



The 2025 Agenda – Achieving our vision

Discussion Paper: Proposal for a new support services model

The 2025 Agenda – Achieving our vision

Discussion Paper: Proposal for a new support services model

1 Foreword by the Vice-Chancellor

The discussion paper that I released in August on a new ‘College’ structure has been the subject of extensive and thoughtful feedback and I would like to thank everyone who has contributed thus far.

The feedback included detailed comments on the two core themes in the proposal, firstly, the condensation of existing Faculty and School structures into a single administrative layer and, secondly, the amalgamation of disciplines from our current 14 Schools into six larger ‘Colleges’.

Having carefully reviewed the feedback I am satisfied that there is a widespread appetite for transformational change in the way we do things here at Flinders. I am also convinced that there is a broad understanding of the potential benefits of condensing our academic structures into a single layer.

However, before a decision to initiate any formal consultation process on the academic structure, it is appropriate to now consider in more detail how professional staff support might be organised in the future. The enclosed discussion paper from Stuart Mossman, Interim Vice-President, Corporate Services is based on extensive consultations, discussions with staff, and other work undertaken by the Professional Services Project (PSP), and introduces the outline of a support service model that would be consistent with a simplified structure.

I ask you to consider this paper and invite you to provide feedback on the ideas presented.

On the second major question, that of the proposed amalgamation of disciplines, the feedback thus far has raised a number of questions and concerns that need to be considered. To that end, I would like to extend the discussion on academic structures to identify the optimal constellations that would realise the maximum benefits for our staff and students.

This second phase of the discussion on College constellations has already begun with a series of school visits underway and a Senior Leaders Forum that was held last week. The key themes for this continuing discussion include the identification of opportunities for synergistic relationships across disciplines that will create significant opportunities in both teaching and research.

I shall shortly be writing to staff seeking further specific feedback on these opportunities. I urge you to discuss the issues freely with colleagues, both within and between disciplines, to explore the opportunities that you see for future synergies in education and research.

Other feedback

The feedback on the College discussion paper also included constructive comments on a wide range of other issues including the use of the title “College”, the role of disciplinary leads (in particular those responsible for professionally accredited programs), and the proposed titles of specific Colleges. The feedback on these issues has been immensely valuable and will be duly considered should the discussion progress towards a formal change and implementation proposal.

Next Steps

Your feedback on this professional support services discussion paper will be considered in parallel with further feedback on the specific opportunities for education and research synergies between disciplines as well as feedback already received on the College discussion paper in coming weeks.

I am mindful of the need for staff to have clarity on our future structure. It is my intention to make a decision on whether to progress towards a formal proposal by the beginning of November.

Professor Colin Stirling
President and Vice-Chancellor

2 Introduction

In early 2016 the Professional Services Project (PSP) team sought the views of students and staff on their professional support needs and ways to improve systems and processes in support of our core academic activities in education and research. The feedback has identified the need for significant process improvement and an appetite amongst staff for a change in the way we deliver professional support services.

In August the Vice-Chancellor released a discussion paper introducing the concept of a new academic organisational structure to condense and reorganise academic structures into fewer and larger groups (named 'Colleges' in the paper). The PSP team was asked to consider the implications of this concept on the provision of support services.

This discussion paper proposes a new support service model that would better integrate our support services across the University and provide a high level of dedicated support for educational and research activities in the proposed College structure.

Analysis of the number of support staff at Flinders University, the needs of staff and students in academic units, and the experience of similarly sized organisations indicates that, ideally, professional staff groups would support a group of academic disciplines with 130 to 250 academic staff and associated students.

Ensuring the proposed new model enables the delivery of our strategic objectives is of paramount importance. The model must reflect our values and create a shared sense of purpose. It must promote the agile, enterprising and accountable service culture required to deliver our 2025 strategic agenda.

This paper seeks feedback from you – the University's staff, students and stakeholders – on the proposed model. Your contribution will inform any future change proposal and other PSP work. The final structure will be determined after your feedback has been considered and once a decision is made regarding the academic structure of the University.

3 Background

Significant forces of change are reshaping the higher education sector in Australia and globally. In response, Flinders University has developed an ambitious strategic plan, *Making a Difference – The 2025 Agenda*. It sets out a vision for Flinders to be internationally recognised as a world leader in research, an innovator in contemporary education and the source of Australia's most enterprising graduates. That includes an aspiration to be a top 10 Australian university and in the top 1% of universities around the world.

Achieving our vision requires us to focus on the four pillars of our plan: *People and Culture, Research, Education, and Engagement and Impact*. *People and Culture* come first, as they are the key to our success. That means ensuring our structures, processes and behaviours support student and staff success.

The PSP consultation earlier this year revealed frustration with our policies, processes, systems and layers of bureaucracy. These are having a negative impact on our people and our culture, and hence on the University's ability to achieve our vision.

The consultation showed that our current support services model is weighed down by hierarchy, inefficiency and a culture that does not adequately encourage trust in decision making. Particular frustration was expressed about the number of organisational layers and silos to be navigated when seeking support services, together with inconsistencies between areas and inadequate focus on the importance of customer service.

The feedback makes clear that staff and students want personable, flexible and effective support services that can be accessed directly through a choice of locations and channels.

In designing the proposed model, the PSP team took an evidence-based approach, which included the broad consultation that occurred earlier this year with students and staff from all campus locations, a review of University values consultation outcomes, analysis of benchmark data and sector trends, and market insights from other industries.

There is a strong view within the Flinders' community that our support services model needs to be fundamentally transformed rather than incrementally improved.

4 Objectives

The support services model outlined in this paper is designed to meet the following objectives:

- To provide high quality and streamlined support services that are easy to navigate, consistent, responsive and personable;
- To provide local understanding, capacity and capability that is integrated with portfolio services;
- To empower staff to make timely decisions at a local level;
- To reduce the administration burden on students and staff, freeing up time to focus on education, research and other strategic priorities;
- To enhance career and development opportunities, and improve support for professional staff;
- To establish a streamlined professional services structure that can better meet the varying demands across the University throughout the academic year.

5 Proposed Support Services Model

It is fundamentally important that our professional staff are brought together and organised in such a way to provide highly integrated, high quality and consistent support services across the University. Quick and effective resolution of queries would free up staff and students to focus on their academic objectives.

The proposed consolidation and reorganisation of professional staff into fewer but larger groups is intended to merge local and discipline-specific knowledge and relationships with functional expertise, standardised processes, peer networks, and the benefits of economies of scale.

The model outlined in this discussion paper proposes the establishment of **Service Teams** aligned and co-located with Colleges and integrated with Portfolios.

Service Teams would have the necessary capability and capacity to deliver the range of support services required by the College it serves. Service requests that cannot be resolved at first contact would be case-managed to resolution in liaison with other Service Team and/or portfolio staff members as necessary.

College Service Teams

It is proposed that a Service Team would comprise existing school, faculty and portfolio roles brought together to provide services such as administration support, student support, teaching support, research support, finance, IT, and HR. Services would be delivered through two broad groups of collaborative and connected professional staff within each Service Team: **Service Specialists** who would provide a broad range of support services to students and staff; and **Functional Specialists** who would provide more specialised and complex services such as expert academic matters, HR, finance or IT support.

Each service team would have a **Service Team Manager** who would be accountable for the provision and ongoing improvement of high-quality, consistent support services to the group of academic staff, students or portfolio staff with which they are aligned.

The size and composition of each Service Team would vary according to the specific needs of the College it serves. Service Teams should be small enough to understand the local needs of students, staff and external stakeholders, but large enough to ensure they have the necessary capacity, agility, and functional expertise to deliver services. Of critical importance is the 'one-team' culture and operation that would be established both within each Service Team and between different Teams to better facilitate staff working together to meet peaks in demand for services.

Flinders Connect

Flinders Connect was recently established in parallel with the Student Hub and Plaza redevelopment project based, in part, on student consultation. Under the proposal in this discussion paper, Flinders Connect would remain but be enhanced and extended to become a centrally-located Service Team. Flinders Connect would also integrate with student/academic specialists located within College Service Teams to provide the full range of student services, from general enquiries to specialised local issues. From the student perspective, their issues would be resolved by whichever Service Team they first engaged with who will then case-manage their inquiry.

Students may access services face-to-face by visiting their College Service Team or Flinders Connect, depending on the needs of the student at that point in time.

Like the College Service Teams, Flinders Connect would expand on the range of services currently offered and have a team of service and functional specialists and would case-manage service requests that cannot be resolved at first contact. The skills present in each location would be adjusted throughout the year to match the changes in student demand that are expected as the academic year progresses.

Service Team for Portfolios

The staff located in central portfolios would also require support from service and functional specialists, again under the leadership of a service team manager. This Service Team would comprise service and functional specialists to support the portfolios in delivering their services to the Colleges and College service teams.

Accountabilities of Service Teams

To effectively integrate our support service staff, members of the Service Teams would be accountable to the academic and student groups they support, and to their portfolios.

The College leadership team would determine the operational priorities of the Service Team. The Portfolios would work closely with Colleges to set the overarching policy framework and support systems to deliver College priorities. The Portfolios would also provide Service Team members with professional and career development, access to peer support, and maintenance of specialist expertise and knowledge.

The Manager of a Service team would report to a new university-wide role with overall responsibility for the delivery and quality of support services.

Service Specialists would report to the Manager of the Service Team.

Functional Specialists would be accountable to the Services Team Manager for operational priorities and report to their functional area (such as Student Services, Research Services, IT, Finance, HR) to ensure the provision of consistent high quality portfolio-based services across the University.

The key premise is to bring together our school, faculty and portfolio staff so that they operate as part of an academic, student or portfolio team.

6 Role of our Portfolios in the Proposed Model

The portfolios are the professional services groups reporting to the Vice-Chancellor. These are currently the portfolios of the DVC (Academic), DVC (Research), DVC (Students), PVC (International), VP Corporate Services, and the portfolio of the Vice-Chancellor including the Office of Communications and Engagement.

As part of this new model, how Portfolios operate to deliver improved support services that are seamless to our staff and students would be different and will necessitate a change to existing structures and operations.

Portfolio staff would engage with academic and student groups to better understand their needs and then partner with Service Teams to deliver high-quality, integrated and flexible support. This would result in some Portfolio staff integrating with College Teams, to enable efficient and effective service delivery.

Portfolios would also continue to be responsible for university-wide operations and strategy.

7 Support Services Transformation

In addition to the formation of integrated professional support teams there will be a need for improvements to our policies, processes, delegations, technology and information management. Work on these critical elements of our support services delivery model is already underway and proceeding as a matter of priority.

Improving how staff, students, and other stakeholders access services in the new model depends on:

- enhancing the accessibility of face-to-face, web, mobile, online chat, self-service, and phone services;
- providing mechanisms for resolving queries at first contact and, where this is not possible, to be seamlessly case managed to resolution;
- enabling access to services at any service team location, while retaining a primary point of service.

8 Considerations for Existing Professional Staff

In developing a model of this kind for the future delivery of support services, there are likely to be a number of changes to the ways in which many of us, as members of the professional staff of the University, may be required to operate. The model would require the creation of some new positions that will be different to anything we have in our current structure. Other roles, duties and responsibilities will continue to develop over time as we transition towards the new service model and improved service culture.

Most likely changes as a result of the proposed support services model

The adoption of the model outlined in this paper may result in a number of professional staff experiencing a change in reporting lines or change to position titles, all of which will need to be carefully considered and planned in order to achieve the objectives outlined above. Changes to reporting lines, work team associations and day to day responsibilities may also necessitate modifications to a number of existing professional staff position descriptions.

If the proposed model were adopted, some new roles would be created, which will bring new opportunities for staff. It is possible however that some positions within our existing professional services structures will no longer be required. Where this occurs, the University will follow a robust and transparent process based on its industrial obligations to existing staff.

Whatever composition the University takes forward in terms of its academic organisational structure, the University's overall expectation is that professional staff located in the current Schools, Faculties and Portfolios will continue to make significant and meaningful contributions within the support services model outlined in this paper. While accountabilities and reporting lines will in many instances have to be modified to suit the proposed Service Team structure, it is anticipated that a large number of existing positions will be minimally affected.

Our people are extremely important to us and the University is committed to retaining as much of our current professional staff talent pool as possible. A number of professional staff positions will need to be transitioned into any new structure and to this end the University will again be guided by fair, transparent and industrially sound principles.

Some categories of professional staff that currently report to academic staff, such as research assistants and lab staff, could retain their current reporting lines rather than operate as part of the services team.

It should also be noted that further and more detailed information about any actual changes, impacts and change processes will necessarily be associated with any formal change proposal and implementation plans that follow.

Physical Locations of Services Teams

The service team concept aims to bring the delivery of professional support services as close as possible to the people for whom the services are being provided, however space considerations across the University could affect the extent to which this will be possible in some areas.

Remote and Regional Centres

The principles of this proposed model will be applied where possible to our remote and regional centres. However, further consideration of local requirements will need to be made before proposing any changes.

9 Have Your Say

The primary objective of this proposal to integrate services teams and portfolios is to deliver high-quality and sustainable professional services that better support and enable our academic endeavours.

Your views are sought on the proposed support services model along with feedback on the issues you regard as important for the University to include in its consideration as it endeavours to better integrate service delivery.

Subject to this feedback, further work will be undertaken to determine the optimal organisation structure that may be proposed for the University, including how our industrial obligations are met in considering any proposal for change.

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 FLO where you may also post written comments on the proposal. A dedicated email address is also available (2025@flinders.edu.au).

Your feedback will be considered by the PSP team and presented to the Vice-Chancellor with a recommended way forward. The outcome of this discussion process will be communicated by early November.