

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE CONSULTATION PAPER



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PROPOSAL FOR CHANGE CONSULTATION PAPER

INTRODUCTION

The University Executive has established three main priorities for 2021¹, namely (a) *Budget sustainability* (b) *Student load growth*, and (c) *Improving the student experience*. In response to the University's priorities, the School of Social Sciences is seeking to re-align the School's strategic priorities, with a primary focus on enabling a measurable improvement in student experience and enrolment retention and growth within the School through improving operational efficiency and budget sustainability.

DRIVERS FOR PROPOSED CHANGE

Teaching Program and Resourcing

The School of Social Sciences has a broad teaching program that includes 13 majors and 5 active² coursework masters courses (with nested degrees) and co-teaches a specialised bachelor and several other undergraduate and postgraduate courses. This broad teaching program has not translated evenly through to enrolments or enrolment growth across the School. Indeed, during Semester 1 2021, 54% of the coursework units offered by the School had less than 20 students, and 35 of the units had less than 10 students.

The School of Social Sciences has a relatively low³ student-staff ratio (SSR) of approximately 18.6 (excluding casual staff). However, the student-staff ratio is unevenly distributed across the different teaching areas (please refer to **Appendix A** for summarised breakdown). This highlights that the current teaching program and resourcing is not sustainable from a financial perspective and needs to be addressed.

Research Program (Activity & Impact)

While University investment into research in the School has been evenly distributed across the School's staffing, there is an unevenness in research activity across the School. Between 2015 and 2020, more than 80% of the School's total external research funding⁴ was secured by Geography and Archaeology (please refer to **Appendix B** for further breakdown).

Across the School, there has been a sustained low level of engagement in demand driven research, with the School now falling well behind sector norms⁵. While in the fields of Human Geography and Archaeology more than 50% of funding came from category 2, 3 or 4 sources between 2015 and 2020, other discipline groups have not had the same success in developing a diverse research funding portfolio.

Data from Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) 2018 also provides insight into the unevenness in the research activity and impact across the School. Researchers in the School made the dominant contribution to the assessable output for Human Geography (Rating of 5) Archaeology (Rating of 4), and Political Science (Rating of 3). Reflecting the diversity of research across the School, School researchers also made contributions to Sociology (4), Anthropology (4) and Cultural Studies (3). For the ERA Engagement and Impact (EI 2018) assessment, case studies from Human Geography (Population and Regional Development) and Archaeology (Australian Archaeology) were rated as High⁶.

¹ Vice Chancellor's Academic Board Report, 17 March 2021.

² Enrolments into 3 coursework masters courses were suspended in 2020 due to sustained very low enrolments and these courses are considered inactive.

³ Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020 Staff Appendix A – Student staff ratios.

⁴ Data sourced from UWA Research Office. Includes grants transferred to UWA by new staff (i.e. DECRA's, Future Fellowships).

⁵ Nationally, more than 60% of research funding for the Social Sciences comes from category 2 and 3 sources.

<https://dataportal.arc.gov.au/ERA/NationalReport/2018/pages/section2/herdc-research-income-summary-all-categories/>

⁶ A 'High' ranking in the EI 2018 is the highest ranking and is awarded when the Unit of Area (UoA) is characterised by highly effective interactions between researchers and research end-users outside of academia for the mutually beneficial transfer of

While there are areas of high research performance in the School, the social sciences are lagging sector competitors in the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), Times Higher Education World University Rankings (Subjects) (THE) and Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) rankings.

Considering the distribution of research performance across the School and current operating costs, there is a need for the School to refine and focus effort to develop flagship programs in areas of existing strength as well as ensure appropriate support is available to strongly emerging areas, with a view to measurable improvements in relevant rankings and performance indicators.

Student Experience

The Good University Guide (2021) notes that, amongst the Go8, social sciences and humanities graduates from The University of Western Australia have the lowest rate of full-time employment 4 months after graduation, which is 45% lower than the University of Sydney and 32% lower than the Australian National University. Quality Indicators for Teaching and Learning (QILT) survey data also indicate that UWA students in the humanities, culture and social sciences study area were less satisfied than those at other Western Australian Universities.

The social sciences at UWA have a low participation rate for Indigenous students and students from a low socio-economic background.

Sector-Wide Challenges

While the challenges facing social sciences at UWA are significant, they are not unique and nationally it is recognised that 'the social sciences are at a crossroads'⁷. Structural adjustments in research funding for universities and the expansion of private and corporate social science research companies has significantly changed the funding landscape. The Job-Ready Graduates Package legislation has also resulted in an overall decrease in the funding available per social science student, while, on average, the costs borne by students have increased. Furthermore, The Academy of Social Sciences notes that the social sciences have fallen behind STEM and health science fields in ensuring relevance and impact is at the forefront of activities.

Challenges noted, there are clear opportunities for the social sciences. During 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic, the emergence of new civil rights movements and the heightened threats to lives and livelihoods from climate change brought into sharp focus the utility of the social sciences in addressing complex problems. Social scientists have played a critical role in understanding these problems, designing and implementing responses and helping communities to better prepare for future events. The need for applied social science graduates and researchers is clear.

OUR PROPOSED FUTURE VISION

The School of Social Sciences will develop a clear and unique identity within UWA as a dynamic learning space, sitting between the Arts and Sciences, in which students learn to employ the scientific approach to examine, theorise and develop solutions to complex social challenges.

The School will deliver a suite of undergraduate and postgraduate disciplinary focused courses to ensure students are provided with a world class education, including an enhanced opportunity to develop transferable applied social science skills.

By enhancing the applied focus of the courses, and with a view to developing a 'Social Science Skills Passport', students in the social sciences will be afforded better access to experiential learning, work integrated learning and fieldwork opportunities.

Classes will be delivered by a combination of leading researchers and teaching focused academics, with students being provided with guest lectures from industry and community partners. Where practicable,

knowledge, technologies, methods and resources. Research engagement is well integrated into the development and ongoing conduct of research within the UoA' (ARC, 2019, Engagement and Impact Assessment 2018-2019, no page).

⁷ Academy of Social Sciences, 2021, State of the Social Sciences Discussion Paper, p.4.

programs will draw on Western Australia's unique geography and global position, to ensure graduates gain a globally recognised qualification whilst accessing a unique UWA experience.

Putting the School on a sustainable platform, an overall student-staff ratio of approximately 35 will be targeted for the School⁸. Individual programs will be provided with the support needed to drive an improvement in student experience and student employability, including new support materials and the updating of key teaching resources.

Students, as well as industry and research partners, will have access to leading researchers across the School including within the School's flagship research programs in Australian archaeology⁹ and human geography¹⁰. Emerging research areas¹¹ in politics and policy (particularly related to health, social care and the environment), forensic anthropology and linguistics will continue to be developed and supported through nationally competitive research grants and industry funding.

NATURE OF THE PROPOSED CHANGE

To support the achievement of the School's vision, it is proposed that organisational change is required to simultaneously adjust the overall resourcing of the School and ensure that teaching and research resources are strategically aligned to future goals and growth areas.

It is proposed that the School's structure, teaching program and research program will be reduced and refined to ensure the School can operate in a sustainable manner, and in a way that will allow the School to support the University's priorities for growth and improving the student experience.

Proposed Refined School Structure

The School structure will be changed from 1 department and 6 disciplines to 3 departments; namely:

- Department of Geography and Archaeology (DGA)
- Department of Politics, Society and Policy (DPSP)
- Department of Linguistics, Communication and Language (DLCL).

The DGA will deliver courses in archaeology, forensic anthropology and geography and host the Centre for Rock Art Research and Management, Centre for Forensic Anthropology, Centre for Regional Development and the Planning and Transport Research Centre.

The DPSP will deliver courses in political science and international relations, public policy, international development and Asian studies and will host the Centre for Muslim States and Societies, Social Ageing Lab and VaxPol Lab.

The DLCL will deliver courses in linguistics, communication and media, Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese and Korean and will host the Korea Research Centre.

These proposed departments reflect the future strategic direction of the School in terms of teaching and research priorities and will enhance the capacity for resource sharing.

⁸ Benchmarked against Australia's leading social science providers (THE) University of Melbourne (SSR of 27), University of Queensland (SSR 35.5), UNSW (SSR 41.1) and Monash (SSR 41.7).

⁹ Approximately \$12.5 million in external research income in the past five years, an ERA ranking of 4 in 2018, 2 externally funded chairs, 1 staff member supported by an ARC Future Fellowship and 2 staff members supported by ARC DECRA. Work from the *Murujuga: industrial and cultural connections project*, undertaken by the Archaeology group, formed UWAs ERA Impact submission for Archaeology and Heritage.

¹⁰ Approximately \$14 million in external research income in the past five years, an ERA ranking of 5 in 2018, and 1 staff member supported by an ARC DECRA. Work from the *Enhancing policy making and public dialogue on the future of cities project*, undertaken by the Geography group, formed UWA's ERA Impact submission for Human Studies.

¹¹ As identified by external research grant activity, research publications and research impact data.

Proposed Refinement of the Teaching Program

To ensure that the School can deliver its teaching program within a sustainable budget, enable sufficient resourcing to be invested into the continual improvement of courses and enhancement of the student experience, and position the School for enrolment growth, it is proposed that the following courses be discontinued¹²:

- the Anthropology and Sociology major and associated units
- the Master of Urban and Regional Planning, nested courses and associated units

Between 2015 and 2020, enrolments in the Anthropology and Sociology major declined by 77%. While in 2021, in line with overall enrolment growth across UWA's undergraduate programs, there has been a small uplift in enrolments, when compared to Political Science and International Relations, which is similar in scope and resourcing, enrolments in Anthropology and Sociology are unsustainably low¹³. Declining enrolments in Anthropology and Sociology have been a recognised issue in the School for some years, and despite various initiatives to attract students to the program (including offering a large diversity of topics, cross listing units and postgraduate coursework pathways) enrolments in the major have failed to sufficiently improve. In recent years, UWA has expanded the number of majors it offers in society and culture. In contrast to the Anthropology and Sociology major, these new majors have experienced growth, indicating that, overall, UWA has expanded and adjusted its offerings to match a change in student preferences. Given the alternative learning opportunities in society and culture at UWA, it is proposed that the Anthropology and Sociology major be discontinued.

Under the proposed change, students in the Anthropology and Sociology major would be offered support to complete their study through teach-out plans or supported to transfer to an alternate major with comparable learning outcomes.

The Master of Urban and Regional Planning, which is an accredited program, has had very low enrolment numbers since its establishment. The program faces competition from multiple other providers, including locally with the long-established Curtin University program. Under the proposed change, students in the Master of Urban and Regional Planning would be offered support to complete their study through teach out plans or supported to transfer to alternate courses.

In addition to discontinuing the Anthropology and Sociology major and the Master of Urban and Regional Planning, the number of units will be reduced in the following programs:

- the Master of International Relations
- the Asian Studies major
- the Human Geography and Planning / Environmental Geography and Planning majors

Under the proposed change, the School Honours program would be comprehensively re-designed to create a consolidated core School research training program, with enhanced pathways for collaboration with community, government and industry partners. Students would be supported to develop disciplinary expertise through research dissertations and associated research training units.

The Master of Public Policy (public administration and governance specialisation) and Master of Strategic Communications will be reviewed to ensure strong alignment with industry and sector standards and with areas of research strength.

To ensure clear differentiation between the major in Environmental Geography and Planning and the major in Human Geography and Planning, it is proposed that the major in Environmental Geography and Planning will be repositioned as a major in Environmental Geography and Policy and a major within the BA and BSc.

Opportunities to enhance the teaching synergies between linguistics and language programs will be explored.

¹² The Master of Social Research Methods, Master of Asian Studies and Master of Heritage Studies, which have had no new enrolments since 2020 and are currently being taught-out due to sustained very low enrolment are proposed to be rescinded.

¹³ 2021 enrolments data show enrolments in Political Science and International Relations are 200% greater than Anthropology and Sociology.

Across the School, all programs will be reviewed to ensure Indigenous knowledge and perspectives are embedded into courses.

To ensure adequate teaching resources are available for the School's programs and enable the programs to be delivered sustainably, to support an improved student experience and to enable future growth, teaching focused appointments are proposed to be created (or continued) in most subject areas, but most substantively in the following areas:

- Asian studies
- Chinese studies
- Communication and media
- Indonesian studies
- Japanese studies, and
- Korean studies.

This enhanced focus on the teaching of languages and communication and media will ensure a greater number of UWA students are provided with the opportunity to develop transferable language and communications skills.

Proposed Refinement of the Research Program

To ensure that the School can deliver a world class research program, it is proposed that the School proposes to concentrate its research into two 'flagship' areas, these being:

- Australian archaeology – spanning from desert to maritime environments, drawing on CRAM+ expertise, and focused on enhancing community and industry partnerships, and
- Human geography – focused on enhancing the high impact regional development and population studies research developed through the partnership with the Committee for Perth and Centre for Regional Development.

The School also proposes to focus on developing and expanding demand driven and researcher driven research in areas of emerging strength, these being:

- Forensic Anthropology – focused on enhancing the work undertaken by the Centre for Forensic Anthropology
- Linguistics - particularly in partnership with Australian Indigenous communities, and
- Policy and politics – particularly related to health, social care and environment.

Further to the above research fields, in returning the School to a sustainable platform and positioned for growth, the School will seek to support additional emerging research fields, predominantly in response to industry / community partner demand.

All academic staff, including those with teaching focused appointments, will continue to have access to research time in line with workload allocation for activities, including, where relevant, for the supervision of HDR students.

IMPACT OF PROPOSED CHANGE

With the proposed refinement of the School structure and teaching and research program, a number of continuing academic positions are proposed to be discontinued, or significantly varied to a teaching focused appointment. It is also proposed that a number of new continuing academic positions will be created.

Discontinued Positions: The proposed discontinuation of 16 academic continuing positions across the current department / discipline structure, namely:

Department of Geography and Planning

- 1 x Level E Teaching and Research position
- 2 x Level B-C Teaching and Research positions

Discipline of Asian Studies

- 1 x Level B-E Teaching and Research position in Japanese Studies

Discipline of Anthropology and Sociology

- 2 x Level E Teaching and Research positions
- 6 x Level C-D Teaching and Research positions

Discipline of Archaeology (including Forensic Anthropology)

- 1 x Level E Teaching and Research position

Discipline of Political Sciences and International Relations

- 3 x Level D-E Teaching and Research positions

Significant Position Variations: It is proposed that there would be a significant variation to 12 continuing academic positions across the current department / discipline structure, namely:

Discipline of Asian Studies

- 6 x Level B-D Teaching and Research positions to Teaching Focused positions in Languages
- 1 x Level B-D Teaching and Research Position to Teaching Focused position in Asian Studies

Discipline of Media and Communication

- 5 x Level A-D Teaching and Research positions to Teaching Focused positions

New Academic Continuing Positions: In the proposed new structure, it is also proposed that there would be 7 new academic continuing positions, namely:

- 1 x Level B-C Teaching Focused position in Geography
- 1 x Level C-D Teaching and Research position in International Development
- 1 x Level C-E Teaching and Research position in the School Honours Program
- 1 x Level B-C Teaching Focused position in Archaeology
- 1 x Level B-C Teaching Focused position in Linguistics
- 1 x Level B-D Teaching Focused position in Communication and Media
- 1 x Level A-D Teaching Focused position in Chinese Studies

In addition to this, it is noted that all current fixed term positions across the School will continue to their current contract end date. To note, casual and externally funded positions, together with positions that remain in the new structure unaltered, will not be impacted by the proposed change. Please refer to **Appendix C** for a visual representation of the proposed new organisational chart.

In practical terms, under the current proposal, employees who hold positions in areas subject to a reduction as outlined above will be considered at risk of redundancy as a result of the proposed changes if the proposal for change is implemented in its current form, all potentially impacted employees will be notified and will be offered the opportunity to:

1. Seek expression of interest for voluntary redundancy for the University to consider following the consultation process. The University will retain the right to reject an application for voluntary redundancy where the employee holds skills or expertise that are required in the proposed new structure; **and**
2. Present their academic achievements to a University panel to be considered for remaining or new academic positions which reflect the specialisms required to meet the proposed new refined teaching and research program for the School.

If an employee is unsuccessful in obtaining a position in the proposed new structure, and they have not applied for a voluntary redundancy, the University will explore any other redeployment options that may be available more broadly in the University. If there are no suitable redeployment options available, the University will follow the redundancy process prescribed by *The University of Western Australia Academic Employees Agreement 2017*.

MEASURES BEING CONSIDERED BY THE UNIVERSITY TO MITIGATE / AVERT ADVERSE EFFECTS ON EMPLOYEES

As set out above, in order to avert or mitigate any material adverse effect of the proposed changes on affected employees, the University is considering the following:

1. Giving potentially impacted employees the opportunity to submit an expression of interest for voluntary redundancy; **and**
2. Inviting potentially impacted employees to present their achievements to a University panel to be considered for the vacant positions in the new proposed structure; **and**
3. Exploring other redeployment opportunities within the University before implementing any compulsory redundancies.

CONSULTATION PROCESS

1. Before any final decisions are made on the proposed changes, the University is committed to engaging in a meaningful consultation process with affected employees and their union or other nominated representatives. Accordingly, there will be a period of consultation commencing on 6 July 2021 and concluding on 20 July 2021.
2. Given the nature of the proposed changes to the School's organisational structure, all employees in the School of Social Sciences will be invited to a group consultation meeting, during which the Head of School will explain the proposed changes. Employees will be invited to provide a written response to the proposed changes. Employees will be invited and are encouraged to submit written feedback on the proposed changes via email to socialsciencesproposal@uwa.edu.au
3. In addition, Professor Amanda Davies (Head of School) and Human Resources will be available to meet and confer individually with impacted staff, to discuss the proposal for change, the potential impact this may have on their role and any potential alternative proposals. Impacted staff will be welcome to bring a support person, their union or other nominated representatives to these meetings.
4. The University is committed to providing each employee with the relevant information they need during this time. To assist with this, we have prepared a list of questions and answers that we anticipate that you may have. Should you have any other questions, please raise them with your manager and/or HR Business Partner and they will address them for you.
5. At the end of the consultation period, once the affected employees have considered their options and had an opportunity to provide feedback, the University will give genuine consideration to that feedback and any other matters raised during the consultation period. After this, the Vice-Chancellor will make a final decision on the proposed change, including whether there should be any adjustments to the proposed changes.

Appendix A: School of Social Science, overall student staff ratio by teaching area

Overall Average = 18.6

Teaching area	Student staff ratio	Teaching area	Student staff ratio
Urban and Regional Planning	3	Japanese Studies	21
Indonesian Studies	10	Chinese Studies	22
Anthropology and Sociology (including HERI, SOCS & MIXD research units)	11	Political Science and International Relations and Public Policy	25
Archaeology	13	Media and Communication	27
Forensic Anthropology	16	Asian Studies	28
Linguistics	17	Korean Studies	30
Geography	17		

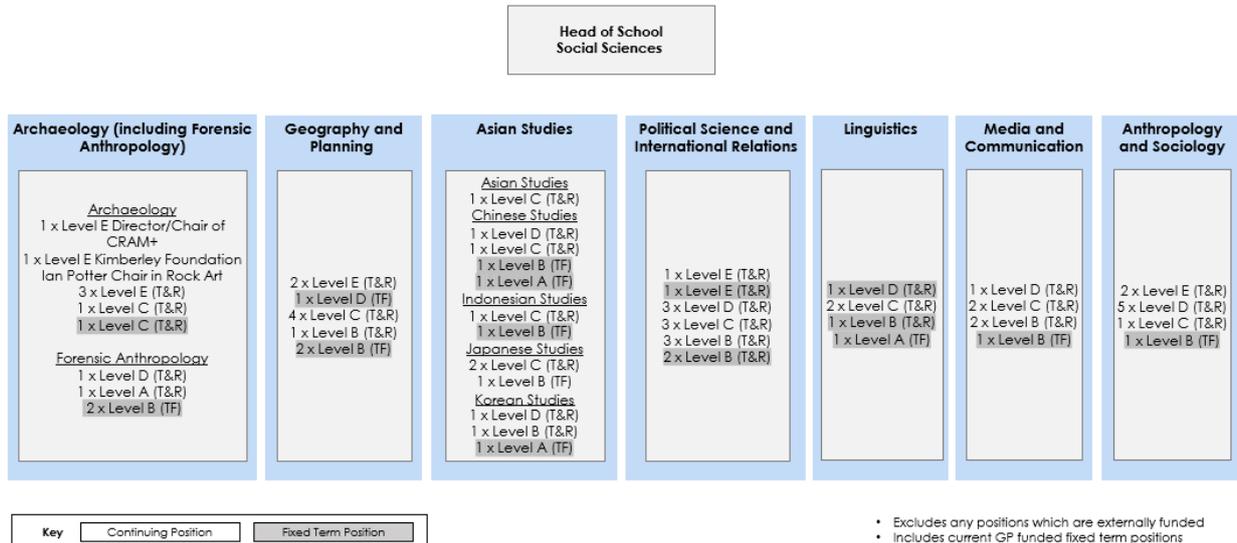
The above figures are based on FTE exclusive of casuals and draws on unit enrolment data from semester 2, 2020 and semester 1, 2021.

Appendix B: School of Social Science, total external research funding by discipline 2015-2020

School of Social Science total external research funding by discipline	
Geography	45%
Archaeology	38%
Anthropology and Sociology	6.5%
Political Science and International Relations	5%
Asian Studies	4%
Linguistics	1.5%
Media and Communication	0%

Appendix C

School of Social Sciences – Current State



School of Social Sciences – Proposed Structure Continuing Appointments

