

The 2025 Agenda – Achieving our vision

Discussion Paper: Proposal for a new College structure

Professor Colin Stirling
President and Vice-Chancellor
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Summary

This Discussion Paper proposes a new structure to replace the existing two-tiered structure of *Faculties* and *Schools* to a single tier of *Colleges* at Flinders University. It provides background, principles for the development of a new structure and an outline of a proposed new College structure.

The proposed structure is intended to better enable the University to achieve the ambitious vision set out in *Making a Difference – The 2025 Agenda*. More specifically, the re-organisation would aim to:

- Reduce bureaucracy and management layers
- Improve the strategic alignment of our academic activities by putting academic leaders at the heart of University decision-making
- Increase academic synergies that encourage inter- and cross-disciplinary education and research
- Enable improved professional support services to academic staff and students, and
- Increase operational agility, delivering services that support and enable the delivery of high quality research and education.

This paper seeks feedback from staff and students on this proposal.

Background

The higher education sector is facing a series of unprecedented global and national challenges. Technology is changing the way that education can be accessed, with major international universities now competing in the digital sphere as never before. We are also seeing the rise of private education providers offering educational products and services on a for-profit basis. At a national level, there is uncertainty as to the effect and timing of changes to the funding mechanisms for higher education being proposed by the Government. However, a 20% cut in Commonwealth funding remains government policy alongside changes to existing student fee structures that would be expected to create a more competitive domestic market for higher education than has existed to date.

The University is no stranger to such pressures. Late last year I informed colleagues that actions were necessary to address a substantial budget deficit. We have made excellent progress towards our 2016 budget target and I would like to thank all staff who have contributed to this effort. There is still work to be done but we are on track to achieve the financial sustainability required to navigate the challenges ahead. Achieving our 2025 Vision requires that we maximise every opportunity to improve our collective performance in order to take Flinders University to the top 1% in the world.

I have consulted widely with staff and students and been struck by three consistent themes underpinning their feedback. The first is one of a deep commitment to Flinders University that speaks volumes for our institution and the role we play in our society. The second theme is a shared ambition for the future of Flinders that I believe has been captured in our new Strategic Plan: *Making a Difference - The 2025 Agenda*. However, the third speaks of frustration with the systems, policies and processes that have accumulated over time and that too often get in the way of achieving our academic mission.

The Professional Services Project (PSP) has gone on to undertake further in-depth consultations to identify pain-points in our systems and processes. The tone and tenor of the feedback has again been unequivocal: staff and students alike describing our processes as excessively bureaucratic and hierarchical.

Instead of spending time on low value administrative processes, we ought to strive to ensure that our structures and processes serve to enable all staff to contribute towards our strategic vision; academic staff should be free to deliver the highest quality teaching and research, professional staff should provide services that enable and enhance our academic activities, while students deserve seamless access to the best quality education and support that inspires and encourages achievement.

Having reviewed the feedback from the PSP, and considering the rapidly changing higher education environment, it is time to reflect on whether our current academic structure is optimal for the next stage in our history.

I am therefore proposing that we consolidate and simplify our academic structures.

Concept

Flinders University is currently organised into two academic layers, Faculties and Schools, supported by a central administrative layer of Portfolios. This Discussion Paper outlines a concept that would compress these layers from three to two.

Faculties and Schools would be condensed into a single layer of 'Colleges' that would be home to our academic activities. The second layer would provide core support services and meet the legal/regulatory requirements the institution has as an employer, a recipient of Commonwealth financial support and as a regulated entity. Improved integration of professional support between delivery of the core services and the support of academics and students will be the ongoing focus of the PSP.

Condensing Faculties and Schools into a single layer of Colleges could simplify our academic administrative structure. Further, the amalgamation of fourteen Schools into six Colleges could create potential benefits by encouraging interdisciplinary collaborations in teaching and research. These larger academic units might also be expected to be capable of creating more strategic investment opportunities, given consolidation of budget resources.

Decision-making authority would be delegated to the head of College whose title would be *Vice-President and Dean*, reflecting both the direct role to be played in leadership of the College plus the strategic role to be played at the whole-of-university level. The *Vice-President and Dean* would be a member of the University Senior Executive Team and would be expected to lead the College with an appropriate management team structure.

The new Colleges would be created through an integration of areas that have an underlying academic coherence or complementarity with potential synergies in both education and research.

The development of Colleges around academic synergies offers opportunities for our outstanding teaching innovators to identify and share teaching materials and curriculum innovations with fellow academics in related disciplines. This has the potential to improve the educational experience for our students while reducing academic staff teaching/administrative workloads. In so doing, we would be able to provide more time to individual staff for research, curriculum development or student learning, thus enhancing our collective academic performance. The creation of larger academic units might also be expected to further benefit research through enhanced opportunities for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches in tackling complex research questions.

Principles for the development of a College structure

1. Colleges would have an academic coherence and/or complementarity that binds them. In this context it is suggested that Colleges be based on groupings that share a level of disciplinary or practice-based commonality in education and/or research.
2. Colleges would be of sufficient size to achieve critical mass and financial sustainability with adequate resources to make strategic investments and to buffer against fluctuations in demand for specific courses.
3. The College head would be responsible for leadership of academic activities in the College and also be a member of the University Senior Executive. This will reduce management layers in the University, increase representation of academic activities on the senior executive and thereby enhance communications and strategic alignment throughout the organisation.
4. The support structure and policy framework in which the Colleges would operate would be simplified to enable staff and students to focus on the activities that will achieve The 2025 Agenda.
5. Each College would have appropriate goals and objectives that contribute to and align with the University's strategic vision. These goals and objectives will be different for different Colleges in acknowledgement that each will contribute to the University's strategic goals in ways that consider their strengths and relative opportunities.
6. Colleges would operate in an environment that commits to interdisciplinary and cross-college collaboration in both teaching and research.
7. The College funding model would support the University's strategic priorities; most notably it would provide transparent and meaningful support for research excellence.
8. Cross-College collaborations in teaching and research would be facilitated through consistent and transparent administrative processes and an enabling budget model.

A six College model

On the basis of the principles outlined above a specific proposal is attached (Figure 1) for a model in which our four Faculties and 14 Schools are consolidated into six academic Colleges:

- College of Arts and Humanities;
- College of Business, Law and Government;
- College of Medicine;
- College of Nursing and Health Sciences;
- College of the Professions; and
- College of Science and Engineering.

Figure 1 illustrates how our existing Schools and academic areas could map across to a six College model. The Colleges presented in Figure 1 would have the critical mass to be financially sustainable and would be consistent with the principles identified above. Other constellations of disciplines might meet the principles to varying degrees. It is important to emphasise that no single constellation might be perfect but one may prove optimal and therefore preferable. I am actively seeking advice from colleagues to ensure that we achieve that optimal outcome.

Internal organisation

Each College would be led by a *Vice-President and Dean* with support from senior academics with key responsibilities for leading the College's strategic direction and for the delivery of key performance outcomes. An example of such an internal structure is indicated in Figure 2 where the *Vice-President and Dean* would be supported by a Deputy Dean and three Associate Deans.

It would be expected that academic staff in each College would be organised into a number of coherent "Research Themes" and "Teaching Programs" as determined by the *Vice-President and Dean* in consultation with staff.

Academic staff in balanced roles would contribute to at least one research theme and at least one Teaching Program. New Teaching Specialist academics would contribute to one or more Teaching Programs, while academics appointed in research-only roles would contribute to one or more Research Theme(s).

Each grouping would have a Theme or Program Lead who would represent the group at a College level and would work with the Associate Deans to further the College and University strategy. In the case of teaching, the programs would be led by a Program Director. The number of Research Themes and Teaching Programs would likely vary between Colleges and would depend on the research and teaching breadth of each.

The academic activities of Research Themes and Teaching Programs would require the support of professional staff. If a decision is made to progress towards a College structure then the PSP proposal for professional services would be configured to support the new structure and be the subject of a separate consideration and consultation process.

For discussion

Your views are sought on any aspect of this proposal but I would especially encourage you to provide feedback on the following issues:

1. Should Flinders move towards an academic structure with a single tier?
What are your concerns? What are the potential benefits?
2. Do the Principles capture what we need for our academic units?
What is missing? What is not needed?
3. Is "College" an appropriate title or would "School" be more appropriate?
4. Does the number of Colleges (6) seem right and are the suggested names appropriate?
5. Do the groupings of disciplines in the suggested Colleges align with the Principles?
Is there another constellation that might provide greater benefit?
6. Will the indicative College structure with a head called a Vice-President and Dean, supported by a Deputy Dean and three Associate Deans meet the needs of the College and support the strategic goals of the College and University?

You can have your say by participating in one of the forums being conducted across the University during the next three weeks. Details of these forums are available on the website where you may also post written comments on the proposal. A dedicated email address is also available (2025@flinders.edu.au).

Next Steps

Feedback on this Discussion Paper through the forums and written comments will be considered by the Vice-Chancellor. The outcome of this discussion on whether to progress with further consultation on a changed structure or to retain the existing structure will be communicated by the Vice-Chancellor no later than the end of September.

Proposal for a new College structure showing mapping of existing academic areas

COLLEGE OF MEDICINE 250 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$43M Research: \$26M	COLLEGE OF NURSING AND HEALTH SCIENCES 270 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$78M Research: \$13M	COLLEGE OF SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING 220 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$59M Research: \$21M	COLLEGE OF THE PROFESSIONS 130 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$53M Research: \$4M	COLLEGE OF BUSINESS, LAW AND GOVERNMENT 100 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$36M Research: \$2M	COLLEGE OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES 110 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$33M Research: \$4M
Paramedicine Medical Course Medical Science Other (incl service teaching) 250 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$43M Research: \$26M	Nursing 140 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$39M Research: \$2M	Computer Science and Engineering 70 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$22M Research: \$4M	Education 80 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$31M Research: \$1M	Law 40 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$13M Research: <\$1M	Humanities and Creative Arts 80 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$23M Research: \$2M
	Health Sciences 130 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$39M Research: \$12M	Biological Sciences 60 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$17M Research: \$8M	Psychology 30 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$10M Research: \$2M	Business School 40 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$15M Research: <\$1M	History and International Relations <10 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$7M Research \$1M
		Environment 40 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$9M Research: \$5M	Social Work 20 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$12M Research: <\$1M	Tourism <10 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$1M Research: <\$1M	Sociology 10 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$2M Research <\$1M
		Chemical and Physical Sciences 40 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$10M Research: \$4M		Health Care Management <10 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: <\$1M Research: <\$1M	Women's Studies <10 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$1M Research: <\$1M
		Medical Biotechnology <10 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$1M Research: <\$1M		Public Administration, Public Policy and Politics 10 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$5M Research: <\$1M	
				Education Leadership and Management <10 Academic Staff FTE Teaching: \$2M Research: <\$1M	

2015 Data: Academic staff FTE to nearest 10, teaching and research revenue to nearest \$M.

FIGURE 1. PROPOSAL FOR NEW COLLEGE STRUCTURE

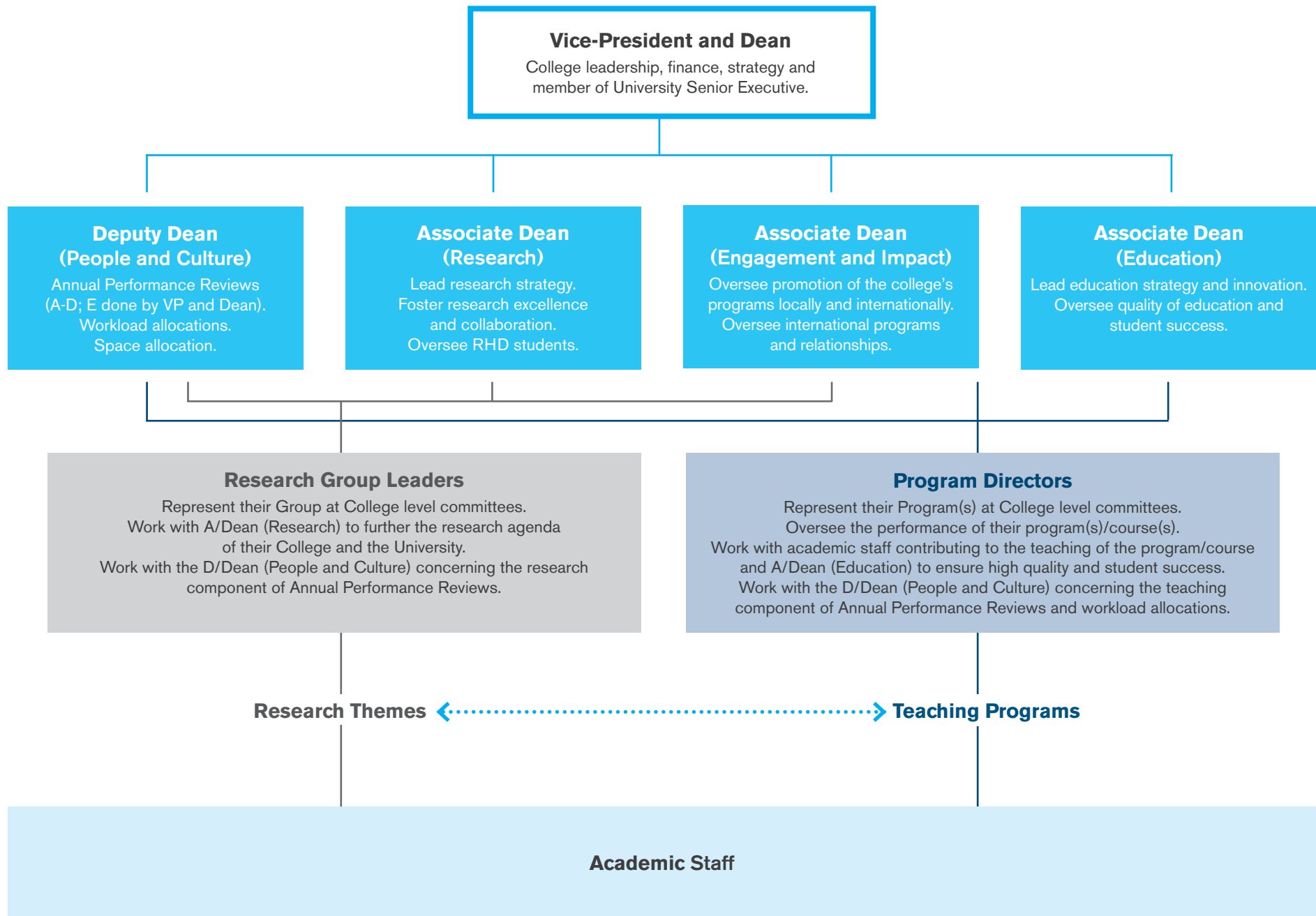


FIGURE 2. PROPOSAL FOR INTERNAL COLLEGE STRUCTURE