

NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2020

Just a quick update on a few items as we rapidly approach the start of semester. I hope that those of you who are teaching are managing to cope with the added complexities and workload posed by the COVID-19 situation.

Academic Staff Re-Profiling Project

You may have heard from the NTEU (or other sources) that, at a recent meeting between the SDVC and Heads of School, there was a discussion about a proposal for academic staff re-profiling based on staff : student ratios which specified the need for a reduction in current academic staff by 75 FTE—a proposal for staff reduction that follows only three years after the ‘Renewal’ restructuring program in 2016.

On the basis of this report, I contacted the COO Robert Webster, the SDVC Simon Biggs, and the DVCE David Sadler for clarification. I pointed out that, in the midst of the dynamic situation posed by COVID-19, which requires significant inputs of time, effort and good-will from both academic and professional staff across the University and which will, almost certainly, require many academics to teach beyond the Enterprise Agreement stipulations (which limit changes to workloads and prevents academics from being required to teach more than 26 weeks per year, unless negotiated in advance), rumours about ‘academic staff re-profiling’ are extremely damaging to staff morale and trust, and fundamentally counterproductive.

I was very pleased to receive a prompt reply from the SDVC who stated categorically that he has not developed “a university-wide programme of restructuring” to be “rolled out by the middle of the year.” In the interests of working together, I let him know that I was happy to reassure the Academic Staff Association membership the widespread reports of such a program are a straightforward misunderstanding. The detailed proposal presented to Heads of School—the *Re-Profiling of the Academic Workforce*—that stipulated a reduction in the academic workforce of around 75 FTE by mid-2020, on the basis of benchmarked School Staff: Student Ratios, and the clearly laid out implementation plan that allowed for creative application while requiring certainty of outcomes, was not a ‘university-wide program of restructuring’ but merely a way to ‘guide thinking and seek engagement about the way forwards’ for the University to ‘enable our 2025 Strategy’ and ‘achieve a sustainable financial position’. Glad we’ve cleared that up! (The email correspondence is appended below.)

In the email, the SDVC also noted that the University executive has developed a new approach to change management that they believe is more inclusive and transparent. This is excellent news, and I think I can safely say that we all look forward to seeing the change in approach in the future.

With respect to the COVID-19 situation, UWA ASA and the NTEU are receiving many reports from staff that some of the demands placed upon them to redesign units and rearrange teaching programs at very short notice are unreasonable and causing a significant measure of additional stress. Please contact the NTEU or the UWA ASA and let us know about your experiences.

Rainbow Flag

There has been some consternation about the removal of the rainbow Pride Flag from the fifth flagpole. The official explanation, which was provided in a recent Ally newsletter, is that the fifth

flagpole is a community flagpole to be used to publicise community events and etc. However, this seems to suggest a change to custom and practice as the Pride Flag has been flying at the front of campus for at least a couple of years. The summary removal of the flag, and then leaving the flagpole empty for months seems an odd thing to do. Also odd not to fly the Pride Flag during O-week. Clearly there are other community interest groups whose flags might fly there at relevant time of the year, for instance the trans pride flag on the day of trans visibility, or perhaps the Olympic flag during the Olympics etc, but absent any other directly competing community needs (i.e. an empty flagpole), the explanation given is not entirely satisfactory.

Change Program Director and Interim Vice Chancellor

You may have seen in this week's UWA Forward that Professor Jane den Hollander, who will commence as Interim Vice-Chancellor on 16 March, actually joined the University on Monday 17 February, in the newly created position of Change Program Director. Professor den Hollander's role is to review and assess the University's Transformation program, and to guide the University's response to the longer term risks and challenges associated with COVID-19. The UWA ASA is pleased to welcome Professor den Hollander to UWA.

New Vice Chancellor

Our incoming Vice Chancellor, Professor Amit Chakma has been on campus for the past few days. The UWA ASA wish to extend a very warm welcome to Professor Chakma and are pleased to let our members know that he has happily agreed to a meeting with the UWA ASA committee and members when he is next visiting. Details to be confirmed.

UWA Press

There has been an extended silence around the plans for the UWA Press since the DVCI announced in the last Academic Board meeting of 2019 that he was planning a facilitated workshop in early 2020 to determine a way forward. No formal announcement about the date, time, list of invitees and name of facilitator has been made, however there is some indication that the workshop may be in early March. We look forward to a formal announcement of the plans in the near future.

Parking

We all have heard rumours around the changes that will affect UWA parking. Although attempts to get clear information have been met with what seems like deliberate obfuscation, we know for sure that our permits for 2020 will expire in July, and rumours have it that UWA parking will go fully pay-as-you-go. We acknowledge there is a real and pressing environmental issue with the current widespread reliance on cars, and support initiatives designed to move UWA towards a more sustainable and environmentally responsible model of access and transport. However, there are strong concerns relating to the inequity of this change, which is bound to have a significant impact on the more vulnerable members of staff (especially those with caring duties). If, as it transpires, UWA parking is to be outsourced to Wilson, the university would lose any flexibility in arranging proportionate and equitable rates. Whatever the reality, this is yet another example of staggeringly poor and non-transparent management and communication.