WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

VICE CHANCELLOR'S TRANSITION AND RETENTION TASKFORCE

CONFIRMED MINUTES

A meeting of the VC's Transition and Retention Taskforce was held on **Thursday 23rd June 2022,** from **9.30 to 11.00 am** via **Zoom**

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1   PROCEDURAL MATTERS

1.1   Welcome
Associate Professor Jo-Anne Chuck (Acting Chair) opened the meeting, welcomed members and guests, and acknowledged the traditional custodians of the land.

Attendees

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
Jess Gleeson, Director, Data Integrity, Quality & Operations
Dr Caterina Tannous, Director of Undergraduate Health Science & STARS/START Academic Lead

1.2   Invitees
Debra Farrelly, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Student and University Planning
Leonie Patrick, Director, International Student Recruitment & Admissions
Dr Celeste Rossetto (Senior Lecturer, Learning Futures)

1.3   Apologies
Professor Simon Bedford, PVC Learning Futures (Chair)
Nikki Meller, Deputy Head, Technology-Enabled-Learning (TEL)

(Lynnae Venaruzzo, Head, Technology-Enabled Learning, Learning Futures, has changed roles and TEL will now be represented on the Taskforce by Nikki Meller)

1.4   Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th May 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

2.0 Other Business

The Acting Chair requested that 'Other Business' be added to the agenda.

Two points were noted:

1. The Transition and Retention Strategy requires updating, as there have been language changes, and some items require revision.

2. An Executive Committee paper on discontinuing students will be circulated to the Taskforce, describing when students leave and why, based on student responses. Natalie Bradbury will share the updated paper and speak to it at the next Taskforce meeting in July 2022.

Action: The Acting Chair to circulate the Transition and Retention Strategy for updating

Action: Natalie Bradbury will share the updated paper and speak to it at the next Taskforce meeting in July 2022.

2.1 Trends and Strategies Arising Around International Recruitment (Leonie Patrick, Natalie Bradbury)

Leonie Patrick and Natalie Bradbury provided an update on International student recruitment and its implications for retention at WSU.

International student commencements at WSU grew by 46% between 2016 and 2019, before dropping by 35% in 2019–2021. The commencing student cohort dropped by 16% in 2020 and a further 23% in 2021. The 2021 result was lower than the average for Australian (−22%) or NSW (−17%) universities. This appears to be attributable to the reliance of smaller universities on the generally more budget-conscious South-east Asian students, in contrast to large universities such as the University of Sydney or UNSW, which have larger proportions of affluent and brand-conscious Chinese students. Moreover, a surge in COVID cases had a strong impact on India and other South Asian nations and the students' ability to access funds for study.

WSU has the advantage of a student body from a diverse range of nations, so the University is expecting strong growth. Based on acceptance numbers, student numbers so far in 2022 appear to be recovering strongly, although they have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.

One risk is that rival universities have moved into regions that have high levels of fraud where they have little experience, which has resulted in slowdowns in visa processing and reputational damage. This also has the potential to damage WSU's brand as well. The Department of Home Affairs has warned universities to be vigilant against potential fraud.

A number of initiatives, such scholarships and concessions, are in place to encourage recruitment supported by WSU's improved world rankings.

Natalie Bradbury considered the implications of International recruitment, noting that International students are retained at a higher rate than domestic students. Moreover, several initiatives assist retention of international students but there have been drops in retention. In the Autumn Semester of 2021, there had been 2% attrition by census, increasing to approximately 11% by the end of semester. This compares well to the domestic cohort, which in the same periods had attritted at rates of 11% and 25%, respectively.

In 2021, WesternSuccess was directed to focus on International students. Those who engaged with the service had a very low attrition rate of 2.3%, compared with a rate of

17.5% for those who did not. In addition, students engaged with WesternSuccess had higher net promoter scores than the others (14.2 compared with 13.4), citing care and support as important positive factors. Initiatives such as International Buddies and financial support have also been important in international retention.

It was noted that School engagement with International Recruitment has helped some schools improve their recruitment considerably. Schools such as Law and Psychology have engaged more closely with International Recruitment to improve their international recruitment numbers. There are, however, various limitations across Schools in terms of recruitment capacity, for instance enrolment limitations enforced via accreditation, for example in School of Medicine and School of Nursing and Midwifery.

2.2 Progression Policy Module (Dr Celeste Rossetto)

Dr Celeste Rossetto described the content of a proposed progression module that would encourage students identified in progression checks to seek support. The module would provide evidence of engagement with actions to mitigate of factors impeding academic progress. This evidence could then be used in appeals.

The module would consist of three Learn2Learn activities (on goal setting, setting SMART goals, and time management). The students then write a 300–500-word reflection. This approach encourages students to take responsibility for their own progress, rather than imposing solutions. This will link to support services and resources, and suggestions for assistance.

The module content was well received by Taskforce members, who made the following comments:

- Emotions are a more positive approach than a purely informational focus.

- The module should be an opt-in resource offered to students as soon as the student was flagged as of concern, as the point of exclusion is too late to be effective.

- Linking the tools to Academic Program Advisors would be useful.

- A predictive capability could be used to make the module sensitive to student needs at a given time.

- There should be other response options (such as voice recordings) besides written text, as the students may already be overwhelmed by written assignments.

- How does this module connect with other services, such as WesternSuccess, as a service or life cycle model to optimise the support given to at-risk students.

2.3 Actions arising—EAB Navigate Student Success Management System

This item was a reflection on a presentation of the Navigate student success management system by the EAB company on June 22, 2022, attended by several members of the Taskforce.

Taskforce members felt the presentation and the tool were impressive but noted that a full procurement process was appropriate if it the tool is to be considered for WSU. This process should consider SMS functional delivery and the current resourcing limitations for the SMS project. The process should also consider articulation with other systems such as the new call centre system, which requires a sound CRM system.

The SEO was proposed to lead the Navigate procurement process.

Action: WSU's requirements should be developed and other stakeholders, such as leaders of the Digital Acceleration, SMS and student experience strategy consulted. Any procurement process should be combined with the customer strategy work and the Digital Acceleration project

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3   NEXT MEETING

3.1   The next meeting will be on Wednesday July 20, 10.30 am–12.00 pm