WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY

Positioning Our Schools to Achieve Our Aspirations

Issues Paper

2024

1. Preamble

Following on from the Strategic Plan '*Sustaining Success 2021-2026*', and in response to shifts arising from rapid technological changes and tertiary education policy decisions, Western Sydney University is currently developing a new Strategic Plan for 2025. This will be designed to position the University to respond to emerging issues, reaffirm its place as a leading Australian University and better serve the needs of students, staff, and the region.

The vision of the Plan is to ensure our students will succeed, our researchers have impact, and our communities thrive. We will also demonstrate our commitment to Indigenous voices, sustainability, promoting knowledge and understanding, equity and diversity.

Whilst consultations on the Strategic Plan are ongoing, it is clear that our academic endeavours will be critical to not only achieving the University's aspirations but more broadly supporting the aspirations of our staff and students. Thus, we need to consider whether our academic units are well positioned to achieve this, whether transformative change is required to set us up for success and what any change might look like.

We are thus proposing a review of the Schools, with the following broad terms of reference:

1. Does the budget model and allocation of resources appropriately reward and incentivise growth and quality, including in Third Party Providers and Transnational Education? What alternative approaches to resource allocation could be considered?
2. Is the professional staff support model, including how professional staff are provisioned within and outside academic units, sufficient, appropriately located and connected to ensure student success and research quality?
3. Is the interface between Schools and Divisional portfolios working to support the teaching and learning objectives, and research objectives, of the University?
4. Is the relationship between Research Institutes and Schools appropriately structured to ensure that staff in schools have robust research careers and that the University's research and research-led teaching ambitions are realised? Are there incentives and appropriate reward models to foster cross-unit collaboration in research, HDR training and teaching?
5. Is the core pathway to HDR, and HDR support, set up for success and with an appropriate mandate to deliver quality research, HDR training, and discipline regeneration? Is the interface between Schools and the Graduate Research School effective in ensuring quality teaching and learning, and HDR pathways?
6. Is the current academic and governance structure fit-for-purpose to support our core activities – teaching and research – and to provide agility and foster innovation to better meet the needs of our staff, students and communities? Are there alternatives that would better deliver on our mission of teaching and research?
7. Does the current approach to setting academic workloads provide appropriate incentives for innovation and excellence?
8. How well-placed are Schools to contribute to Indigenous acceleration, including both staff and student success?

9. Other matters relevant to the success of academic and professional staff in schools.

This paper provides background on previous reviews of academic areas and their functioning, commentary about the current state of the academic areas, and some benchmarking with similar universities. It outlines some perceived challenges currently being faced and asks for ideas on the way forward. Western is a strong University with global esteem for its leadership on impact, it has a remarkable confidence about its mission, and has a culture and staff buy-in that is unrivalled.

At the outset, it is important to state that this Review is not driven by a need to reduce costs or a need to reduce the number of staff at Western Sydney University. In this Review, the University is focussed on where resources are allocated and invested. Our future investment must deliver financial strength and resilience for the next five to ten years. There is no pre-conceived view of the outcome of the Review. Our focus is – and must be – to ensure that our Schools are equipped and resourced to deliver on the University's core missions of teaching and research. The Review must lead us to support structures and ways of working that provide the agility, and foster the innovation, to better meet the needs of our staff and students.

2. Background

It is important to understand some of the history of change within the University. Four reviews of the academic areas have been conducted since 2001, all of which resulted in changes to structures. Reviews have been conducted under the context of emerging opportunities and challenges posed by changing external (local, national, and international) environments, budgetary pressures, attention to strategic imperatives and positioning the University for a new (or refreshed) Strategic Plan.

There has been attention to the evolving needs and positioning of the University as it has grown and matured. Thus between 2001 and 2006, the University operated with four Colleges and 22 Schools. In 2006, the four Colleges were merged into three, with 15 Schools. In 2012, the College layer was removed and replaced with nine Schools, all reporting directly to the Vice-Chancellor. The Graduate Research School was established in 2015 to provide centralised services to support higher degree research (HDR) candidates, and to oversee a Masters pathway to HDR.

The most recent review of academic structures in 2017 commenced with the goal of addressing perceived issues of School sub-structure, governance, and leadership, along with the aim of creating a small number of organisational units. This was seen as a mechanism to encourage and strengthen cross-disciplinary research and teaching, improve collaboration and the strategic alignment of academic activities through cross and interdisciplinary connections.

An additional goal was to deepen leadership and management structures, provide succession and leadership planning, achieve efficiencies through scale and lower cost structures, and position the University for the future (Discussion Paper May 2017). A

potential transfer of Research Institutes into Faculties was explored as part of the consultation. There was an emphasis on physically co-locating Schools, together with Institutes where possible, to increase collaboration and strengthen research-informed teaching and learning.

Extensive consultation through the process to strengthen academic engagement and leadership resulted in a decision to increase the number of schools (from 9 to 13, later 12) and maintain a flatter structure rather than create Faculties, with attention to be given to the sub-structure, governance, and leadership of Schools. This was envisaged as a first stage to be followed by clustering, and ultimately the creation of a faculty model, with a working party to produce an outcome on an appropriate 'super-structure' by mid-2018.

During the same period, the University introduced a Shared Services model for 12 professional staff function areas, which was in operation from late 2017. This largely comprised a realignment of School and Institute supports into centralised functions (see Table 1 for a list of service functions). At the same time, work was done to understand what Schools required in terms of services and professional staff support remaining in Schools. This was the inception of the current pooled staffing model, which was established because of the increase in the number of Schools and a desire to not proliferate the numbers of professional staff. The assertion was that staff would essentially be providing the same amount of support. Thus, a set of standardised roles was established, with nuances for Schools depending on need, along with an agreement that some professional staff roles could be shared across multiple Schools.

Several reviews of the Shared Services model have been conducted – in mid-2018 and again in 2019 to assess the maturity of the service provision. At that time, most of the issues noted were problems with existing systems or processes, or process gaps created by the introduction of the model. There was also an identified need to strengthen relationships between service owners and clients and build a culture of excellence across the organisation. Some areas were seen as working better than others (e.g. technical and research services [TRTS] was held up as a success). The review also identified the impacts of changes on the academic workforce, with many academics feeling 'deserted' and perceptions of limited visibility on who could support them (unless there was on-the-ground support as part of the service model). Many felt a growing 'us and them' mindset – they had previously seen professional staff as being part of 'their team'. There were also views that shared service areas did not always understand their specific needs, challenges and time pressures and some academic staff reported an increase in administrative workload. There is also a perception that services provided to Schools had been further impacted as resourcing was reduced during the 2021 '*Future Directions*' Change Proposals (a response to challenges from COVID), since considerable savings at that time came from central Divisions.

A more recent review of Shared Services (under the auspices of a Service and Improvement Program) commenced in August 2022, with the aim of enhancing the service experience for staff, students and external partners. The work identified key organisational and School operational challenges, with design principles proposed for a future state model. Feedback from a subsequent Discussion Paper recommended short (~2024), medium (2025-26) and longer (2026+) term solutions. Many short-term initiatives were implemented as part of the

‘Service Reimagined’ work (e.g. review of travel processes, review of student misconduct function and development of a case management system, process review of casual academic contracts). Others have not yet been pursued, at least in part because of budgetary pressures.

3. School Profiles

The University’s academic areas are currently structured as 12 Schools (and the College), and five Research Institutes. Each School is led by a Dean, with a Deputy Dean, School Manager, Directors of Academic Programs (DAPs), Academic Program Advisors (APA’s), various Associate Deans (e.g. permutations of Learning & Teaching, Research, Graduate Studies, Indigenous, Engagement, International) and a range of Professional staff. School profiles vary considerably across all indicators including undergraduate and postgraduate student load, research income, staffing profile, budget and expenditure. For example, in 2024, two Schools (Nursing & Midwifery, Engineering, Design & Built Environment) were each responsible for 3-4 times the revenue of the two smallest Schools (Law, Psychology). Additional detail on School profiles is given below.

i. Student Load

The University's total student load for 2024 is currently estimated at 26,751 EFTSL (25,353 in 2023: Table 3). This compares to 27,245 in 2018; a 2% decline overall. Domestic (CGS) load comprises 74% of the total student load in 2024, with international students making up almost 24% and domestic fee-paying (DFP) just under 2%. In 2018, CGS comprised 82.5% and international 14.5% of student load. During the period 2018-2024, the University's international load increased by almost 65%, while CGS and DFP load declined by 11.8% and 50% respectively. The decline in domestic student load has largely occurred since 2021 (Figure 1).

Considerable variability in student load is evident amongst Schools (Figure 2), both in relation to the total numbers of students and how it is partitioned (i.e., by program, postgraduate vs undergraduate, international vs domestic). Seven Schools are each responsible for less than 10% of coursework load, with the School of Nursing and Midwifery responsible for the greatest percentage of load (13.5%). Undergraduate coursework load comprises just under 80% of the University’s total load. This varies from 22% in the School of Education to 90+% in Schools of Law, Psychology, Health Sciences, and Humanities and Communication Arts. For many Schools, 10-20% of their load is in postgraduate coursework (PG CW). Exceptions are Social Sciences (with 32% of load in PG CW), Medicine (46% PG CW) and Education (78% PG CW). The Research Institutes are collectively responsible for 0.5% of coursework load – all of which is in postgraduate programs.

When looking particularly at international student load it is clear that some schools have done very well, some continue to do so, some have declined, and others have struggled to gain much traction. Six of the schools have had a more than 50% increase in international student EFTSFL between 2020 and 2023. Others have had a decline (Nursing & Midwifery; Engineering, Design & BE) or only modest improvement (Humanities & Communication Arts; Education) (Table 2). Some schools, like Business, had impressive growth in international

load up until the visa processing delays were imposed by the Government (Ministerial Direction 107).

Trends in student load over time also vary across Schools (Table 3). The School of Education has suffered from a declining through-flow of bachelor pathways students into its largely Masters by Coursework set of programs (MTeach) (-35% decline in total EFTSL). The School of Nursing and Midwifery has suffered a COVID-generated decline in student interest (decline -34%). Growth has stalled in Science and Law, and growth in Social Sciences, Psychology, and Engineering Built Environment and Design is insufficient to keep up with the growth in staffing and costs. The Schools of Medicine and Health Sciences have robust growth. The Schools of Business, and Humanities and Communication Arts, have experienced long-term load decline. The Review needs to address what processes or initiatives are being countenanced to address these declines.

As at the second half of 2024, there was a total of 489 EFTSL of Higher Degree by Research (HDR) candidates enrolled across the Schools, with a further 163 in Research Institutes and 95 in the Graduate Research School (747 EFTSL in total). Again, distributions amongst Schools are uneven. The Schools of Engineering, Design and Built Environment, and Humanities and Communication Arts, carry the highest HDR loads, making up 18 and 13% of total load respectively. Overall, the number of HDR students has declined by 27.6% over the past five years, with the greatest decline seen in the Schools - almost 32%, compared with a 17% decline in the Research Institutes.

The University currently offers a large number of programs to students (a total of 462, including 88 diplomas, 171 undergraduate and 203 postgraduate programs), with 3,813 subjects. Many programs have relatively low student load, indicating they are not particularly attractive to students. Recent benchmarking indicates that the number of programs offered at WSU is significantly greater than other Sydney-based universities. It is also apparent that areas of high student load/interest are not necessarily also areas of research strength for the University.

ii. Research Performance

Research at the University is currently distributed amongst five Research Institutes and 12 Schools. There is an expectation that all Research Institute members have a collegial relationship with at least one School to ensure productive links. Institutes and members are required to contribute to and enrich the undergraduate program through teaching, and to contribute to appropriate School Committees. In turn, Research Institutes have School-based members.

Research Centres are designed to provide recognition and support for distinct areas of research excellence and are located within schools. The Centres have a Director appointed and an external advisory board. The University website lists 15 Research Centres, although it is not clear how active/productive they are.

Total School HERDC research income in 2023 was $26.4M, with $16.8M or 64% derived from Category 2 and 3 income. Like many measures, research income varies widely amongst

Schools. In 2023, the School of Medicine accounted for 33% of the total research income derived by Schools, while the School of Engineering, Design and Built Environment accounted for 15%. All other Schools accounted for less than 10% (and some less than 1%). While total research income has shown small increases since 2018, increases have been modest at best, and some Schools have seen reductions over this time (see Figure 3). It is a reasonable expectation that academics at a University of global standing are able to successfully capture external research funding.

Research outputs also show variability amongst Schools. An average of 2.6 publications were produced per academic FTE across all Schools during 2022 (the most recently available complete data), with an average of between one and four publications per academic FTE within Schools (Figure 4). This compares to an average of 5.5 publications per academic FTE for Research Institutes for the same period. Similar trends are evident when examining publication subsets of journal publications and Q1 publications.

The current Strategic Plan has research performance targets relating to Times Higher Education (THE) and QS World University Rankings. This includes THE Young Universities, THE Impact Ranking, THE Overall Ranking and QS Subject Rankings. With the exception of the THE Impact Ranking, the University is trending down and has not met its targets in several of these measures (Table 4). In addition, Western's score on Research Strength (a THE measure that uses the FWCI at the 75th percentile) is the lowest among 7 peer universities (Table 5). It should be noted that these measures are field-weighted by discipline, and the FWCI for STEM disciplines is not used as a yardstick for HASS performance. THE's recent adoption of metrics to measure the depth of quality has revealed that Western's research is not strong outside of the elite researchers and institutes, not compared to our peer universities.

In relation to the QS World University Rankings by Subject (which covers 55 disciplines), the University is currently ranked in 23 disciplines, with eight in the top 200, against a target of 12. This ranking instrument uses a range of criteria, including survey measures of academic and employer reputation as well as quantitative data. For 2024, all existing areas have either declined (7) or stayed stable (9). However, the University did see seven discipline areas ranked for the first time.

Ranked 49 in the world, Nursing is the only discipline in the top 50, while the newly ranked discipline of Development Studies is the only one in the 51-100 band (Table 6). However, Western has poor rankings, or is not ranked, in critical areas of student load: Engineering; Law; Computing Science; Data Science; Biological Science; and Business. The latter involves CGS revenue of at least $143M p.a. International load in these areas is worth at least $110M p.a. (Q2 forecasts).

iii. Student Success

Western Sydney University has a KPI of achieving an 83% retention rate as reported to the DESE by the end of the current strategic planning cycle (2026). At the start of the strategic cycle, the rate was at 79%. In 2022, the retention rate fell to 77.1%, and in 2023 to 70.6%. Western is unlikely to meet its strategic targets for retention in 2026. In 2023,

undergraduate commencing retention rates across the schools varied from 96.9% (Medicine) to 58.7% (Social Sciences). Other schools with low commencing undergraduate retention are Science (58.8%), Health Science (59.6%), Humanities (59.7%) and Computing Data & Mathematical Sciences (60.7%) (Figure 5a). The inability to retain students in their first year has financial costs, it injures Western's ambitions to expand access and opportunity, and ill serves our region.

There are also wide variations in student satisfaction with their classroom experience (Figure 5b). The average overall satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning in undergraduate subjects varied from 83% in Law to 50% in Medicine. In the School of Medicine, the continuing retention rate is only 71.9% (while commencing retention was 96.9%). In most schools, satisfaction rates were about 80%, with Science and Computing Data and Mathematical Sciences in the mid-70s. Low satisfaction rates will be associated with lower continuing retention as students 'step up' to universities presumed to be higher in prestige. Low satisfaction also points to a risk of adverse security when the new Student Ombudsman commences in 2025. Surveys of staff reveal a concern that Schools are not sufficiently resourced to generate the levels of appropriate student satisfaction and continuing retention. Student success and satisfaction from priority groups (Indigenous Students; Lower Socioeconomic Status) and gender representation, varies from school to school. It is not clear how well are schools supported in reaching equity targets for their student body.

iv. School Staffing, Academic Governance and Workloads

Across all Schools, there are 12 Deans, 12 Deputy Deans and 45 Associate Dean roles. Numbers of academic staff in Schools (including academic leadership roles) vary from 26 - 103, while numbers of professional staff vary from six to 52, with totals of between 35 (School of Law) and 138 (School of Medicine) staff per School. The percentage of professional staff in Schools also varies – from 7% in the School of Science to just over 60% in the School of Medicine. There is also variability amongst Schools in the numbers and percentages of staff employed at each level, whether academic or professional (Figures 6a, 6b, 7a and 7b). For example, the percentage of staff at Level D or E or in academic executive roles is 37% overall, varying from 27% (School of Nursing & Midwifery) to 55% (School of Education). Similarly, while approximately one-third of professional staff overall are employed at HEW 7-9, this varies from 20% (School of Computer, Data and Mathematical Science) to 64% (School of Social Sciences).

Six of the Schools utilise the 'pooled professional staffing' model, where two Schools share several professional staff functions (e.g. engagement, HDR support, business analysts, executive project officers; governance and compliance officers). Accordingly, professional staff in the School of Psychology support the School of Social Science activity, School of Health Science staff support the School of Science, and staff in the School of Computer, Data and Mathematical Science support the School of Engineering, Design and Built Environment. This was established when the number of Schools was expanded in 2018 and is a consistent source of discontent.

There are up to five Associate Dean's (ADs) per School, with roles and titles varying across Schools. AD roles should be occupied by either Level D or E academic staff, although more junior staff have been appointed to these roles and receive a significant salary loading for doing so. Some of these roles may be appointed and salary loaded at a fractional capacity. Most Schools have designated ADs of Learning and Teaching, Research and International. One School currently has only two designated ADs (Health Sciences), and some have combined roles (e.g. Research and HDR, International and Engagement). Others have opted for additional Associate Dean titles (e.g. Graduate Studies instead of HDR, Academic, Learning & Innovation instead of Learning & Teaching; and regionally focussed Associate Deans International).

Each School currently designates between one (Medicine and Law) and 10 academic staff to Director of Academic Programs (DAP) roles, and between zero (Medicine) and 15-17 academic staff (Humanities & Communication Arts; Social Sciences; Business) to Academic Program Advisor (APA) roles. This equates to 58 DAPs and 106 APAs (i.e. 164 in total) across the 12 Schools. With some exceptions, most DAPs should already be Level D academics, while APAs should substantively be at Level C. Again, many staff not at the optimum rank receive a significant salary loading. This has seen more junior staff attracted to these roles for the additional remuneration, but it has been found that this has an injurious effect on career development by removing them from developing their teaching and learning, and research. This especially affects mid-career female academics. Some Schools (notably but not exclusively, Medicine, Nursing & Midwifery) have alternative role titles, such as Clinical Dean or Sub-Dean, or various Director roles.

The total of all academic governance roles currently allocated to staff in the HR system is 273. This equates to 29% of all academic staff in each School occupied in formal academic governance or administrative roles. The percentage of staff engaged in these roles varies between 11 and 48% per School, with an average of 31%. While it is not clear whether all of these academic governance roles accrue full-time workloads in accordance with their title, it nevertheless represents a significant amount of academic workload tied up in senior governance or administrative roles across the Schools.

As per the Western Sydney University Academic Staff Agreement 2022, academic workloads are allocated as Individual Work Agreements in accordance with the University Work Plan Policy and taking into account the needs and resources of individual Schools. The major areas of designated academic work comprise teaching and HDR supervision, research, and administration and governance.

According to workload information collated for 2023, the average time spent on administration and governance by academics across all Schools in 2023 was 35.6%, above that for either teaching (31%) or research/HDR supervision (33.3%). However, there was considerable variability across Schools. Three Schools documented an average of more than 40% allocated to administration and governance (Business; Education; Engineering, Design and Built Environment), while four Schools documented 20% or less (Medicine; Law; Nursing and Midwifery), with the remaining five between 25% and 38%. However, workloads are purportedly applied in different ways across the Schools (for example some Schools include subject co-ordination in administration and governance, while others account for it in

teaching), so differences may in part be a function of how particular elements are categorised. Regardless, there is no doubt that the time allocated to administration and governance by academics is significant. In some schools, the total academic workload calculations well exceed 100%, as a means to accommodate these large service workloads.

v. School resourcing

As well as a decline in professional staff resourcing for schools there is a more general concern that School's do not receive a sufficient share of their earned student revenue from which to operate. In 2023, the Schools received 38.8% of the value of their revenue from which to deliver their teaching, research and engagement. In 2024, this allocation was reduced to 35.9%. This means that a considerable amount of the University's spend is not directed to frontline teaching and learning, from which the vast majority of the University's revenue is sourced.

The proportion of revenue that schools retain to expend on their operating activities varies dramatically. In 2023 the variation was between 29% (Engineering) and 60.6% (Medicine). Schools with declines in student numbers have higher proportion allocations (Business at 41.6%; Humanities at 49%; Education at 43.9%; Law at 40.4%; Nursing at 40.7%). Schools with substantial recent growth have more modest allocations, such as Engineering at 29%, and Health Sciences at 33.5%. The University budget model provides relatively more resources to schools in decline than it does to those that have student load growth.

At the commencement of 2024, the Schools were allocated a Research Investment Fund (RIF) allocation of $423,000. This amount was to be shared across the 12 Schools, with some Schools receiving no RIF at all. It has been reported that further RIF allocations were made to schools from mid-2024. Ten years ago, the RIF allocation to schools was $14.8M (2014). The Schools do not receive a research block grant that has the predictability or sufficiency for strategic investment in research. School Deans report being insufficiently resourced to drive research strength in areas of load and strategic importance. There is also a need to empower Deans, and enable their delegated authority, to drive research strength, to develop the research careers of academic staff, and to ensure research-led teaching and learning.

The University does not have a budget mechanism to reimburse schools for the resources they dedicate to Third Party Provider (TPP) or Transnational Education (TNE). Schools provide academic oversight, and other forms of assistance, but are not reimbursed for that effort. Moreover, no share of the revenue from these endeavours is returned to schools.

For example, the School of Business supports teaching delivery for three University TPP entities: Sydney City Campus (SCC), WSU Online via Online Education Services (OES) and the University of Economics Ho Chi Min City (UEH). In 2023, the School supported 326 subject deliveries (involving 104 subjects) across these three parties (97 at UEH, 157 at SCC & 72 at UEH). The school has costed this effort for 2025 at $720K, but there has been no budget allocation to the School to support this activity. In 2024, a modest fixed sum ($70K) has been preserved to part-reimburse schools for participation in the development of the Surabaya TNE offerings.

4. Benchmarking with Other Universities

A scan of student load, research income, staffing and academic structures was undertaken for 11 universities of comparable size, characteristics and/or strategic intent to Western Sydney University using 2022 Department of Education information (the most recent complete statistics available). Several clear differences between WSU and the other universities are apparent (see Table 8). In 2022, WSU sat in the upper third of comparator universities for student load (measured as headcount) but was the second lowest in relation to research income. While the University had a relatively low number of full-time and fractional staff compared to other universities sampled, it employed the second-highest documented percentage of casual staff (at 23%). WSU's student-to-staff ratio (SSR) sat in the upper third of universities, although the ratio of professional to academic staff (0.59) was similar to most other universities.

Compared to comparator universities, WSU's relatively flat structure is unusual. More than half of those universities sampled were distributed as three or four academic units, usually termed Faculties, with many led by Executive Deans and reporting either to a Provost or Vice-Chancellor.

5. Qualitative Internal Feedback

Various staff surveys and reviews (including the recent '5Qs for 250'; '8 questions' for Deans; and reviews of Shared Services) have provided feedback and some suggested improvements on a range of matters relating to academic structure, operations and functioning. Some of this feedback is summarised below and may need to be tested further to ascertain broader veracity:

<u>Learning & Teaching and Research:</u>

- There is an acknowledgement that new program development is required, to better align products and disciplines with current student demand.
- There is too great a reliance on casual academic staff with a need for more experienced and longer-term teachers. It has been suggested that the high levels of casual staffing (ameliorated by the de-casualisation process) may impact quality and also reduce opportunities to lift research performance.
- Scholarship allocations for HDR students are considered problematic, with suggestions there are few if any HDR scholarships available other than for specific/targeted areas. There may be merit in examining a possible connection between the apparent decline in the number of HDR students and scholarship availability/allocation.
- The model of support for HDRs provided via the Graduate Research School (GRS) is perceived as 'broken' and either needs fixing or be discontinued. Schools feel they do not have resourcing to support HDRs, but the support also is not provided by GRS and/or requires more investment than is currently available.
- While it is acknowledged that there are good systems to support researchers and research in Research Institutes, funding and support for School-based research initiatives are seen as inadequate. This will need to be rectified if we are to achieve

research outcome aspirations and aid the development of academic careers in Schools.

- More generally, the relationship between Research Institutes and Schools is perceived in some quarters as siloed and problematic, with room for improvement in relation to opportunities for collaboration, research support and alignment with teaching ambitions.
- Some suggest there could/should be greater integration between Research Institutes and Schools, or better mechanisms to encourage collaboration and a reduction in the 'us and them' culture.

<u>Staff and Workloads:</u>

- There is a widespread perception that there are not enough professional support staff in Schools, particularly to support DAPs and especially during peak times.
- The DAP role in line management is also seen as an issue since the line manager must mentor applicants in their promotions. DAPs are seen as having a focus on learning and teaching and may not be appropriate in relation to advice on research performance. In addition, the use of DAPs for academic staff line management is also seen to define the function of Schools (and by extension the University) as teaching-focused.
- Issues relating to academic workloads are a recurring theme. Workload models and their application are inconsistent across Schools, with similar roles often being allocated different workload values.
- There is also a negative perception that workload models have an accounting approach, with a 'cut and slicing' or major work areas, and micro-counting. This gives rise to perverse behaviours, where academics refuse to participate in developmental or school-community work because 'it is not in my workload'.
- Some academics believe there is little point in being awarded a research grant, as workloads are set and they will not be allocated additional research workload. This is revelatory of a culture in which it is presumed that a research workload allocation is a reward for outputs, as opposed to a statement of expected research activity.
- Some staff would be keen to engage in mentoring other staff but in places there is a culture of only engaging if workload for this is allocated. Level D and E academics need to be encouraged to mentor Early Career Researchers.
- There is excessive allocation of current academic workloads to administration. This is evident not just from workload allocation data but also through the Academic Promotions process. For example, a staff member might have 60% allocated to administration one year and 20% the next. This can reduce opportunities for staff to engage in research.
- A variety of administrative tasks currently carried out by academics do not necessarily require academic judgement. Some of this work could be better done by professional staff. This would also free up time for academics to focus on core academic tasks.
- Workloads (and workload models) are seen by some as barriers to research productivity.
- There is also a desire for greater clarity of expectations for academics to assist with career development. In particular, there is a recognised need to develop robust expectations of research attainment, and also for teaching and learning.

Shared Services and Processes:

- The Shared Services model in place is seen by many as not working effectively, although there is an acknowledgement that it is commonly in place across the sector and can work well if implemented thoughtfully.
- There are questions about whether we have the right partnership model between central teams and Schools, with some areas/arrangements thought to work better than others. The most successful examples are where specific business partners are allocated and work closely with staff in the Schools or are embedded within them (even on a part-time basis), or where strong personal relationships are in place. This is seen to facilitate mutual understanding of requirements and decision implications.
- There is certainly a need to develop appropriate shared expectations across all functions. Indeed, Service Agreements were meant to be put in place as part of the implementation of the model, but this has not been done across all areas.
- Perceptions are that there has generally been a reduction in service and School interactions since the Shared Services model was implemented. This is in part a consequence of the need for budget reductions and concomitant staff reductions – there is an impression that tasks have been centralised, budgets have been cut, and the work goes back to the source which is no longer resourced for the purpose.
- There is also a perception that there are barriers in working between business units, creating silos, communication barriers and sometimes unhealthy competition. There is a need for an institution-wide view.
- The problems outlined above are multi-faceted. There is a widespread perception that the University has many inefficient, onerous and complex processes that take up time and have multiple approval layers and/or delegations that rely on excessive control.
- There is a recognition that the solutions lie in streamlining processes, changes to delegations, enhancement of systems and introduction of automation opportunities to free up time for more productive work and to better enable academic governance.
- Delegations could be examined at a number of levels. The Dean's decision-making powers and autonomy are currently restricted, particularly in relation to budgets and resources. At the same time, in at least some areas the Deans are the only decision-making authority for a School and there is likely a need for greater devolved delegation powers. Regardless, there is clearly a need to set up principles around delegations that are consistent across Schools and aid in decision-making authority as well as accountability.

Structures:

- The large number and uneven size of Schools, along with a lack of consistency in how they operate and how decisions are made creates challenges and adds unnecessary complexity to the University – both from a service delivery point of view and in regard to ease of communication and consultation.
- The multi-campus dimension of the University adds another layer of complexity to this.
- There are currently limited formal structures for sharing best practice amongst Schools which could alleviate the above to some extent.

- There is a perception that Schools sometimes operate in isolation when decision-making should be shared. Some examples of this are in decisions about program and curriculum development or campus delivery (of programs, subjects or classes).

5. Summary of Challenges and Opportunities:

A key driver for change at the University is the need to meet aspirations of quality and growth as part of the new Strategic Plan. As evidenced in the sections above, many indicators for the core business of learning and teaching and research have stagnated or declined over recent years, while at the same time the sector has evolved and become more competitive and government policies have changed. There is a clear opportunity to change ways of working at the University and position academic areas more strategically.

Accordingly, there is a need to:

- Improve research performance.
- Enhance teaching quality, promote greater innovation in learning and teaching, and create a sense of belonging and professional identity for students.
- Enhance student retention.
- Refresh our course profile.
- Ensure the provision of effective and efficient resource management.
- Better facilitate relations with external partners.
- Enable a more strategic/outward-looking approach.

In tandem with this, we must:

- Strengthen the academic voice and enhance academic decision-making authority, autonomy and accountability,
- Strengthen and empower leadership by empowering academic and professional staff managers and leaders to enable and lead innovation and entrepreneurial activity,
- Maintain a focus on quality,
- Undertake operational, cultural and governance reform and reduce 'busy work' to free up more time for core business. This includes streamlining processes and increasing efficiencies. It also requires a professional support structure that fosters best practice and continuous quality improvement. It should also be appropriate for the size and number of academic units,
- Maintain greater consistency in the way academic units operate.

6. Next Steps

i. Consultation

The Schools Review will be led by the Provost, Professor Kevin Dunn. He will be supported by an Advisory Panel comprised of:

Mr Angelo Kourtis, Senior Vice-President and Chief Operating Officer
Professor Maryanne Dever, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education
Professor Sarah Lewis, Dean, Health Sciences
Professor Michele Simons, Dean, Education

Professor Kate Stevens, Director, MARCS Institute for Brain, Behaviour and Development
Professor Robert Mailhammer, Chair, Academic Senate.

With the release of the Issues Paper, the Office of the Provost will lead a deep consultation phase with the University community from mid-October to December. This will include town halls with each School and Division, focus groups to discuss support to the Schools; and workshops/briefings.

Further information about how to get involved can be accessed here: https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/news/schools-review.

Submissions can also be sent to: schoolreview@westernsydney.edu.au.

The Report of the Schools Review will be released in early 2025.

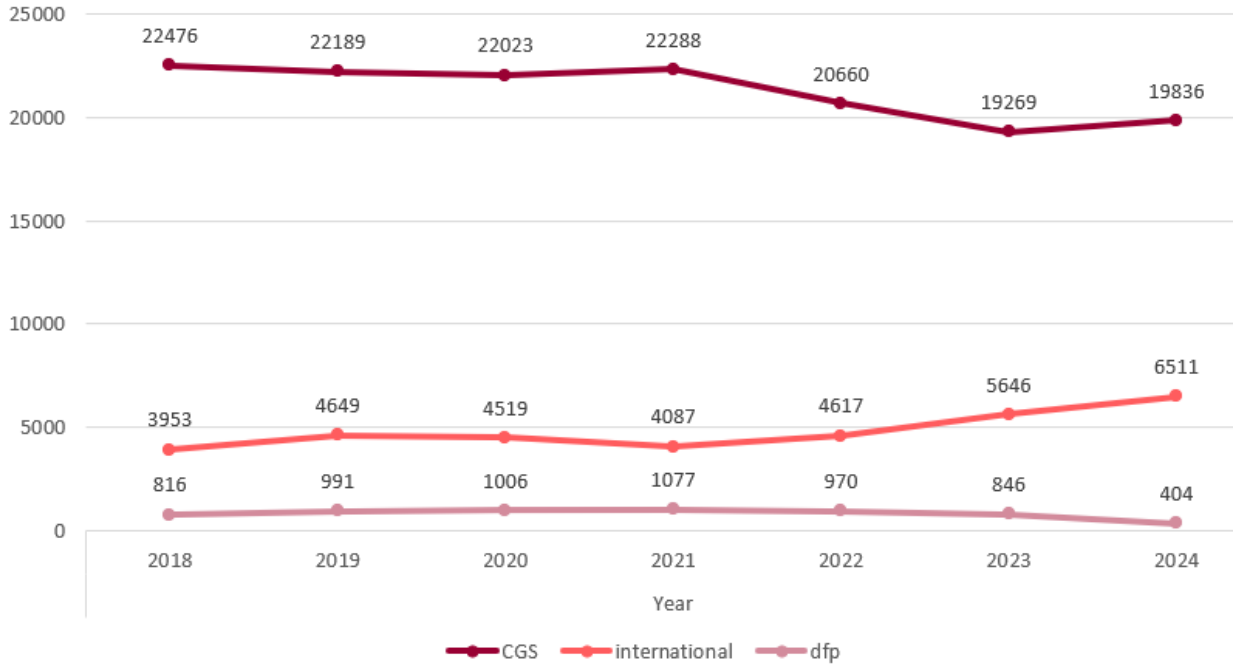
If the Report of the Schools Review indicates a need for formal changes, then the change will be managed in accordance with 'Clause 54' Organisational Change of the Professional Staff Agreement 2022, and 'Clause 46' Organisational Change of the Academic Staff Agreement 2022.

Tables and Figures

Table 1 *Service Functions included in 2017 Shared Services Model*

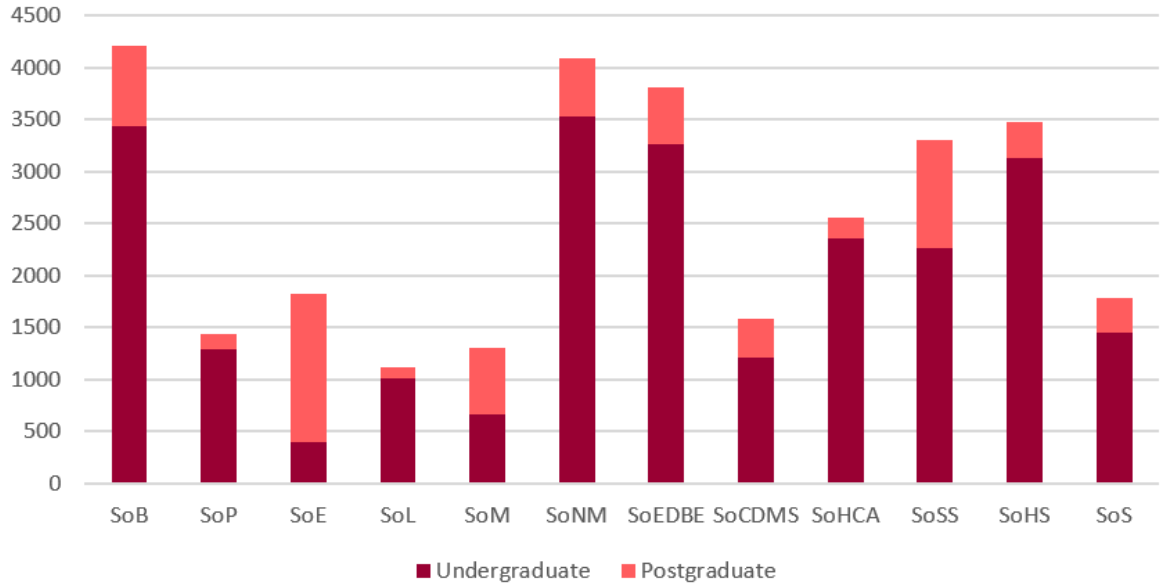
Area	Rationale	What worked?
Tech Support	Central governance and scalability of service	Best example of how a well-designed and led shared service can work
Placements	Strategic investment	Improved central compliance and leadership of placements during a time when compliance requirements were escalating, especially for Health disciplines. Important role during COVID.
Education & Program Support	Central governance and service effectiveness	Successfully delivered standardisation of learning guides via LGMS.
Accreditations	Central governance and risk management	Limited change.
Technology Enabled Learning	Cost efficiency and service consistency / effectiveness	Became a big part of the support model for 21C and critical role during COVID transition to online learning
Student Admin & Student Enquiries	Cost efficiency and service consistency / effectiveness	Enabled closing of multiple counters and improving student services via the new 'Hubs'. Delivered significant savings in 2020.
Marketing, Comms and Engagement	Cost efficiency via scalability and rationalisation of activity	Brought a more strategic focus to marketing, but still a point of contention with schools and institutes.
Secretariat & Gov. Committees	Cost efficiency and service consistency /effectiveness	With the advent of zoom, this service has "become part of the normal way of working"
Recruitment & Casual Administration	Cost efficiency and service consistency /effectiveness	Now "become part of the normal way of working" – took a long time to 'find its feet'. Still considerable opportunity to improve casual employment
New Schools Structure	Realisation of benefits	Enabled ASI.
Procurement, Asset & Equipment Mgt	Cost efficiency and strategic investment	Improved compliance and enabling ESM to provide improved productivity
Travel & Expense	Spend control & cost efficiency	Supported further adoption of TEMS
System Admin	Central governance of systems and centralisation of IT	A model that has enabled better support for a range of areas including SCEM, SMS, ESM and BI.

Figure 1 *Student Load (EFTSL) by funding type over time*



Source: Competitive Intelligence and Analytics, Longitudinal Pipeline Forecasting, LEO, accessed September 2024

Figure 2 *All Schools Student Load (EFTSL) 2024 (p) – domestic and international*



Source: WSU @ a Glance, Tableau accessed September 2024

Table 2 *YOY EFTSL Course Load by International Funding Type*

	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Change between 2020 and 2023
SoB	825	669	692	938	14%
SoP	26	33	52	55	112%
SoE	247	229	226	276	12%
SoL	18	23	38	44	144%
SoM	125	123	134	153	22%
SoNM	1,235	1,194	1,196	1,117	-10%
SoEDBE	623	452	454	584	-6%
SoCDMS	377	333	431	564	50%
SoHCA	298	292	320	317	6%
SoHS	206	161	260	363	76%
SoS	138	154	248	399	189%
SoSS	302	356	446	625	107%
WSU Total	**4420**	**40149**	**4497**	**5435**	**23%**

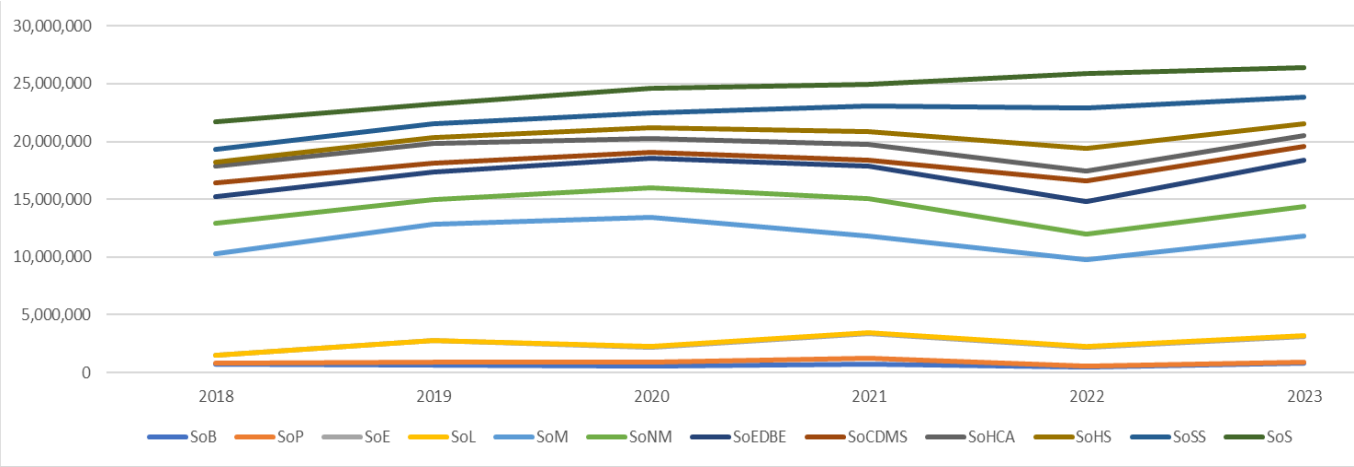
Source: *Competitive Intelligence and Analytics*, Longitudinal Pipeline Forecasting LEO, accessed September 2024

Table 3 *YoY EFTSL Course Load by all funding types*

	2020	2021	2022	2023	% Change between 2020 and 2023
SoB	3,165	2,889	2,588	2,574	-18.67%
SoP	1,091	1,274	1,307	1,254	14.94%
SoE	1,414	1,373	1,290	1,322	-6.51%
SoL	1,173	1,233	1,221	1,135	-3.24%
SoM	714	736	782	759	6.30%
SoNM	4,535	4,431	3,846	3,387	-25.31%
SoEDBE	3,417	3,360	3,216	3,333	-2.46%
SoCDMS	1,120	1,042	1,085	1,216	8.57%
SoHCA	3,269	3,103	2,835	2,584	-20.95%
SoHS	2,678	2,871	3,055	3,097	15.65%
SoS	1,911	1,971	1,899	1,902	-0.47%
SoSS	2,746	2,945	2,835	2,790	1.60%
WSU Total	**27,233**	**27,228**	**25,959**	**25,353**	**-6.90%**

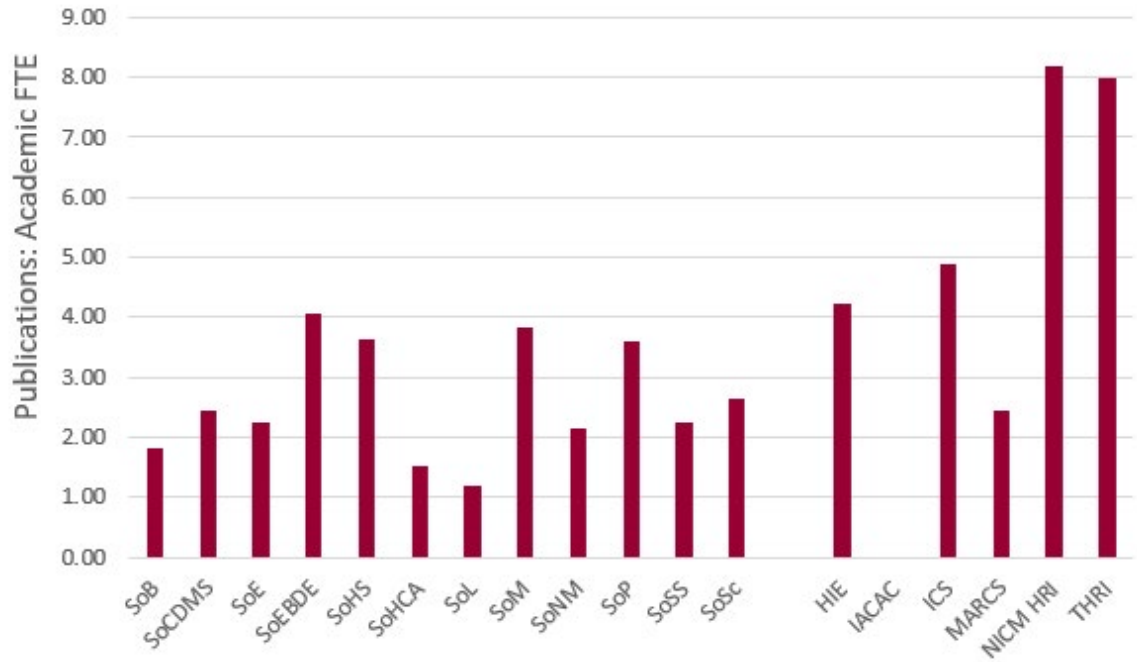
Source: *Competitive Intelligence and Analytics*, Longitudinal Pipeline Forecasting LEO, accessed September 2024

Figure 3: *All Schools Total Research Income (Cat 1-4)*



Source: Income Trend, Research Services, accessed September 2024

Figure 4 *Ratio of Publications to Academic FTE 2022*



Source: 2024 Operational Plan & HR Staff Occupancy List @ 4.09.24, accessed September 2024

Table 4 *Global rankings performance against strategic plan KPIs*

Measure	Method/ Source	Baseline	Mid-cycle	Full-Term Target	2022/2023 Data	2023/2024 Data
M1. Grow the University's reputation	THE Young Universities ranking	=36	25	15	33	48
	THE Impact ranking	3	Top 10	Top 10	1st globally 1st nationally	1st globally 1st nationally
	THE Overall Ranking	251-300	251-300	200-250	249	301-350
Appendix 3	QS Subject Rankings	9	11	12	8	8

Table 5 *Research sub-metrics benchmarked against peer universities, 2024*

	Citation Impact Score	Research Excellence Score	Research Influence Score	Research Strength Score
Curtin University	86.8	98.3	94.2	88.5
Deakin University	90.9	99.6	97.6	91.2
Griffith	79.1	99.6	98.7	82.9
La Trobe University	88.3	98.7	96.8	83.2
Newcastle Uni	94.7	97.8	95.3	91.3
RMIT	79.1	98.5	95.7	90.1
Swinburne UT	91	99	94	94.5
Western Syd U	**90**	**96.5**	**93.1**	**80.1**

Table 6: *QS World Rankings by Subject for WSU for 2023 and 2024*

	2024				2023	
	World	Trend	Australia	Trend	World	Australia
Agriculture & Forestry	151-200	=	12	↓	151-200	10
Architecture / Built Environment	151-200	=	15	=	151-200	15
Biological Sciences	451-500	=	21	↑	451-500	22
Business & Management Studies	451-500	=	21	=	451-500	21
Communication & Media Studies	201-250	↓	14	↓	151-200	12
Computer Science	551-600	=	22	=	551-600	22
Development Studies	51-100	↑	7	↑		
Economics & Econometrics	451-500	↑	21	↑		
Education	251-300	↓	21	↓	201-250	20
Engineering - Civil & Structural	201-240	↑	14	↑		
Engineering - Electrical & Electronic	501-530	↑	20	↑		
Engineering - Mechanical, Aeronautical & Manufacturing	501-530	↑	20	↑		
English Language & Literature	251-300	=	15	↓	251-300	11
Environmental Sciences	401-450	↓	23	↓	301-350	21
Geography	151-200	=	13	↑	151-200	14
Law	301-350	↑	19	↑		
Linguistics	151-200	↓	9	↓	101-150	8
Medicine	351-400	↓	20	↓	301-350	17
Nursing	49	↓	12	↓	47=	10
Physics & Astronomy	601-640	↑	19	↑		
Psychology	201-250	↓	16	↓	151-200	14
Sociology	151-200	=	10	=	151-200	10
Sports-related Subjects	101-140	=	20	↓	101-140	19

Figure 5a *Program Retention Undergraduate Commencing Students (%)*

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Retention 2019-20 to 2022-23 % point change
Business	71.8	76.7	74.8	69.5	-2.3% points
CDMS	66.1	63.9	71.1	60.6	-5.5% points
Education	46.2	66.7	73.2	65.4	+19.2% points
EDBE	75.5	76.5	73.1	71	-4.5% points
Health Sciences	63.9	70.7	68	59.9	-4% points
HCA	65.3	66.2	63.9	59.9	-5.4% points
Law	68.3	74.1	75.3	64.6	-3.7% points
Medicine	97.9	93.1	96	96.9	-1% point
Nursing & Midwifery	88.1	87.3	82.6	76.6	-11.5% points
Psychology	72.9	73.3	71.1	66.3	-6.6% points
Science	66.2	66.3	65.2	58.9	-7.3% points
Social Sciences	67.4	68.9	69.3	58.8	-8.6% points
WSU Average	**70.8**	**73.6**	**73.6**	**67.4**	**-3.4% points**

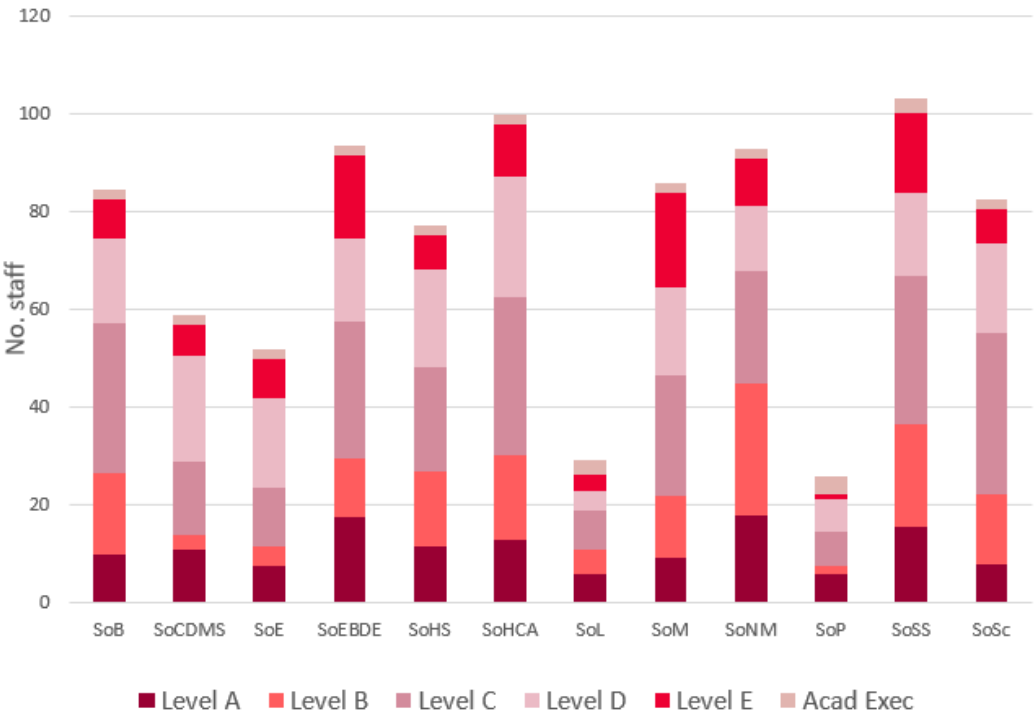
Department defined student retention. Measures students enrolled in year x who returned to the program in year x plus 1 (completions are removed from the retention base).
Source: Program Review Dashboard, Tableu accessed 19/09

Figure 5b *SFS Overall Satisfaction Explicit Agreement (%), by school 2019-24*

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024*	2019 to 2023 % Point change
Business	72.7	74.5	76.9	79	81.8	78.3	9.1
CDMS	71.9	71.9	73.4	75.6	76.1	76.6	4.2
Education	77.1	75	83.3	75.7	80	78.1	2.9
EDBE	73.4	73	77.5	78.4	80.5	75.5	7.1
Health Sciences	73.3	73.9	75.5	76.7	83.5	73.2	10.2
HCA	76.2	78.7	78.9	81.6	81.6	77.5	5.4
Law	74	79.4	82	81.4	83	73.5	9
Medicine	47.1	26.7	40	64.8	50	65.7	2.9
Nursing & Midwifery	76.3	74.9	68.5	73	81.1	81.1	4.8
Psychology	79.8	80.7	76.1	78	81.3	71.4	1.5
Science	71.5	71.3	74.1	80.2	75	70.1	3.5
Social Sciences	75.4	79.1	80.3	79.3	81.9	75.5	6.5
WSU Average	**72.4**	**71.6**	**73.9**	**77.0**	**78.0**	**74.7**	**5.6**

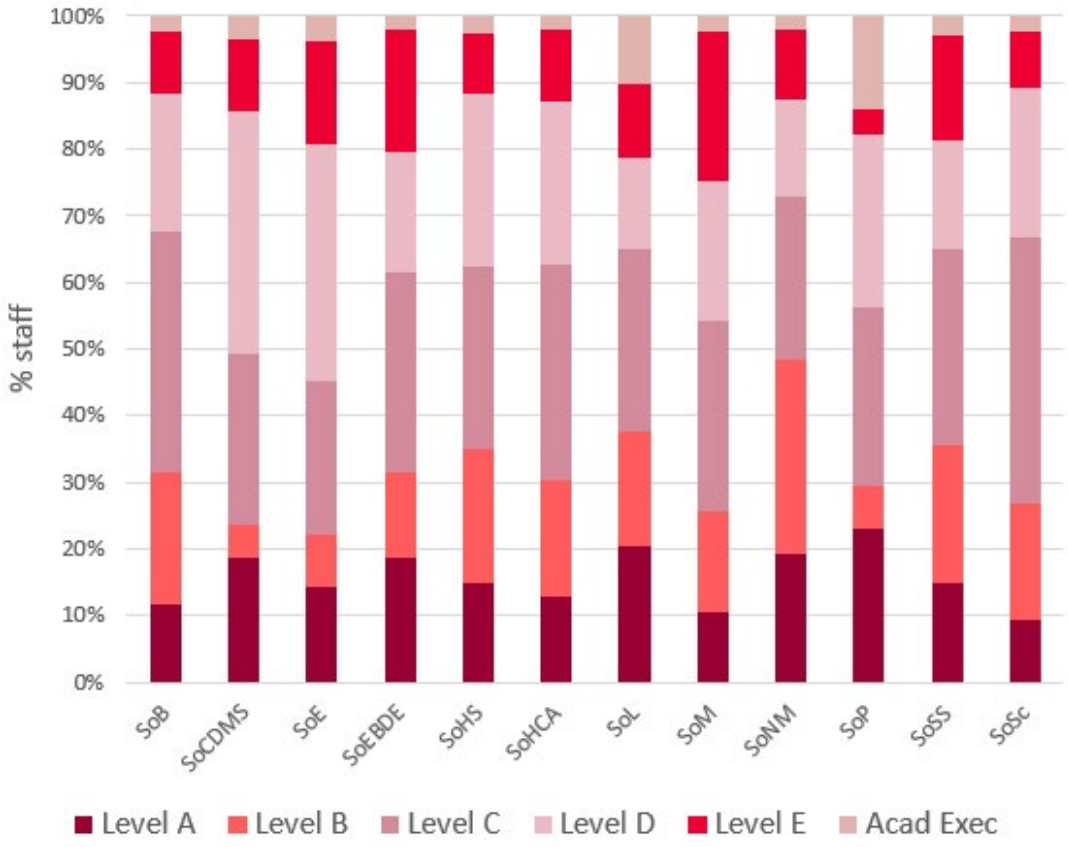
Source: Program Review Dashboard, Tableau accessed 19/09

Figure 6a *Number of Academic Staff, by rank and School*



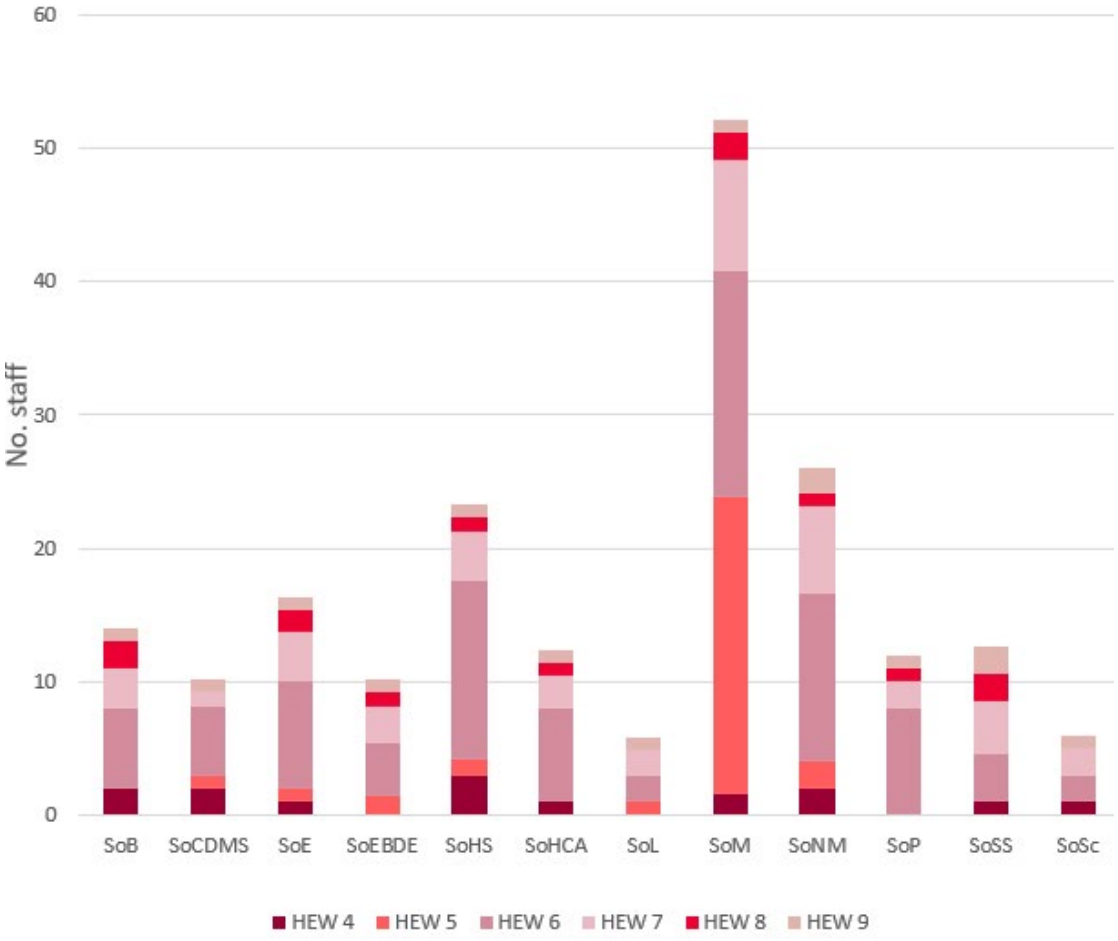
Source: 2024 Operational Plan & HR Staff Occupancy List @ 4.09.24, accessed September 2024

Figure 6b *Ranks of Academic Staff, proportions by school*



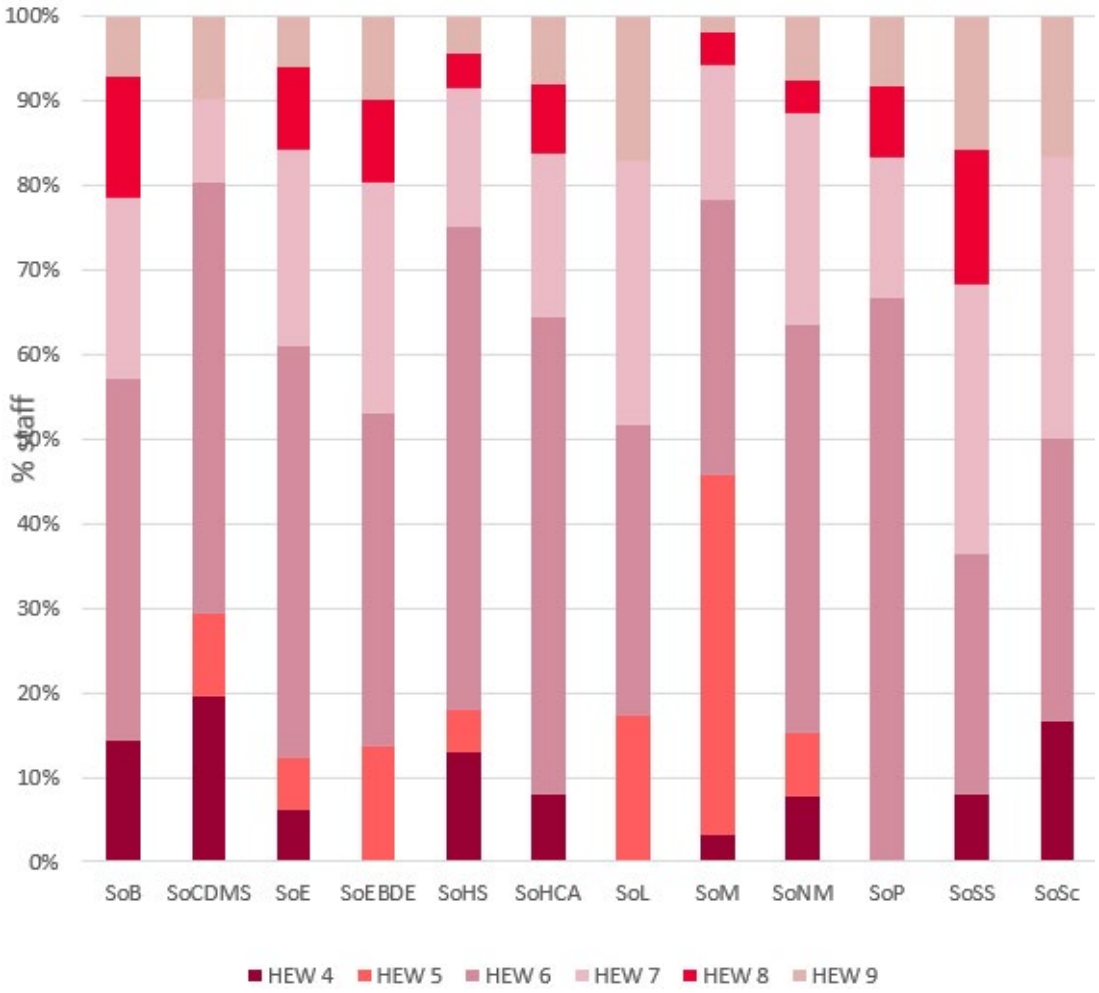
Source: 2024 Operational Plan & HR Staff Occupancy List @ 4.09.24, accessed September 2024

Figure 7a *Number of Professional Staff in each School by HEW level*



Source: 2024 Operational Plan & HR Staff Occupancy List @ 4.09.24, accessed September 2024

Figure 7b HEW levels of *Professional Staff, proportion by school*



Source: 2024 Operational Plan & HR Staff Occupancy List @ 4.09.24, accessed September 2024

Table 8 *Comparator University Information*

			Full time or Fractional Staff								
	Research income	**Student Headcount**	**Prof Staff**	**Total Staff**	**prof:acad staff**	**% Casuals**	**SSR**	**Acad Units**	**Title**	**Led by**	**Reporting to**
University of Newcastle	$126,952,708	35,155	1,834	3,101	0.59	14.3	11.4	3	colleges	PVC	VC
University of South Australia	$90,178,266	36,124	1,570	2,880	0.55	15.8	11.5	7	groups	Exec Dean	Provost & CAO
Charles Sturt University	$19,849,649	36,659	1,181	2,162	0.55	13.8	17.0	3	faculties	Exec Dean	DVC Academic
Swinburne University of Technology	$56,092,876	41,279	1,150	2,025	0.57	28.6	17.0	6	units	Dean	SDVC & CAO
Macquarie University	$100,035,488	43,944	1,690	3,028	0.56	17.3	12.9	4	faculties	Exec Dean	VC
University of Technology Sydney	$99,253,266	44,727	1,981	3,427	0.58	18.1	11.5	8	faculties	Dean	Provost & SVP
Griffith University	$101,780,430	46,061	2,310	3,829	0.60	15.5	10.9	4	groups	PVC	Provost
Western Sydney University	**$53,653,833**	**46,828**	**1,551**	**2,630**	**0.59**	**23.2**	**14.6**	**12**	**schools**	**Dean**	**Provost**
Curtin University	$137,119,472	50,048	1,939	3,363	0.58	16.5	13.8	4	faculties	PVC	Provost
Queensland University of Technology	$124,522,502	50,170	2,244	4,613	0.49	18.3	11.3	5	faculties	Exec Dean	VC?
Deakin University	$130,524,926	57,580	2,415	4,445	0.54	14.5	12.1	4	faculties	Dean	VC
RMIT	$110,811,885	72,939	2,534	4,286	0.59	12.4	17.0	3	colleges	DVC & VP	VC