WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

VICE CHANCELLOR'S TRANSITION AND RETENTION TASKFORCE MEETING

CONFIRMED MINUTES

A meeting of the VC'S Retention and Transition Taskforce was held on **Tuesday March 30th 2021** from **1.00 to 2.30 pm in KW-UG 17 and** via **Zoom**

1	PROCEDURAL MATTERS

1.1 WELCOME
Simon Bedford (Chair) opened the meeting by welcoming members.

1.2 ATTENDEES
Professor Simon Bedford, PVC Learning Futures (Chair)
Michael Burgess, Chief Student Experience Officer
Assoc. Prof. Jo-Anne Chuck, Head of Teaching and Curriculum, Learning Futures
Lynnae Venaruzzo, Head, Technology-Enabled Learning (TEL), Learning Futures
Ms Leanne Yard, Associate Director, Planning and Performance
Natalie Bradbury, Director, Student Retention & Success
Dr Colin Clark, Project Officer, Learning Futures

1.3 INVITEES
N/A

1.4 APOLOGIES
All members present - No apologies received

1.5 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING
First meeting of reconstituted Taskforce - N/A

1.6 ACTION SHEET FROM PREVIOUS MEETING
N/A

2	NEW BUSINESS

2.1 Welcome and Outline of VC's Taskforce (SB)

PVC (LF) Simon Bedford opened the meeting and welcomed members.

New Terms of Reference (ToR) were proposed based on the ToRs of the previous taskforce and current imperatives. After discussion several minor amendments were proposed.

Action: Colin to update the ToRs and circulate to the group.

2.2   Review of *SPR/2H 2020* online teaching, learning and assessment experience SPR 2020 (JC, All)

The *SPR/2H 2020* report was tabled, articulating that the student experience and success in SPR was similar to the first half of 2020. A decline was noted in the SFU results for the student experience, with groupwork and a positive grade skew being evident, consistent with AUT 2020. Students seem more comfortable with online learning/assessment with less interaction with support services (e.g., emails around on-line exam enquires). These findings have implications for student transition and retention in light of the adoption of Hyflex and the broader delivery of flexible and blended teaching and curriculum.

The seven recommendations from the AUT Lessons and Reflection report were discussed with it being noted that student performance was strong in 2020 and retention remained robust. It was also discussed that the recommendations from AUT highlighted flexibility in learning, delivery (e.g. Hyflex), requiring support from other areas of the university e.g. timetabling.

It was noted that it is important to understand the complexity of adopting flexible learning. For example, some students prefer face-to-face, but over time attendance is impacted as students lose the habit/deprioritise class attendance. Given the range of individual preferences, it was acknowledged that it is very difficult to measure the impact of this flexibility on student learning. Discussions centred on strategies to collect metrics across the cohorts using different delivery modes.

Action: To add "Flexible teaching and learning delivery" with aligned appropriate activities to the Transition and Retention Strategy.

2.3.   The Transition and Progression Strategy (NB, JC)

The Transition and Retention Strategy was well received by the VC and Senate Education Committee.

The paper presented only included implementation of strategy by Schools which included information that varied in quality and consistency. The review of the use of the strategy for AUT 2021, now requires the input of data from other sources such as Western Success, the Library, MESH and The College.

Discussions centred on Western Success data indicating that the student cohorts concerned about transitioning into WSU were in Science, Medical Science, and Business courses. Most of this centred on concerns about maths skills. It was noted that MESH is developing a micro-credentialed course in maths that would function as a bridging course.

Other areas discussed included that the strategy should recognise key points in a student's journey where high numbers of resignations are evident e.g. following results release.

Suggestions included for exploration included:

- Consider improving communications to support student experience when they receive good or bad unit grades.

- Review units with high fail rates after identification via *Project Query*.

- Increase student awareness of the need for math skills in courses, including access to support

Action: Approach SEM to address communications aligned with results release

Action: Communication with Kate Liddell on communication between Project Query and this task force

2.4 The work of CUSWP and TaRP, redistribution and consequences (JC)

The Course and Unit Standards Working Party and Transition and Retention Pedagogies Working Party have been disbanded. This work has been re-allocated to other areas of Western as per the tabled paper. This was approved via Senate Education Committee.

Learning Futures will continue to support unit development/improvements and oversee STARS and START. However, work on units will be driven by Deans of Schools (via Project Query, ACRs and other projects) with negotiated support from LF and other areas of Western.

The Academic Integrity Party will now report to Senate Assessment Committee.

The function of the CUSWP to build thresholds into the ACR has not yet been approved.

Action: Leanne Yard to ask Kate Liddell regarding who is to approve thresholds

2.5 International Students—Response to concerns raised (SB)

PVC (International) is reviewing courses with high international student enrolment but poor retention: Bachelor of Business, Master of Engineering and Master of ICT. She will be working with Schools and LF and other staff to understand issues impacting retention.

Action: PVC (International) is to be invited to next meeting.

2.6 Update on Western Success (MB)

A review of Western Success' strategy for 2021 discussed its work in contacting students to welcome them to WSU. These phone calls and other forms of personal engagement driven by schools, e.g. to advertise such events as MESH workshops, were deemed to be helpful.

It was also discussed that there was the need for early indicators of student engagement so as to intervene with students at risk during transition. vUWS engagement is one indicator, but there is currently no early access to grades or assessment results. Personal, institutional and discipline-specific factors may all affect transition and retention success. This needs further discussion/research by the task force.

It was noted that data is disjointed as the student may be failing in a number of units beside the targeted one. An early conversation with the student on their experience and other issues may circumvent them discontinuing but this would require a holistic understanding of the student.

The Advise module was discussed as an option to access this information but it does not have an analytics function. Another source of data would be the Transition Success Exit Survey.

It was noted that TEQSA expects the University to be able to identify performance of each student. A function of this Taskforce will be to derive these insights from these student data.

Action: Director of Data Integrity Lizette Delacy to be invited to next VCTF meeting.

2.7 Current enrolment and retention figures

Current enrolment and retention figures (see attached sheet) were discussed with the data asked to be kept confidential.

Enrolments have increased. This includes domestic (total number and EFTSL) and Indigenous students. International student numbers have decreased. Enrolment rates of continuing students (retention) have increased; with PG, UG, domestic and international retention numbers increased (to be confirmed after census).

Most school enrolments have increased, or marginally decreased.

Domestic PG enrolments appeared to be of some concern however the available EFTSL data was out of date. Centrally is a move to provide data insights rather than the complete data. It was noted that it is impossible for this Taskforce to do its work without complete and current data.

Action: Enrolment and retention data to be provided after census date.

2.8 Develop Data Sources, Learning Analytics and Business Intelligence to Support Retention Planning (NB/LY)

+ 2.9 Develop Effective Data-Driven Transition Curriculum Interventions to Support Retention (JC/LV)

The group discussed possible new sources of data include QR codes, Zoom usage, and Wi-Fi access. Zoom does not have an analytics engine/platform; however, this may be available in the future. Academics do not always select the correct category of session, hampering access to data. LF has been placing Zoom in Blackboard to categorise them correctly. Blackboard Collaborate could also undertake this function but it is not as widely used or accessible. Interpretation of Zoom data has limitations – many students log off shortly after going in, and logging on does not necessarily lead to engagement. Staff should not be using Zoom for lectures (though some do) and there needs to be a discussion on a recommendation that a 50 student threshold (without additional support) for blended synchronous sessions be adopted.

The use of QR code data was also discussed. Though the data collects attendance at an individual student level, though will only be used for contact tracing or for aggregated data use. It does allow some understanding of attendance patterns of students who attend face to face (at least showing that they are in the building). Wi-Fi pings can also track students, potentially to classroom level. However, the technology is not as accurate as QR data and acknowledging student privacy. It was felt QR codes were better and could be replaced with a 'tap in' solution with student compliance if they can see a benefit.

There is an action item from the COVID T&L group to establish a website with links to the T&R strategy, data dashboards and a guide to using data. It was suggested that the VCTF website could be used for this purpose. The piloted TaRP dashboards are now available for all units. There is a need for a guide on the use and easy access to data, which will support Schools to be more independent in their data-driven decision making.

Action: CIA to consider dashboard functions; Website to be updated with current links when available.

3 NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be on Wednesday May 5th 2.00–3.30 pm in KW-UG.17 and via

Zoom.