A Cluster Model for GSSSP

Background Paper

11 October 2009

David Hayward

Purpose

The School Executive has agreed to oversee a transition to a cluster model within the School, effective from 2010. The clusters will involve groupings of disciplines and research centres that reflect the high impact areas identified by the University as its strengths. This Paper proposes terms of reference, a PD for the Cluster Leader, and particular configurations of clusters for consideration by the Cluster Working Party.

Rationale and Proposed terms of reference for Clusters

There are 3 broad arguments underpinning the move to a cluster model:

1. Management structures and the School

GSSSP is a very big School by any standards. It is also complex in that it has a substantial teaching presence that goes from VET certificates to coursework masters and PhDs and a research contribution that is underpinned by more than $3m of external research income. While some important changes have happened over the last few months, the management structure of the School is in need of further improvement in these areas:

- The Dean's role needs to have fewer direct reports;
- Levels of management accountability and responsibility are not well-developed; and
- There need to be fewer key management positions within the School and these need to be well-resourced and adequately supported (including staff development).

It is important to note that there is one other School within the College that is slightly larger than GSSSP. This is the new School of Media and Communications. While it is larger, it is not nearly as complex, for it has very little research and few VET programs to speak of. It has been established using the Cluster model similar to the one proposed here.

2. Teaching and research effort need to be better aligned and more tightly integrated

The School has 3 existing research centres, which have no direct or well-developed links with the teaching disciplines. There are many fine researchers in the disciplines doing work that could add value to the Centres and the Centres in turn could provide a robust basis for more research from the disciplines if stronger ties existed between them.
3. The need to be more strategic

The University has identified a number of areas in which it believes it has a competitive advantage. There is still work to be done to define these areas, but broadly speaking GSSSP contributes to 3 of them:

- Built Environment (which we will call Cities and Planning)
- Community and Social Services
- Global and Justice studies

One of the key arguments in favour of moving toward a cluster model is that it will link the School’s governance and management structures closely into the strategic direction in which the University wishes to move.

Proposed Terms of Reference

The following are proposed as terms of reference for the Clusters:

Clusters are groups of disciplines and research activity, which align with the university’s strategic direction.

They have three main purposes:

- To ensure that teaching and research effort are strategically aligned
- To promote cross-fertilization of teaching and research, in particularly by:
  - Encouraging discipline-based positions to undertake research within established centres;
  - Enabling staff within Centres to contribute toward disciplined-based teaching
- To provide a management structure that enables workloads, workplans and performance assessments to be developed and implemented in a timely fashion.

Proposed Clusters

The proposed clusters are as follows (please note that the names are slightly different to those used in the original Better Governance Discussion Paper – they are also open to further change and refinement):
The Role of Cluster Leader

The Cluster Leader will have an Executive position with the School. It is first and foremost a management role, involving significant responsibilities. The management roles will include:

Participating effectively in the School Executive

- Advising the Dean on strategic and operational matters
- Taking a whole School approach to decision-making
- Participating on Executive Working Groups and subcommittees as required

Advising the Dean on the contribution that their Cluster can make toward School strategic directions

Being accountable for an Annual Cluster plan and reporting against that plan in the areas of

- Teaching and learning
- Research
- Industry engagement

Day-to-day management of Clusters, including:

- Work plans and performance assessment of Discipline Leaders
- Ensuring that all staff have work plans and undertake performance assessments
- Implementing effective communications within the Cluster

(Note: I have left Youth Studies out of this figure because they have so far said they are not sure where they might fit into this model)
• Being able to manage change effectively
• Managing Cluster budgets.

I propose this to be a 0.6 role.

Cluster Leaders will be appointed by the Dean.

**The relationship between Disciplines, Centres and Clusters**

For the foreseeable future, the core units within the School will remain the Disciplines and Centres. These will remain the primary point of identity for staff. However, all staff within the Cluster will be recognized as such, including those based within Centres.

Discipline Heads and Centre Directors will report to the Cluster Head. They will retain significant day-to-day line management responsibilities for: workplans, workload allocations, performance assessments, and budgets. They will continue to receive a time allocation of 0.25 for their role. I would propose that the Discipline Heads retain their roles on the Learning and Teaching Committee. I would also propose that the Centre Directors retain their role on the Research Committee.

The degree of integration and cooperation will be up to each Cluster to determine. As a minimum I would propose that the Clusters meet at least quarterly to discuss the following issues:

• Strategic planning, including:
• Research programs and fellowships
• Course profile and teaching allocations
• Industry engagement

**Resourcing**

It is accepted that the Cluster model will involve the development of a new layer of management. However, it is difficult to see how else a School of our size can function effectively without this. It will require an addition 0.35 time allocation for the 3 Cluster Leaders. I would also hope to be able to provide more administrative support for the Leaders.

I would intend to allocate a combined sessional budget to the Cluster Head, who will have the job of ensuring that workloads across the Cluster (including teaching allocations for Research Centre staff) are properly managed.

**Relative size of the Clusters**

The relative size of the Clusters is shown in Table 1. They will range in size from around 50 EFT staff (Community and Social Services) to 35 (Cities and Planning).