, Director, Partner Development, EAB) was unable to attend. EAB has a range of data analytics tools for educational purposes, including Navigate, a 'student success management system' (<https://eab.com/products/navigate/?autosuggest-term=navigate>).

Michael Burgess reported that the Student Experience Office had met with Mr Brett a number of times to discuss the Navigate platform and to arrange an ITDS partner to formalise a platform review. ITDS has responded that they currently have no available resources. One solution would be that Navigate is incorporated into the Digital Transformation project at Western. It was noted that adoption of Navigate, or any similar system, should be done systematically as an integral part of Western's digital architecture, rather than as a single-point solution.

Professor Simon Bedford noted a report from an Adobe conference in Melbourne that improvements in staff and student digital literacy in US universities had resulted in significant improvements in student retention and subject pass rates. Western is currently lagging behind in this area, so action is required.

Action: Dr Colin Clark to approach EAB to arrange a suitable time for Professor Simon Bedford, Michael Burgess, and other parties to meet David Brett to discuss academic and student support.

2.2 Sense of belonging and co-design of resources (Dr Liz Thyer, SoHS)

Dr. Liz Thyer presented on a research project 'Fostering sense of belonging and co-design of resources', led by Clarice Tang in the School of Health Sciences. The project examined the impact of online learning on sense of belonging (SoB), the challenges of fostering it and strategies to overcome these challenges. SoB impacts transition into university and into a professional environment. It influences mental and physical health.

This was a mixed-methods study using validated student surveys and questions devised by the researchers. The number of respondents (n=179) was satisfactory and reflective of the numbers enrolled in each program. Despite the pandemic and lockdowns in 2020–2021, the students were generally satisfied with their programs and the university. However, the proportions that reported feeling 'Connected to staff' (57%) and 'Connected to students' (34%) (4 or 5 on a five-point Likert scale) were low.

Qualitative data were collected from focus groups of students with neutral coordinators (not the tutors). These highlighted similar issues to staff comments: cameras were not switched on, making it difficult to make friends. Four dimensions emerged: dimensions of belonging, individual experiences and challenges, relationships are central to belonging, and reconceptualization of teaching and learning.

The subsequent E-Delphi study involved the team working with students and staff to develop 33 strategies to promote SoB. The top five were:

- Knowing that [the student is] able to contact staff within the course for assistance (94%)
- Having a tutor to create a safe environment for open discussion (92.8%)
- Being able to reach out to other students (82%)
- Having an opportunity to observe and experience life after graduation (81.6%)

- Having quick access to support services within the university (77.6%).

Conversely, the least popular strategies were:

- Ice-breaker activities during the face-face orientation session for the course (52%)
- An academic highlighting the importance of having a sense of belonging to the course (58.4%)
- Having a subject tutor linking me up with other students within the course (62.4%).

The research was well received by the Taskforce, which noted that the use of ‘near peers’, senior students and alumni, was very useful. It was suggested that a possible extension to this work may be to investigate ‘sense of meaning’ in the discipline.

2.3 Sentiment analysis: 2020 student SFU comments (Dr Colin Clark)

Dr Colin Clark presented on a sentiment analysis of Student Feedback on Unit (SFU) open comments concerning the best aspects of the subject and the areas that need improvement. This qualitative analysis used an online tool called Kapiche (<https://www.kapiche.com>), which groups lexical items by common collocations. Based on the patterns revealed, queries can be constructed to show how frequently topics arise in the comments (e.g., assessments, based on a query grouping words such as ‘test’, ‘quiz’, and ‘assignment’). In addition, Kapiche uses artificial intelligence algorithms to calculate the strength of positive or negative sentiment.

From this, quadrants plotting frequency of comments on a particular topic against the strength of positive or negative sentiment can be constructed.

The salience of a topic can be inferred from its position in the quadrant, with positions at the top right indicating high frequency and strong sentiment.

It is possible to filter the data for any field included, such as program, school, or subject.

The conclusions drawn from this exploratory study were as follows.

- Sentiment analysis is useful when a sufficiently large response rate is gathered from a given subject.
- Aggregation at the school or program increases sample size, and shows differences in subject feedback, although no questions are asked about programs or courses.
- There may be a ‘survivor bias’ in findings as the feedback is collected at the end of semester, so not gathered from those who drop out.
- Used in conjunction with quantitative scores, sentiment analysis could identify problems with specific aspects, such as groupwork or activities.
- Presentations with a live dashboard may be useful for coordinators/DAPs/ADTLs in small meetings
- The method may be more useful for seeking feedback on particular aspects or initiatives in a subject than overall impressions.

Taskforce members noted that the aggregate findings may be useful for Schools and the University. However, the usefulness of the method is limited by the low response rates to SFUs, and comparison of subjects is problematic because it does not take into account the different contexts and external factors that may affect student reactions. Moreover, first-year students have little basis of comparison for judgements of subject quality.

Action: Dr Colin Clark to present the sentiment analysis to the Senate Education

Committee.

3 NEXT MEETING

3.1 The next meeting will be on Thursday June 23, 9.30–11.00 AM.