

Our Ref: 16/120761

26 September 2016

Committee of the UWA Academic Staff Association
M004
The University of Western Australia

By email: uwaasa@uwa.edu.au

Dear Committee of the UWAASA

Thank you for your letter dated 31 August 2016. May I firstly apologise for the delay in responding.

I have noted your observations and am providing brief answers to the specific questions raised in your letter, many of which have now been addressed through the specific Q & A sessions or directly through the FAQs on the renewal website. However, I am also currently liaising with the UWAASA President with regards to attending a meeting of the ASA.

- 1) Could the SDVC please explain what measures will be put in place to ensure that the level of service Academic staff receive to aid them in their teaching, research and service functions will not be reduced, and in cases where certain areas of the University enjoy less support than others that this level of service is enhanced, rather than service delivery sinking to the lowest common denominator?

The primary objective of the current organisational change is to design a model to better support academic staff and students. Extensive work over a number of months with both academic staff and faculty and school managers has informed the design, which is now available for all staff to provide feedback.

As you have pointed out, the level of support across the University is both uneven and variable, and it is my hope that by the end of the current consultation process there will be a service delivery model that provides not only fair and consistent support to colleagues engaged in the core business of teaching and research activities, but also adds value in a host of other dimensions.

- 2) Considerable concern has been expressed that the SDC regroup will take away local knowledge and local culture from support staff and that Academic staff will be forced to fill this loss of corporate knowledge. In particular, in many parts of the University the position of a laboratory technician is particularly specialised. It is not a generic function and specific training and knowledge is necessary to perform that function. This includes the role of technicians who are involved in setting up laboratories for student teaching where specialist knowledge is both an efficiency AND a safety issue. Directing such staff from afar is likely to result in inefficiencies and the transfer of parts of that role onto Academic staff.

The value of corporate knowledge held by professional staff has not been underestimated; indeed this is one of the core reasons for undertaking the wider consultation at local levels. It is also, in part, why there is an attempt to understand activities, in detail, across a range of functions. A considerable amount of consultation is still being undertaken in order to finalise a design that delivers adequate support at the local level, with minimal disruption or dislocation wherever possible. In the case of role of technicians, these will continue to work at the local level, reporting to a Lead Technician, who will be responsible for safety and all technical roles within a particular faculty.

- 3) Specific disciplines have very specific needs from support staff. OHS needs are very discipline specific and will not be able to be filled by generic staff.

Discipline specific needs are being considered in the design of the model and specific discipline, and it is clear that OHS needs must be taken into consideration.

- 4) It is important that Schools have professional staff positions skilled in and devoted to strategy. For efficiency and effectiveness there must be support for the Heads of School to help develop and translate innovative ideas into strategies for the development of the Disciplines and Schools.

There has been recognition of the need for support for Heads of School. Deans, Heads of School and senior faculty staff have been involved in the work to date and the current consultation period does not exclude feedback from Heads of School. The role of the Head of School is being revisited and appropriate support is being built into the new role description.

- 5) In the UWAASA sponsored forum in early 2016, a member of professional staff stated that the variety of tasks she undertook in her school was part of her job satisfaction and that she felt a commitment to her school as well as to the University as a whole. She noted that she'd heard professional staff would be moved from Schools and the VC shook his head and stated that this was not the case. How will the current plan which visualizes faculties as entities off to the side of the bureaucratic network maintain the benefits of both Academic and Professional staff feeling mutual responsibility and accountability at the academic / management nexus?

The heads of the service delivery centres will report directly to each Dean and form part of the faculty leadership team. They will have responsibility for ensuring all the administrative teams within their Centre are providing the support required by the faculty and the support articulated in service level agreements is being provided from each central function.

- 6) Every centralisation so far has increased the level of paperwork and emails necessary to accomplish a given task (e.g. GRS, new teaching framework, centralisation of special considerations, risk management); how is this evidence of a more efficient management when applied to the requirement for rapid responses to day to day requirements?

The service delivery model will centralise some administrative support from the faculty to their newly established service delivery centre, with the remainder being devolved from the current centralised areas. The aim of the model is to bring this support closer to the faculty to facilitate a relationship between the providers of the support and the faculties. There is no intention to replicate existing centralised services but rather to dismantle and streamline the issues you have highlighted. A primary focus of the model design is to address the inefficiencies that currently exist.

- 7) It is well understood that face to face communication among actors who know each other is a cornerstone of effective communication. These social bonds will be minimised in the new centralised system. What mechanisms will be put into place to substitute for the missing "connection" factor?

It is not clear to me, nor demonstrated through your comments, that social bonds or face-to-face communication will be minimised through the development of the new service delivery model. Indeed, the very nature of work is constructed through social bonds and communication. While the proposed change will transform the way in which professional services are delivered across the University, working relationships between academics and professional staff will remain integral to the support provided across the University.

I would like to reassure you that measures will be set in place for 2017 to ensure the teaching and research support needs of the academic community and our students are met. It is critical that as the academic activities start with a new focus in January, and that the transition to the new service delivery model does not present impediments to your work as academics of this University.

I will be overseeing a number of measures to ensure the transition is championed throughout the year and swift responses are available wherever it becomes evident that adequate support is not being provided during the transition. I will elaborate on these measures over the coming months.

Finally, I would also like to explain that while the primary objective of the current proposal is to better support the academic mission, the design of the new model goes well beyond this objective. There are shortcomings in the current career opportunities for many of our professional staff that have been working in an environment of uncertainty for an unacceptable length of time, with unclear pathways to develop beyond their existing roles. There is inconsistency and inequity in the classification of roles across the University performing the same or very similar duties and an inability for the University to recognise, develop or exploit the talent of these staff. It is my ambition to rectify this situation to ensure that our professional staff have fulfilling and rewarding career trajectories with enhanced opportunity for mobility and progression within this institution.

I look forward to further engagement with you on these matters,

Best wishes



Dawn Freshwater
SDVC & Registrar