



AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF CONSULTING ARCHAEOLOGISTS INC

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**Professor Amanda Davies**  
Head of School of Social Sciences  
University of Western Australia  
Crawley WA 6009

21 July 2021

Dear Professor Davies,

### **Rejection of UWA's proposed restructure of UWA's School of Social Sciences**

*The **Australian Association of Consulting Archaeologists Inc. (AACAI)** is the peak professional body representing consulting archaeologists in Australia. Our members in WA are often engaged as consulting archaeologists on cultural heritage assessments where we work alongside and in partnership with consulting anthropologists.*

AACAI whole-heartedly rejects the recent proposals by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Western Australia (UWA) to 'restructure' the School of Social Sciences, which will effectively abolish the Anthropology and Sociology major. The proposals will see the dismissal of all permanent staff within these disciplines, as well as senior positions in Archaeology and Forensic Anthropology.

The [current UWA website](#) describes the School of Sciences as follows:

*UWA's School of Social Sciences bridges social, physical and environmental sciences and brings a scientific approach to understanding the development and operations of societies and their influence on the world.*

If the Vice-Chancellor's proposals to abolish the disciplines of Anthropology and Sociology go ahead, the School will no longer be able to fulfil this statement. Instead, the university stands to erode their foundational principles and damage their international reputation. Current and former scholars from UWA's Anthropology and Sociology disciplines have contributed greatly to Australian society and its economy, as well as to global research in science and the humanities. To lose this invaluable output of research and understanding would be detrimental to professional education and capacity in this country.

The ongoing high demand for expert archaeologists and anthropologists in the WA resources and infrastructure sector will be greatly impacted by this proposal. All development proposals in WA must meet specific requirements under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 (WA)* and the *Environmental Protection Act 1986 (WA)*, involving heritage and social impact assessments and consultations with Traditional Owners and other community groups. Professional archaeologists and anthropologists, many of whom gained

their education and training through UWA's School of Social Sciences, have the appropriate skills and expertise to engage in this process (UWA's School of Indigenous Studies presently does not provide equivalent anthropological training). Furthermore, under proposed new WA Aboriginal heritage legislation, it is foreseen that professional anthropologists and archaeologists will be required to support and guide Local Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Services. As such, it is extremely foolish for UWA to propose curtailing the institutions where these skills are formed and established.

AACAI calls on the Vice-Chancellor of UWA to abandon this short-sighted and hugely damaging proposal, and furthermore, we ask him to consider a 'restructure' that expands and enlivens the disciplines of Anthropology and Sociology instead. In collaboration with archaeology, forensics and linguistics, UWA should meet growing demand in heritage compliance, native title, social surroundings and agreement-making. UWA has an internationally recognised and coveted four-field anthropology program, the loss of which would be immeasurable.

AACAI supports the strong statements made by the [Australian Archaeological Association](#) and the [Anthropological Society of Western Australia](#), in calling for UWA's proposal to be immediately abandoned. With over 1,000 combined members we stand in solidarity with the staff and students at the School of Social Sciences who will be experiencing great anxiety for their future at this time.

Yours sincerely



Jo Thomson

Chairperson, AACAI Western Australian Chapter

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cc: Professor Amit Chakma, UWA Vice-Chancellor  
Professor Simon Biggs, UWA Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor  
Professor Tim Colmer, UWA Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)  
Mr Nigel Waugh, UWA Director of Human Resources