

STRATEGY 2016–20 DISCUSSION PAPER: IMPROVING OUR ORGANISATIONAL DESIGN

DISCUSSION PAPER 6 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Process

- Consultation with faculties and other stakeholder groups was conducted during August and September 2015.
- The formal discussion paper was distributed on 30 September 2015. It details some initial decisions following this consultation, along with proposals for further consultation.
- Further consultation will now take place, and conclude on 30 October. This consultation will focus on the structure of our health faculties, for which a number of options have been proposed in the discussion paper. During this period staff will also be able to provide written feedback to the strategy team.
- The University's structure will be decided in December this year or at the first Senate meeting in 2016.

Questions

1. Why is organisational change needed? How will the University manage so much change at once?

The Strategic Plan 2016-20 discussion papers on Research, Education and Culture have outlined an ambitious agenda for strategic reform and performance improvement at the University of Sydney. The challenge of improving our performance so we return to our historic position as indisputably the best university in the nation, and arguably the best in the region, requires a range of strategies that focus on our undergraduate education and research training, and our strategic investment in research strengths.

We are also considering the role of two other important elements in supporting excellence in our education and our research: our culture, and our organisational design. Our discussion paper, 'A culture built on our values', which proposes how we can shift our institutional culture to best realise the talents of all our staff and students is currently open for comment. The last discussion paper in our series, 'Improving our Organisational Design', is also open for comment and outlines the role of organisational reform in this mix to help liberate the creative energies of staff and students by increasing the opportunities and resources for pursuing excellence, and by reducing impediments such as administrative burdens and barriers.

The University's need to address our organisational structure is evident. This is not change for change's sake. The fact that in recent years we have moved from arguably being Australia's leading university to being placed somewhere between the third and fifth leading universities in the country (depending on the measure and ranking system), suggests there are structural and cultural issues that may inhibit our performance.

Our benchmarking data with other universities on administrative costs and efficiency indicate our cost base is higher than many of our competitors; we are spending too much on administration and not enough on our core business of research and education. Evidence also suggests that service reform, critical to releasing resources for research and education, is proving difficult, complex and protracted due to the complexity of our organisational design.

Further, there is poor satisfaction with our organisational structure from people in and outside the University. Earlier this year only just over a quarter of respondents to an open student and staff survey, said our structure serves us well. And it is common for people outside the University to remark that our complex design makes the University difficult to navigate, not least to know where and how decisions are made.

The University can and must do better if we are to regain our place nationally and improve our place internationally.

Changes to our organisational design would enable the outside community and our own people to navigate the University more easily and to better understand our offerings. It would give us greater ability to operate as a single university with common shared goals.

A more effective and less complex design would also relieve pressure on our interdisciplinary SPARC model and centralised administrative services.

While it might seem a difficult undertaking to proceed with so much potential change at once, the reality is that updating our organisational design is key to enabling excellence in education and research in order to lift our performance as a whole.

2. What is the timeline for this change to occur? Are there still opportunities for further consultation?

Some initial decisions and proposals relating to our organisational design are outlined in the 2016-20 Strategy discussion paper 'Improving our Organisational Design' which was released on 30 September. The paper was written after significant consultation with the University faculties and stakeholder groups, including more than 20 'town hall' sessions conducted throughout August and September. More than 50 submissions were made following these consultations.

As a result of these consultations and submissions we have outlined some initial decisions to be put to Senate for approval, and staff will be able to submit comments on these during the written submission period for the paper. For proposals affecting the structure of our health faculties, however, a further round of consultations will be undertaken in October, which will provide opportunity for further input and feedback. The final decision on our University's structure will be made in December 2015 or early 2016, and the implementation timeframe will depend on the extent of the changes decided upon.

However it would be anticipated that planning for any proposed change would commence early in 2016 with a view to implementation in 2017. Staff would be provided with regular updates throughout 2016 and consulted throughout any planning and implementation phases.

3. How will this proposed change affect my role at the University? When will I know how this will affect me and my colleagues?

At the moment these are conceptual proposals and are not formally approved. Once any of these proposals is approved and adopted as part of the next strategic plan, there will be further consultation on the detail and on what they will mean for any impacted areas and staff during implementation.

4. Has the University consulted with the unions about these proposals?

The Vice-Chancellor and the Director of Strategy have been meeting with both the NTEU and CPSU regularly since March this year, well before any strategy proposals had been developed. Initial discussions focused on the emerging objectives of the strategy. More recent discussions have been around the specific proposals in the discussion papers and we are ensuring that both the Vice-Chancellor as well as members of the senior executive whose portfolios are responsible for the proposals are involved in these discussions.

The University will continue to meet with the unions to exchange ideas and enable them to ask questions. It should be remembered that we welcome feedback and comments from the entire University community before we put our final recommendations to Senate for approval.

5. How will any changes impact staff members' workload/location/reporting lines? Will both academic and professional staff be affected by this change?

Should a new organisational structure be adopted it will likely change the way the University manages its course offerings and its research. It is too early to understand the details of any potential change for academic and professional staff, but this will become clearer once a new structure is decided upon and we enter the design phase.

6. How will these proposals affect courses and units of study/accreditation requirements/the professional reputation of disciplines? Why are some faculties more impacted than others?

The aim of any change will be to minimise obstacles to people working together and to ensure that our course offerings can be better navigated and recognised. We will be working with areas impacted by any change to ensure that the reputation of our disciplines is upheld and their visibility is clear within the new structure and externally.

It is too early to understand how a change in organisational structure might impact individual units of study (if at all), especially in the context of potential changes to the University's educational models outlined in our first discussion paper, 'Developing a distinctive undergraduate education'. The proposed changes to our structure would provide opportunities for most faculties to enhance engagement with students and encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration in research and curriculum design – these are all exciting possibilities. With this in mind, however, there are a couple of faculties with such distinctive research and education profiles that combining with other disciplines may not provide enhanced opportunities.

The proposed organisational structure takes into account the circumstances of each discipline to ensure that all accreditation requirements can be met and that external engagement with professional bodies, alumni and supporters continues at the optimal level. This has been addressed on a discipline-by-discipline basis.

7. What organisational principles/theories were used in defining change?

The University adopted five guiding principles in the development of the proposals for organisational structure, linked to strategy, enablement and collaboration. These are outlined in the discussion paper on page 18.

8. Is this simply a cost-savings measure? Is it simply a way to cut staff numbers?

The University operates in an increasingly competitive student recruitment environment. With limited potential to grow sources of government funding, and heightened focus among prospective students and other stakeholder groups on reputation, performance and rankings, we risk losing ground to competitors whose organisational structures better enable them to focus on areas of excellence and adapt to change.

We cannot rely on the excellence of our people alone to achieve our desired outcomes. The recent staff and student survey on strategic themes revealed uncertainty as to whether the current faculty structure is serving us well: only one quarter of respondents said our current structure serves us well and only nine percent of staff said they did not believe there were ways the structure of our faculties might be improved. There was also staff comment that internal structures were often an impediment to their ability to perform their job.

While there may be opportunities for financial efficiencies this is not the key driver for reviewing our academic structure. The current circumstances undermine our aspirations to enable excellence in education and research that will have a significant impact on our overall institutional performance.

9. *How will this change impact students?*

The University will ensure that an updated organisational design would have a positive impact for students and enhance the overall student experience.

One of the aims of proposed changes to our organisational structure is to enable students to more easily navigate our institution and educational offerings while still offering unparalleled choice of areas of study. Students would still be able to develop a strong relationship with a particular discipline, while also benefitting, if they so choose, from greater flexibility to study units of study and electives across faculties. Students would also benefit from a more consistent experience across the University.

10. *What will happen to the position of deans of faculties that no longer exist?*

While the University is committed to continuing current disciplines, the proposals for change to our organisational structure may affect how some disciplines are grouped together. As these are still conceptual proposals it is too early to know exactly how this might affect positions, including leadership positions. However should change occur we will ensure that communication is frequent and informative with the entire University community, particularly with any staff who are directly impacted.