

Blueprint Paper

ACADEMIC WORKFORCE AND FUTURE PLANNING

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Blueprint Paper provides a proposed conceptual framework for considering and implementing a vision for our academic work and staff workforce profile in order to deliver on our strategic vision within the constraints imposed by our internal and external context. This follows engagement with the University community over the course of 2024 about the systemic challenges the higher education sector and Macquarie University (**University**) continue to face. These challenges are driven by a range of influences which require us to consider how we redesign our academic work and the way it is delivered so that the University can remain sustainable and responsive to a dynamic and volatile external environment.

The University is seeking to approach the principles, planning and if needed, redesign, of our work and workforce that is financially sustainable and has the right balance of job families, levels and capabilities to deliver on our core strategies and vision, and is aligned with future teaching and research needs. Although this work must address the immediate financial imperatives, the University is primarily focussed on building a planning architecture which will enable our academic workforce to be responsive to needs, minimising the need for significant restructuring on an ongoing basis.

Although the focus of this Blueprint Paper is on the academic workforce, it is recognised that our professional services must be organised in a way that supports our core education, research and health mission.

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PART 1: VISION FOR OUR ACADEMIC WORKFORCE

As set out in our strategic framework, *Our University: A Framing of Dynamic Futures*, our purpose is to serve, engage and empower our people, nurturing a culture of innovation in education, research and healthcare as a thriving academic community that transforms and improves lives. Our vision is to be transformative, renowned for the exceptional quality of our education and the experiences of our students, our world-class research with far-reaching impact, and the highest standards in Australia in our progressive academic health system. The strategic framework also sets out our core values: collective ambition, purposeful collaboration, bold innovation and genuine care.

Our vision for the Macquarie University academic workforce is one that is high quality, productive, and aligned with this broader purpose, vision and values, and our core Education and Research strategies. Our academic workforce also must be diverse and balanced, with the right mix of skills and capabilities to deliver on our current and future education and research work. An important part of our workforce vision is that it is always appropriately balanced across employment type, level, gender and job family, and for the work that needs to be done. Our job family mix should reflect the important role of the Teaching & Leadership and Technical/Industry/Commercial job families in delivering our teaching, driving innovation and continuous improvement in our education offering and strengthening our external industry partnerships.

Workload models and allocation processes should also enable a highly productive academic workforce, where capacity and capability are optimised each year to meet teaching demand, and workload is accounted for as fairly and as transparently as possible.

The University also has a vision for how members of our academic workforce can enable our broader mission and core strategies. Our vision for the Macquarie University academic is defined by the following characteristics and expectations:

- Seeking to make an impact in the world and in our community as a member of a public university, anchored in the values of our institution;
- Pursuing research discoveries both individually and as part of teams; that matter to society in Australia and abroad; built on disciplinary strengths that are recognised globally as field leaders in areas of distinction; but achieve impact through interdisciplinary collaboration within and beyond the University;
- Leading education in ways that advance learning gains for students; using pedagogical approaches and technologies in how target cohorts learn best; as part of teams engaged in course learning outcomes. This includes:
- being flexible and responsive in what and how they deliver education to meet student needs
 - disseminating frontier knowledge that has real world application
 - keeping abreast of contemporary pedagogy and approaches to assessment
 - being continually engaged in professional development
 - being focused on educational excellence and student success
 - modelling our values and serving as leaders in our community.
- Lead and serve the institution and the wider community, guided by a set of deeply held values of collective ambition, purposeful collaboration, bold innovation, and genuine care.

More generally, it is envisaged that plans for our workforce are intentional activities shaped through many processes at the University, but informed by the pursuit of quality, productivity, and with a view to building the individual and collective capacity and capability of our academic

staff to deliver on our mission in ways that are fair and transparent. This vision is the lynchpin for work in the years ahead, as we redesign and refocus our education and research work to align with the Research Strategy 2035, MQ Advantage Strategy, and strategically align our workforce while supporting it to continually evolve and adapt.

PART 2: RATIONALE FOR FUTURE APPROACH

The rationale for our future approach is anchored by our vision and core strategies and obstacles that we confront in various forms. For example, the nature and volume of academic work at the University is also being reshaped by various external forces that are influencing the higher education sector, but also on the University and its position within the sector.

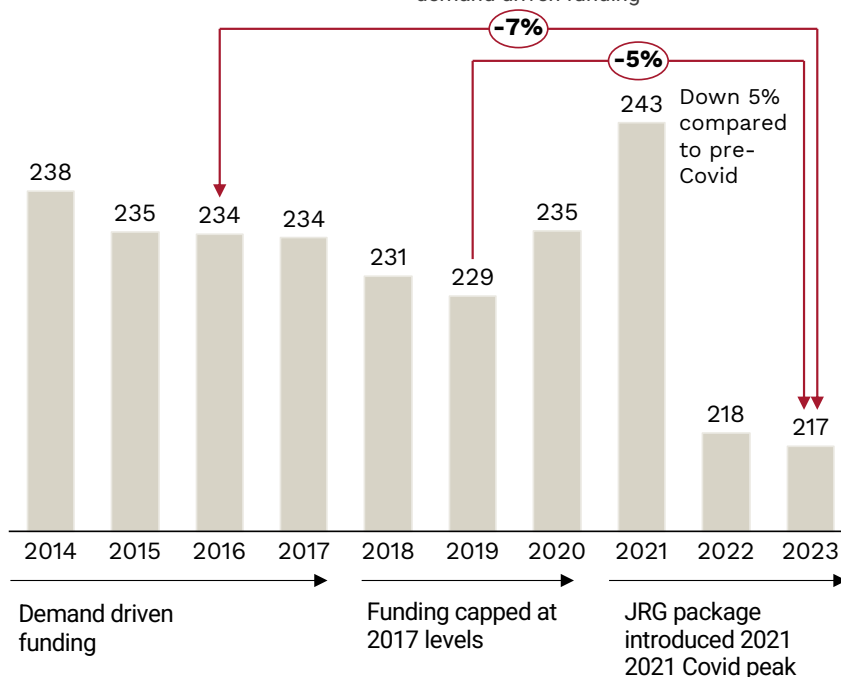
Some key external factors that are currently reshaping the **nature** of academic work include:

- Students are changing the nature of their university study. There is a growth in part-time study, students are seeking greater flexibility in their ability to move between courses (course transfer) and institutions (with recognition of prior learning). Yet our curriculum makes progress through a course hard to understand and the ability to transfer between courses and institutions complex, restrictive and administratively costly, resulting in a barrier to our prospective and current students.
- Research work is time-consuming and depends on costly infrastructure (especially in STEMM fields), yet the funding landscape in Australia over an extended period of time has resulted in the steady erosion of funding to support research. This places greater focus on the reality that the University's largest investment in research is in the time (typically 40%) that academics commit to research in their work allocation based on their job family.
- The regulatory context in which the academic workforce is constituted has changed, posing limitations on the ability of employers, especially in the higher education sector, to rely on a casual and fixed-term workforce to deliver ongoing work on an indefinite basis. Consequently, and in order to operate within a finite budget, the University is compelled to plan and utilise its permanent staff workforce more intentionally and efficiently and to utilise fixed-term and casual employment in a more considered way.

At the same time that the nature of work is changing, the **volume** of work is also changing:

- Both sides of the federal government have indicated plans to cap the entry of international students into Australia. As can be seen in the figure, domestic student demand is flat or declining, with the student contribution cost a likely contributing factor, along with other social and economic drivers. This means that Australian universities, including ours, can no longer rely upon continued growth as a strategy to ensure financial sustainability in a context where government funding is uncertain
- The proportion of Australians studying at university has declined as young adults have pursued pathways beyond university study. This may, in part, be informed by choices both sides of government have made around price controls of university education, which have led to significant increases in some study areas which are not necessarily compatible with students' financial circumstances or supportive of students' choice about their study and career aspirations.

Domestic EFTSL (k) Down 7% compared to demand driven funding



Notes: Undergraduate bachelor and Postgraduate coursework students only; Enabling, sub-bachelor and research excluded. Table A Universities
 Source: Department of Education Selected Higher Education Statistics – 2023
 Student data, visual analytics Load Summary.

- The Australian government has chosen not to significantly increase funding for research funding agencies (as recommended in the *Universities Accord*), engage with international bodies to expand the provision of funding that is overseas to Australian researchers (e.g. Horizon Europe) or reform the R&D tax credit to date. Rapidly changing technology and automation creates opportunities for evolving how academic work is delivered across education, research and service components.

In this context, the University has developed an Operating Plan 2025 – 2030 to support the long-term strategic framework, *Our University: A Framing of Dynamic Futures*. Two of the key enabling priorities set out in the Operating Plan are:

- A comprehensive workforce strategy; and
- Sustainability and performance (including increasing operating margin and refining our curriculum offering).

These enabling priorities aim to build on the work undertaken during the last Operating Plan, informed by the evolving external context to ensure that the University remains contemporary and relevant to the challenges of today and tomorrow.

PART 3: PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR ACADEMIC WORKFORCE PLANNING

As set out above, the University must continually review its academic work and workforce to respond to the changing and dynamic sector context. The University has undertaken preliminary discovery work to better understand our current academic work and workforce and developed a high-level approach to redesigning the future in the form of a proposed framework for planning our future academic workforce needs.

The proposed framework outlined in this paper is high level and in concept stage. We consider this to be an appropriate time to engage and consult with the academic community to provide a meaningful opportunity to inform the University's approach to the planning and management of our academic workforce, noting that this approach will be iterative and continually reviewed and improved over time. The University will consult with staff as required where the ongoing management of our academic workforce involves workplace change.

This framework acknowledges the previous work undertaken at Macquarie University to review and align its academic workforce, structures and leadership in 2020 and 2021, while accounting for significant shifts in our operating context since that time as well as the need to move toward a fair, transparent and clear capability for ongoing planning.

Objectives of the academic workforce planning

In order to fulfil our vision and remain financially resilient , productive and flexible in the future, the University will build a capability for planning that allows it to respond effectively to the external factors shaping the nature and volume of academic work by strategically redesigning and realigning our academic workforce profile and the way we deliver our education and research.

The University considers that the following **objectives** should guide and inform how we build this capability:

- Exploring the opportunity to define today's academic work and design the academic work of tomorrow across education and research, so that it is relevant and contemporary to the changing higher education sector landscape, meets our students' needs and meets Australia's current and future knowledge and skills needs.
- Exploring opportunities to strategically align the academic workforce profile with the education and research work of the University into the future, ensuring its future sustainability and ongoing productivity.
- Supporting the University's financial resilience by right sizing our academic workforce profile with a more simplified coursework suite which meets the needs of our students and makes best use of our available capacity.
- Ensuring that we continue with a sustainable structure, the necessary skills, capabilities, expertise and culture to fulfil the University's mission and objectives.
- Ensuring the process and methodology in relation to any workplace change which may have significant effects on staff (including potential redundancies) are fair and objective, as transparent as possible and respectful of the individual impact of significant workplace change.

Design principles

The following draft principles have been developed to guide and inform the approach to redesigning and realigning our academic work and workforce profile:

- The work should be co-designed with and led by each Faculty Leadership team, shaped by consultation and engagement with staff, including relevant professional staff, and approved in accordance with relevant governance requirements .
- The work should be underpinned by the University's values with a strong performance ethos and ensuring compliance with relevant employment obligations central to decision making.

- Research and education work should be considered in an integrative manner rather than in isolation.
- Any redesign will aim to ensure the future workforce profile is aligned to our mission, vision and the nature and volume of academic work, and balanced across employment types, academic levels, career stage, job families and diversity considerations.
- The opportunity for synergies and collaboration across faculties should be prioritised wherever possible, and Faculties should seek to balance their own needs with a deliberate focus on consilience and collaboration.
- Benchmarking and relevant internal and external data points may be used to help inform areas for attention and quality drivers: for example, how do students experience our curriculum, how do external researchers/grant bodies regard our research excellence, etc.

Approach to workforce analysis and planning

Under this approach, it is envisaged that a set of principles, processes, data and analytics will be developed and/or refined to enable evidence-based decision making as the University designs its future work and workforce.

PART 4: PROPOSED APPROACH TO PLANNING ACADEMIC WORK

Education work

Planning future educational work is a dynamic and iterative exercise. Each year, the curriculum is reviewed through annual health checks. Moreover, courses go through reaccreditation cycles on a regular cycle with close reflection by course directors. Deeper dive and thematic reviews involving broader consultation with staff, students, industry partners and other key stakeholders are also initiated regularly and as needed.

Relevant to the approach outlined in this paper are two areas of priority in the Operating Plan to be considered side-by-side:

- First is the Education Strategy (the Macquarie Advantage), which contains a number of strategies relevant to curriculum design and approaches to learning.
- Second is the priority for Sustainability and Performance, which encompasses financial sustainability to allow for the University's investment in its core mission, optimising our curriculum offering and delivery to improve student outcomes and meet future skills needs, and ensuring the University remains at the cutting edge of impactful research.

Course, course components and units need to be designed with students' interests and employers' needs in mind. This is a dynamic process. In the current paper, it is proposed that course, course components and units will be reviewed and redesigned in accordance such that our curriculum meets the needs of our students and the wider community. In practical terms, examples of how this is considered include:

- Ensuring Faculty Teaching Plans are efficient, effective and relevant. Units and/or courses with low enrolment over successive years will be rested unless they are key to our strategic mission and ethos, or specific requirements of the institution (for example – certain types of accreditation), or there are mitigating circumstances (for example – new courses);
- Ensuring Faculty teaching catalogues are created, maintained and reviewed in collaboration between departments and Faculties to maximize shared expertise. Duplication in unit learning outcomes across multiple units at the same Australian Qualifications Framework level and Field of Education will be minimised as much as possible;

- Ensuring units are optimally designed for student learning and success. Units and/or courses which have low student satisfaction, high failure rates or are complex to administer may be reviewed, which may lead to redesign or resting;
- Ensuring Faculty teaching catalogues support outstanding employment outcomes. Majors, Specialisations, and Electives that go beyond, or are not aligned with, the changing needs of employers and student interest will be rested;
- Any course and unit redesign will factor in principles under the Education strategy to enhance student learning and curriculum management. This includes how units contribute to a coherent course design and the approach to employability units at Macquarie University.

It is proposed, to the greatest extent possible, that teach-out provisions will not extend beyond 12 months from the decision to rest a course. It is acknowledged that the extent to which teach out can be accelerated will vary and that a 12-month timeframe will not be possible in some cases. This will apply to all teach out provisions already under way. The reason for this is to support students, including their ability to swiftly transfer courses where needed.

Many of the above principles are already used by Faculties in making decisions about course and unit offerings from year to year. Clarifying the above points aims to drive more consistent and intentional decisions across Faculties.

Research work

The Research Strategy 2035 provides a roadmap for the University's research strength into the future, anchored toward consilience. This emphasises the importance of working across teams and disciplines in order to achieve societal impact through research. In addition, our researchers have enjoyed rising performance within a number of disciplinary areas according to a variety of different measures. Each of these measures have their own methodology and are best understood collectively, through triangulation, rather than singularly.

It is important to contextualise research performance within a global context, and with a focus on excellence and impact at its heart. Moreover, success in this endeavour involves working at scale and with teams across and beyond the University.

With this in mind, consideration of how to optimise our future academic **research work**, including decisions on potential areas for reduction or divestment, will pay regard to:

- **Excellence and Impact:** areas where Macquarie University has recognised and sustained excellence and impact nationally and internationally in fields of research.
- **Strength at Scale and Consilience:** areas where Macquarie University has team success, reflected not only in singular researchers but in collectives of researchers from diverse backgrounds who work within and across research disciplines to build the aggregative potential of their work.
- **External Funding:** whether Macquarie University has research funding to support the work either through direct research funding, or indirectly through the operating funds of the department, faculty or university to manage short and long-term shortfalls.

The future of research work will also be shaped by the following considerations:

- Identified areas of research which will give the University a competitive advantage, including where there are opportunities to be distinctive
- Where there is evidence of emergence
- Relative value to investment

- Building a successful research culture, development and retention of researchers, and leadership
- New areas of opportunity, investment, and emerging strength.

Review of our current research profile and consideration of how to optimise our future research work will be undertaken by the Executive Deans, in consultation with other members of the Executive Group and in line with the areas of investment and focus set out in the Research Strategy 2035.

PART 5: PROPOSED APPROACH TO DESIGNING OUR ACADEMIC WORKFORCE

5.1 Defining the Faculty Workforce Profile

The **workforce** needed to deliver the work of the University will vary according to disciplinary differences and the nature and volume of the teaching and research work required. In some cases, and at certain points of time, the workforce might require focused redesign.

Where it is warranted, the approach to redesigning the academic workforce will therefore be informed by data and insights about the academic work undertaken in education and research. Workforce planning will be developed with Faculty-specific contexts in mind while aligning to a set of consistent considerations.

Considerations to define the **academic workforce profile** across the Faculties, include:

- The *quantum of future work* intended in an area
- The areas in which the University wishes to invest in research
- The skillset needed to deliver the work in terms of *job family*
- The experience and seniority needed to do the work across *academic levels* A-E as well as any upcoming staff turnover and succession planning needs
- *Equity and diversity* considerations (including gender balance) in the delivery of work in alignment with the University's commitment under the Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Framework, including the University's objective to ensure that the diversity of our workforce reflects the diversity of the communities that we serve.
- The nature of deployment of staff within a Department or Faculty in accordance with the *workload model*.

It is proposed that each Faculty define their academic workforce profile based on the future education and research work and considerations outlined above. The Executive Dean will be primarily responsible for designing their workforce, in consultation with relevant staff and other members of the Executive Group.

5.2 Annual cycle for workload planning

In order to support effective workload planning it is envisaged that each year Faculties would undertake a workload planning cycle to allow time for effective planning and decision making about staffing. At a high level it is envisaged that this cycle would involve the following phases, though the final details will be finetuned through the implementation process:

1. (January – March) - Consideration by Faculty leadership of courses and units available for the following year (taking into account the desire to share units across Faculties as much as possible and where it makes sense).
2. (January – March) - Initial discussion in DPR conversations about potential opportunities to rotate between teaching in units and courses to support professional

growth (including skill diversification, career progression and exposure to different student cohorts and subjects), and balancing the benefits of stability in student experience and curriculum integrity against the risk of stagnation.

3. (April) - Faculty leadership determine units, courses, or course components to be rested, redesigned or added for the following year.
4. (April) - OSP applications finalized for the following year.
5. (May) - Finalisation of Faculty teaching catalogue for following year
6. (May/June) - Expression of interest opportunity for staff to indicate where they have skills and interests in:
 - a. Different teaching units within Faculty teaching catalogue (taking into account cross-Department and cross-Faculty teaching opportunities); and
 - b. Service leadership roles within the Faculty for the following year (nb: subject to leadership roles available based on expiring terms).
7. (August/September) - Allocation of teaching workloads and service leadership roles to continuing staff for the following year
8. (November – January) - Identification and offers to fixed-term positions and recruitment of casual staff

The above approach is not intended to be destabilising, require staff to create new course material each year or teach in courses and/or units in which they have no expertise. It is also not intended to create an onerous or bureaucratic process for workload allocation. . It is intended to drive planning and decision making in a considered and timely way to support effective marketing, student recruitment, course design and development o and allocation to staff to support the work needed to be delivered. This more structured and coordinated approach should also minimise the need for sudden large scale changes which it is recognised has a significant impact on staff wellbeing.

5.3 Approach to use of casual staff in teaching

For many years casual academic staff have been engaged to undertake a significant proportion of teaching and teaching related activities. Recent changes to employment legislation in Australia mean that the University needs to be more considered in how it engages casual staff and in the type of work casuales are engaged to perform, as well as in how it manages expectations of casual staff about the availability of future work.

Generally speaking, it is expected that continuing and fixed-term staff undertake their full teaching workload allocation. In doing so, continuing and fixed-term academic staff will be responsible for course and unit coordination for the large majority of lectures and for a significant proportion of tutorials. This is also an important way for the University to ensure there is no unnecessary expenditure on casual staff.

It is envisaged that for the most part casual academic work will be used as a supplement to unit convening work led by continuing and fixed-term academic staff, and will be focused on tutorials (particularly those with a repeat component), demonstrations and marking. It is recognised that for some disciplines in the University it is beneficial to engage casual staff with particular expertise, such as industry professionals, to take on a broader set of responsibilities. This is taken into account each year when teaching allocations are made within each faculty for the year ahead.

5.4 Approach to Academic Service

An important aspect of the academic workforce profile is how academic staff contribute to service and leadership within Macquarie University, and how their roles are designed to enable these contributions. Fundamental enablers of success are:

- how our staff are organised and led;
- the composition, capabilities, and performance of both academic and professional staff;
- the way faculties interface with central portfolios; and
- how we can shape Macquarie's organisational culture to ensure strategies are successfully achieved (Academic Structures and Leadership Green Paper 2021).

A stream of work is planned by the People and Culture Board under the Operating Plan 2025-2030. It will address academic service and leadership work within Faculties, Schools and Departments of the University. It will leverage and build on the work implemented in 2021 under the Academic Structures and Leadership Paper. In particular, it is intended that the new paper will review and refine leadership positions, including defining a consistent core set of service roles and Expression of Interest process for such roles.

In addition, service and leadership is an important component of overall academic workload allocation. It should be clear how an academic's workload allocation to service and leadership is being spent, including the proportion of time spent on service and leadership within the University.

PART 6: POTENTIAL IMPACT ON STAFF

This paper does not include possible impacts on individual positions or people. These will become clearer as Faculties design their future workforce and will be subject to appropriate consultation including through workplace change proposals where required. Faculties will consider both the work required and then the academic workforce required to deliver that work. This is expected to be undertaken within a timeframe to allow for delivery in 2026.

PART 7: NEXT STEPS

A temporary Blueprint Implementation Working Group will be established to consider and coordinate the implementation of the workforce planning approach outlined this Blueprint Paper. As the University develops and embeds its workforce planning capabilities, the DVC (People and Operations) will coordinate with central portfolios and Executive Deans, supported by their Faculty Executive Directors, to oversee this on an ongoing basis, including ensuring structured governance and review to support continuous improvement.