

## **University Managers Group**

### **Renewal Proposal Feedback Submission**

#### **Overview**

The University Managers Group (UMG) requested feedback from University managers on the Renewal Proposal, with the intention of consolidating any feedback into a collective submission to the Renewal Project Steering Committee. The objective of this process is to provide a collective voice for UWA managers during organisational change, through providing a forum to share ideas and concerns with a group of their peers; feeding back then to the University Executive.

This submission is intended to express the consensus view of the UMG that change is needed at UWA, while expressing the ideas and concerns held by this group as to what these changes might be and the process being followed to implement them. The University Managers Group stands ready to be a *Champion of Change*, given that its ~250 members, operating at all levels of management across all facets of the University, have a collective vested interest in securing the University's success.

#### **Methodology**

Feedback was sought from UMG members via email and through open discussion at the UMG February Forum: *Shaping the Future*. The discussion forum was dedicated to the Renewal Proposal; the sharing of ideas and concerns relating to the Renewal Proposal with peers in a safe environment; and providing the opportunity to address members of the Renewal Project Steering Committee. This forum was facilitated by members of the UMG Committee. Attendees included ~32 managers representing multiple levels and areas of University management.

The majority of feedback came via email, with a significant portion in response to a draft submission circulated on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> March to UMG members for their consideration and contribution.

#### **Disclaimer**

Extensive feedback was received and, while the feedback provided in this document represents the views of many, it is important to acknowledge that not all members of the UMG necessarily agree with all views expressed in this document.

#### **Request for Response**

The UMG requests the opportunity for further discourse with the Renewal Project Steering Committee in relation to the themes and concerns raised in the following feedback submission.

## **Executive Summary**

The key themes evident from the feedback are:

- Impact and Morale
- Vision, Values and Culture
- Governance
- Proposed Structure and Approach

### **Impact and Morale**

There is a high degree of concern for staff morale, both in relation to the ongoing nature of organisational change over the past 12-18 months, and the adverse impact on individual workloads in areas that have undergone organisational change for the benefit of efficiency savings. There is growing concern that low staff morale is not being addressed by the University, and that this will inevitably have a negative impact on the change process and its outcomes.

### **Culture, Vision and Values**

Low staff morale is largely a function of the perceived lack of communication around vision, values and organisational culture. Managers are finding it difficult at times to unite their staff around an inspiring vision and to define the values and culture UWA is striving for, as this appears to be less of a focus for the Renewal Project at this time.

### **Governance**

There are perceptions that the proposed new structure is less inclusive and will reduce the representation and influence of those outside of the Executive.

### **Proposed Structure and Approach**

There is a particular interest in how the Renewal Proposal was developed and why this specific proposal has been put forward, as there are many unanswered questions concerning the rationale for this proposal and few insights into the evidence-based decision making that supports the proposed changes.

Given the conceptual nature of the proposal, and with so little context provided, it is difficult for University managers to offer any substantial recommendations in relation to both the positive or negative aspects of the changes proposed. The questions raised by managers demonstrate the passion and responsibility many feel towards ensuring the right changes are made in the right way.

## Feedback

The key themes evident from the feedback are:

1. Impact and Morale
2. Vision, Values and Culture
3. Governance
4. Proposed Structure and Approach

### 1. Impact and Morale

There is a high degree of concern for staff morale, both in relation to the ongoing nature of organisational change over the past 12-18 months, and the adverse impact on individual workloads in areas that have undergone organisational change for the benefit of efficiency savings. There is growing concern that low staff morale is not being addressed by the University, and that this will inevitably have a negative impact on the change process and its outcomes. The following feedback addresses these concerns:

- 1.1 “The broad case for change is largely understood and accepted by some, perhaps most, staff. The challenge is that many staff are struggling to maintain faith in the change process and leadership. The lightweight renewal Proposal does little to restore confidence in either”.
- 1.2 “The perfunctory consultation period only contributes to the impression that there is no real commitment to consultation. A loss of faith in consultation is something borne out by impressions that the earlier functional review was abandoned part way through the process with the full findings and recommendations never released to participants for discussion or action”.
- 1.3 “Following the proposed 300 redundancies, I am concerned for the remaining staff and their workloads – for example we have already experienced a negative impact on efficiency and service quality following a reduction of staff in Legal Services”.
- 1.4 “There has been a huge impact on staff morale, especially in those areas where they have undergone organisational change in the past 12 months – some more than once. It would be good to start a dialogue on how to address this going forward”.
- 1.5 “There is concern that, without proper IT support (hardware and software), ‘true’ efficiencies cannot be gained; as well as with existing Financial Services processes, requirements can also lead to reduced efficiencies while trying to adhere to all regulatory requirements. Since the IT and Financial Services still have 1 – 3 years to improve on process ‘efficiencies’, there is potential for many areas with reduced staff to be ‘overworked’, cut corners and be susceptible to inefficiencies for the next year or so due to the redundancies”.

## 2. Culture, Vision and Values

Low staff morale is largely a function of the perceived lack of communication around vision, values and organisational culture. Managers are finding it difficult at times to unite their staff around an inspiring vision and to define the values and culture UWA is striving for, as this appears to be less of a focus for the Renewal Project at this time. The following feedback relates to this perceived lack of clarity around culture, vision and values:

- 2.1 “Managers have expressed concerns shared by their teams in relation to the conceptual nature of the proposal (lack of detail about sub-structures), the lack of strategic direction/vision evident in the plan (to what purpose, other than cost cutting?), and the seeming randomness of the proposed structure. The proposed process does not help define what sort of culture we want and how the approach will achieve it”.
- 2.2 “The scale of the changes being proposed represents a great opportunity to transform UWA, but the unseemly haste with which the proposals are being pursued will likely leave UWA dealing with unanticipated consequences for years to come”.
- 2.3 “The explicit goal of the proposal is to improve UWA’s financial position through a number of actions, including staff cuts. However, it appears little effort has been invested in creating a vision of the university that this will allow us to create”.
- 2.4 “What will UWA’s organisational culture be at the end of this process? What are we striving for? What are our values? We need to establish a sense of what it *feels* like to work at UWA. We need to establish a clear vision around what we are striving for and who we are striving to be as an organisation, and link this back to our strategic goals. As it stands, it difficult to get excited about a future here at UWA and to inspire my team to get excited. I would like to see more leadership from Executive and Senior Leaders around communicating a new vision, one that goes beyond the words ‘service culture’ and ‘financial sustainability’”.
- 2.5 “As well as Legal Services being affected by cut backs, I also see this in HR, Financial Services and Faculty Management as well. The hard work of the remaining individuals in those areas is the only thing that is keeping them operative. There will be a future, in the not too distant, when those areas will disappear and all of the specialist services will be devolved to the School or Centre. The impact of that will be a decrease in high level management work being undertaken and more procedural tasks. That is fine if you do not want initiative, creativity and power thinking. In my opinion important elements required in a University culture. It also requires a sophisticated support system and a sound, smooth, simple governance approach that we do not appear to have yet”.

## 3. Governance

There are perceptions that the proposed new structure feels less inclusive and will reduce the representation and influence of those outside of the Executive. The following feedback relates to these concerns:

- 3.1 “A less obvious goal of the proposals, but one with arguably more profound impact, is a reduction in faculty representation on key governing bodies consolidating authority in the university executive. While the state government pursues legislation to reduce elected

representation at Senate, the academic restructure proposal will more than halve the representation of faculties on extended executive (and presumably Planning and Resources Committee, too)".

- 3.2 "If implemented as described, UWA is on the cusp of a major change in the balance of power of key committees; shifting control from faculties to the executive. What can be gleaned of the three change proposals suggests a more profound impact on the university than New Courses or the previous academic restructure from 11 to 9 faculties. Yet, removing repeated background information, contact information, and broad timelines from the document, there is little more than 3-4 pages outlining each 'proposal'".
- 3.3 "The proposed changes in large part state and restate ideas or principles (not proposals) with no clear rationale for how these particular proposals will address the issues better than any other proposal – including not making any changes at all".
- 3.4 "The proposed new structure, with fewer faculties and centralised services, alongside the proposed removal of key positions from Senate, lends itself to a power shift that could see key decisions being made by fewer people, further from the coalface. I have concerns about the flexibility in this new structure as one size does not necessarily fit all – we need to ensure we are maintaining representation and improving administration functions, not just being more 'efficient' at the cost of effectiveness".
- 3.5 "Financial delegations need to be reviewed as a fundamental efficiency saving".

#### **4. Proposed Structure and Approach (including Design Phase)**

There is a particular interest in how the Renewal Proposal was developed and why this specific proposal has been put forward, as there are many unanswered questions concerning the rationale for this proposal and few insights into the evidence-based decision making that supports the proposed changes.

Given the conceptual nature of the proposal, and with so little context provided, it is difficult for University managers to offer any substantial recommendations in relation to both the positive or negative aspects of the changes proposed. The questions raised by managers demonstrate the passion and responsibility many feel towards ensuring the right changes are made in the right way.

A number of questions have been raised in relation to the proposed 4-college structure, including:

- 4.1 "Why four colleges?"
- 4.2 "Why are all four 'science' colleges?"
- 4.3 "Should these colleges align with UWA's undergraduate four degree structure? Why don't they align with headlining postgraduate courses?"
- 4.4 "Is there evidence that this particular arrangement will work better than any other?"

As well as the proposed structure, a number of questions have been raised in relation to the approach being taken to the proposed changes, including:

- 4.5 “Is it necessary to push through a four college academic structure before there is any process or plan in place to design and decide how existing “substructures” may or may not accommodate the change?”
- 4.6 “What attention has been paid to the brand and reputational impacts of sharing a proposal that doesn’t account for how areas associated with headlining professional degrees will be represented? Architecture, Business, Law, Music...?”
- 4.7 “The opportunity presented by the scale and breadth of the three change proposals warrants a substantially more detailed plan than that provided to date. It would be encouraging to see the modelling that supports the proposal to change to four colleges as well as providing the rationale for the naming of the colleges”.

Suggestions and considerations put forward regarding structure and approach are as follows:

- 4.8 “Why not do away with faculties and colleges entirely and place all centres and institutes within consolidated schools and have a flatter academic structure”.
- 4.9 “We should consider a phased approach whereby faculty consolidation is undertaken as Phase One, followed by a review of what (if any) further cuts are required following the outcome of Phase One”.
- 4.10 “Given the concerns of many regarding the lack of detail or rationale for the particular changes proposed, and the degree of concern expressed by UMG members for the impact on the University and on staff morale, I suggest the following counter proposal is offered for consideration:
  - a) modelling of the proposed and alternative structures is undertaken and made available for consideration and;
  - b) a rationale for the naming of proposed colleges together with details of “substructures” to School and Discipline level is made available for consideration
  - c) The proposal to create Service Delivery Centres should be deferred for similar reasons until a model for the academic restructure has been defined
- 4.11 “Consideration must be given to the transfer of corporate knowledge and organisational learning when jobs are being cut. Retaining local/area specific knowledge in a centralised Service Delivery Centre Model is a primary concern”.
- 4.12 “Similarly, when merging Faculties and Central administrative functions, it is important to be aware of selection bias when selecting staff to undertake a reduced number of roles in the new structure. Allowing larger or more dominant faculties to influence staff appointments could lead to the loss of excellent staff from smaller, less influential, but equally capable areas of the University as this encourages the breadth of knowledge and the diversity required to deliver effectively at a local level”.
- 4.13 “Consider easing job cuts until the new IT structures are implemented. This would allow remaining staff trying to operate with “work-arounds” to manage their workload in the near term and not be overwhelmed with more work using old systems”.

- 4.14 “The Implementation and Indicative Timeline in the proposal shows business process re-engineering commencing in March, ahead of the design of the Service Delivery Centres, the Central Units and the development of Position Descriptions. There is a potential risk in re-engineering processes *before* the new processes are designed as part of the Design Phase and the Position Descriptions are built (showing roles, accountability etc)”.
- 4.15 “Significantly more time must be dedicated to getting input into the design phase. The Renewal Project is a major design undertaking by anyone’s standards, and it is critical we get it right “upstream” rather than rush and have to spend time and money fixing mistakes and oversights later. Undoubtedly there will be a need for continuous improvement, however to deliver cost and efficiency savings promptly, it would be prudent to have input from experienced staff (not necessarily the most senior) in the design phase”.
- 4.16 “The approach being taken by the Executive and Renewal Project team feels more focused on controlling the process rather than a genuine concern for people. I am sure this is not the intention of those leading the project; however this message is consistently reinforced when unrealistic deadlines are set, when timelines are rushed, when difficult questions are responded to defensively or aggressively, and when information is withheld that would help provide context and build trust in the process. There seems to be an expectation that staff will unquestionably trust the project’s leadership and the change process – is this a realistic expectation of any organisation?”

I encourage the Renewal Project team and the Executive to model the behaviour they want to see; through transparency of actions and information, and by demonstrating patience and care when leading people through change. This can be done by setting realistic timelines that focus on the time and effort that is *actually* required to design a new way of operating and allow people to move through each change phase”.