

NOTES: Committee Meeting with the Vice-Chancellor Prof Amit Chakma 27/8/20

S Maloney: I spent 5 years as Head of School and budget constraints influenced the level of motivation of academics. Lack of money directly affects teaching but it also affects the university's reputation through research. Research needs PhD students but as it becomes more difficult to recruit, how can one maintain the motivation amongst staff for research?

A Chakma: How do I stay motivated? Looking at the 2-5year future, some of the fundamentals at UWA are quite strong. Resources have not been managed well strategically, but this is not a blame game. It can be turned around with determination, conviction and positive action. It can be fixed but it won't be easy. This is a fiscal problem which must not be allowed to constrain our aspirations but we must work to fix it first. The rebuilding process has begun in a symbolic way. The LIEF competition needed \$350,000 initial investment but probably \$3-4 million overall, money we don't have. However, without this investment, we won't be competitive as a university so we have committed to it and will find the money by 2022.

The funding model is flawed but we can't redo it so we need to grow revenue. This has been neglected. We are too small to aspire to be a top 50 university, we are more the size of UC Berkeley. Growth brings resources and then we will have money to spend. First, we need to get rid of the budget deficit and then being a 30,000 student university will sustain us, preferably 35,000. How do we do that? Our first priority is to recruit 500 more domestic students and marketing is already working towards this. We are already seeing an uptake, then we will stretch the goal. International students are not here at the moment but this will change.

D Judge: Money is not the answer to motivation. For instance, under the workload model, very little time is allocated to the supervision of honours students. This is disrespectful of all parties. Money doesn't motivate academics.

A Chakma: I understand, but if we don't fix the money issue first, we will lose 20% of our size. I can't comment on the workload model yet. I have to concentrate on the top.

M Rizzi: Where is the strategic focus? It appears that to solve the financial issue, the emphasis shifts from teaching and research to students. With reference to my colleagues' earlier comments, there are personal limits to striving for research output and attending to the student experience. How do we juggle these roles?

A Chakma: At great universities, the student experience is great. Research intensive universities don't pay as much attention to their student experience. At UWA, we have lost students to the competition so we must pay more attention to the students and broaden our appeal. We have to focus on the problem to solve it but my position is to look at the macro situation, not the micro situation.

How to support the research mission? Knowing the financial challenges, we must look at Endowment Chairs, investing in faculty positions. We would match the donor dollar for dollar, a donation of \$2.5 million requiring \$2.5 million from the university.

Resources have not been managed well. Every single dollar was spent on running costs with no investment savings for the future (as is required for IT, for example). In the eventual budget model, 10-15% will NOT be spent on running costs, but in the immediate future, this 10-15% must go to the budget deficit.

We are not alone, this is affecting all universities across Australia.

S Tarrant: Money is the immediate problem, but what are your general views, philosophical and personal? Who should be funding universities? Public/state vs private? How do you see your role? Is it focused?

A Chakma: Philosophically, Australia is wealthy enough to provide much more support to education than it does. Worldwide, the return on investment in education is greater than from any other sector. Unfortunately, this resonates with individuals but not governments. To fund health, education spending, particularly on the university sector, gets cut. The US/Canada and the UK spend less per capita, but Australia is heading in the same direction.

Whatever my personal views, this is the reality that we can't change. I have a 5 year mandate and my pragmatic view is to accept the reality.

A McKinley: Historically, UWA has had a low student to staff ratio with small classes. Covid-19 has put all classes on-line. Is this a permanent shift? We can't compete with other universities on-line presence, such as Harvard and on-line means that no students come to campus.

A Chakma: The business model is flawed and the solution has been to increase class sizes. If we are to grow to 30,000 students, we must adjust. On-line classes will play an increasingly large role, but not be the total solution. An example would be to package 1st year studies on-line, so that students don't need to be in Perth for that period and this would make UWA accessible to more people. Arizona State University runs on-line parallel with in-class and has been successful.

E Brink: Implicit in this change is casualization of staff. What is your philosophical view?

A Chakma: A great university can't be run with part-timers, it needs fulltime Faculty members. The business model has led to the practice of employing casuals and at times, it is appropriate to bring in experts to give lectures. However, professors must teach.

Practically, once the budget deficit has been addressed and there are the resources, the professoriate must be built up at all levels to reduce the number of casuals employed.

D Judge: At UC Davis, high level professors taught 1st year introduction classes which was motivational for students. This wasn't a monetary investment but a good use of the professorial and inspiring students by exposing them to great minds early on.

A Chakma: How do you, UWAASA, gather ideas? The hope is that we see eye to eye on the fundamental issues and that ideas can be translated into action to create a change in culture.

D Judge: A lot of things get filtered at the middle-management line.

N Kirkham It called a MUD-LINE, and we have a bad one here.

A Chakma: I hope that UWAASA is viewed as a valuable body. Can UWAASA come up with aspirational ideas? A presentation of ideas would be a starting point for consideration.

R da Silva Rosa: By using the All-Staff email, everyone could be engaged to give personal views of ideas that could be acted on now.

F McGaughey: HR has used an "Ideas Hub" on-line, specifically about flexible working. Anonymity would be required, but this could be a useful tool to engage with staff more on-line.

A Chakma: This is a pilot project that will be used when it is perfected.

S Dobbs: The discussion so far resonates with me and I understand looking at the big picture, but UWA needs real leadership. There has a huge divide between the high level executives and the academics. The Vice-Chancellor doesn't need to orchestrate everything, but the mud-line must be breached so that everyone can see a clear direction.

A Chakma: There have been a lot of things adding no value at UWA. Looking at the structure, there are too many layers which has made it difficult to act. If we don't reduce these, we won't achieve the fiscal goal and so can't aim for growth.

There has been a lack of accountability. The Audit & Risk Committee identified items but these were not actioned. I am identifying who does what.

Investment in IT, \$90 million required, is impossible at the moment.

I need a better understanding of the structure but I am prepared to remove layers. There are challenges in the short term and growing pains. There must be support during the backlash.

R da Silva Rosa: It has been very useful to interact with you. Could the senior executive each appear in a public forum Q & A session?

A Chakma: You are to be commended for maintaining UWAASA as a collegial body. It is a good thing.

I am happy to come to meetings and bring a senior colleague with me one at a time to be party to the conversations. These could be structured to discuss each portfolio.

D Judge: UWA (indeed WA) is complex. It is very important to get out and allow people access to you, to be available for personal interactions. The executive has isolated itself in the past.

A Chakma: Invite me for coffee to meet people.

N Kirkham: There is a gender imbalance at senior levels which is demotivating. Do you have a plan?

A Chakma: What would you do?

N Kirkham: Spill and fill!

A Chakma: You know I can't do that in the short term. I am trying to get the best out of the staff I have.

F McGaughey: This lack of diversity is symptomatic of other issues at UWA – a lack of strategy. For instance, Athena Swan is STEM only.

A Chakma: I need some time (arrived in July). Currently restructuring the executive to best use their skills and streamline things.

On an ad hoc basis, instigating a leadership programme. Not enough done to grow emerging leaders from within, especially as it can be difficult to recruit to Perth.

M Rizzi: There is anxiety around contract renewals. Are we still going to have redundancies?

A Chakma: You do the math. There is a structural deficit in the budget of \$70 million. \$15 million must be saved by the end of the year and the negotiated agreement will help. This saving must be achieved and there must be accountability.