The University of Western Sydney was founded in 1989 with a clear and fundamental purpose: to provide high quality and accessible higher education and research in a region historically under-resourced and undervalued. It is now at a critical period in its development. Whilst UWS has made progress towards developing as a significant force in the higher education landscape, there remains much to be done.

The University’s history has been characterised by periods of environmental and institutional change. Ten years is not a long time in which to establish the optimal structure, function and focus of a University. And in many ways the promise of the new UWS Act of 1997 has yet to be fully realised.

Over the past 18 months, I have conducted a broadly based series of consultations on the future development of the University. These consultations identified a high level of commitment and good will and a significant impetus to reshape UWS to meet the challenges of the future. It was agreed that the University is now at a stage where its continued growth in an environment of shrinking public funding for higher education is dependent on institutional reform.

The University has accepted that it must do most things once, rather than three times, and in the same way, rather than in three different ways. The Board of Trustees endorsed the principle that integration and cooperation will be the norm and the focus of strategic development will be a united UWS.

At its meeting on 11 October, the Board of Trustees of the University unanimously endorsed a new operational framework for the University developed through the extensive consultation process and described in my paper “The Shape of the Future”. The objectives of the new framework of operation and organisation of UWS are:

➢ To improve the quality of services and the educational experience for all stakeholders, particularly our students.
➢ To provide these services in a cost efficient way building on all the elements of best practice.
➢ To provide a working environment that is supportive, rewarding and empowering.
➢ To develop the structure and direction of the university in ways which add value to its international reputation, competitiveness and standing.
➢ To promote and support a business-like approach to academic and organisational developments and an institutional focus on regional development.
➢ To establish an operating environment built on administrative flexibility.

To achieve these objectives, the Board of Trustees authorised me to establish processes to implement a structure to unite and integrate administrative and academic support services; and to consult widely on the proposals relating to the academic structure and the means to ensure community engagement and involvement in the University.
The Reshaped UWS

The proposed framework for UWS specifies the organisation and representation of the University will be in three forms: the University as a whole; broadly based academic groupings designated as Colleges; and the campuses spread across the region. UWS is to be represented as a major metropolitan regional University with the unique advantage of having direct and focused community involvement and local constituency for each campus.

The day to day vitality and focus for the operation of the University will be at the campus level – where the community, students and staff derive a sense of people and place. The work of the students and academic staff at the campuses will be supported through a united UWS administration and integrated academic support services.

The management structure of the University will comprise:

> Division of Education and Equity – including the new discipline-based Colleges and a range of academic support services such as the library, flexible delivery, educational partnerships, learning development, multicultural and indigenous education.
> Division of Business and Resources – including the united UWS administration, commercial services, business development, risk management and campus management.
> Division of Research and Regional Development – including graduate studies, research administration, regional and industry development and consultancy.
> The Chancellery – including support of the University governance, strategic direction setting and institutional review, marketing and communication and the International program.

The governance structure of UWS will involve clearer purpose and more defined responsibility and will be located operationally at two levels:

> The Board of Trustees, with overarching responsibilities for the University as a whole; and
> Community-based Councils that are intended to engage constituencies from across the region in the life of their local campus(es). The form, focus and function of these community councils is not yet fully determined. The proposition that such Community Councils should be established is one of the options being considered to engage the community in the new arrangements for UWS.

As this structure is implemented, the University will no longer be organised as three Member institutions (UWS Hawkesbury, UWS Macarthur and UWS Nepean) having separate, and at times competing, identities across Greater Western Sydney. It will instead focus on regional and educational needs through its six campuses. The University will have a united image that promotes its strengths and develops its strategic direction and academic programs to best meet the needs of the region and beyond, and in this way enhance its reputation as an institution which is: distinctive in its relationship with the community it serves; flexible and innovative in the programs it offers; modes of delivery and research undertaken; and responsive to the changing world of higher education and knowledge production.

Key questions for the consultations

(1) Community Involvement

Ensuring explicit and meaningful engagement with the communities the University serves is a key area in the reshaping of UWS that requires further analysis, consultation and consideration in this next phase of development. The intention is clear – to bring the community into the University and to ensure that UWS contributes to addressing major economic, social and environmental issues in the region and to the broader development of the Greater West.

I wrote in June this year that UWS aims to be an institution engaged with its community, noting that our reputation rests significantly on “student friendly” campuses, a commitment to and from the communities of Greater Western Sydney and the relevance of our academic enterprise to industry and educational partners. The passion and interest of the region is focussed on UWS and as an engaged institution, UWS intends to seek ways to enrich the student experience by bringing research and practical experience of the world they
will enter into the curriculum and to put the University’s critical resources (knowledge and expertise) to work on the problems the communities it serves must face.

The University values the input it receives from the community and this has always been given generously and openly. I have now established a formal consultation program to gather this vital input into the development of the model of community partnership and engagement that will meet the objectives and strategic imperatives of the institution that is being shaped for the future. Whilst one option of community involvement has been proposed to the University community for their comment, there were a number of proposals considered. These were:

A Community Councils

The role of the Community Councils would be focused on local community constituencies in sub-regional areas and the development of designated campuses. Community Council members would have interest and expertise relevant to the mission of the University and have the capacity to assist in the campuses’ development. The Councils would have roles in establishing the University’s public profile, ensuring its resource independence and professional and industry alliances.

The benefits of these Councils would be found through the opportunities to develop productive partnerships, the facilitation of fundraising and by enhancing the quality and relevance of campus-based activities. For the constituent local communities the University could assist by addressing issues of significant public interests, major development proposals and social and economic initiatives. The number of area groupings and geographic reach is an important consideration for the consultations.

A possible disadvantage of this model raised by students and staff is the difficulty of relating to the many different disciplines and services on a campus, and of community members feeling they have meaningful roles in the development of the campus and indeed the University as a whole across Greater Western Sydney. This reinforces the concern expressed that the establishment of Community Councils in this form should not lead to a partitioning of the region into smaller community areas that do not represent the full spectrum of interests and issues of the West.

B Community-based College Advisory Councils

Another option considered was the establishment of community advisory councils connected to the work of University-wide discipline-based Colleges. The role of these Advisory Councils would relate to discipline-based constituencies in business, industry, the community at large and government, and the development of the Colleges to serve the Greater West, for instance the College of Business and Law or the College of Social Sciences and the College of Health and Life Sciences. Advisory Council members would have professional expertise relevant to the academic work of the College, be prominent members of the community and have the capacity to assist with fundraising and industry links. These Councils would be an important link between the educational world of the students and the employment environment providing connections with industry, business, the professions and government. Care will need to be given in this model to ensure that community members are not disadvantaged in expressing a wish to be involved by perceptions of their capacity to add value to the work of Colleges.

The Advisory Councils could provide an effective and purposeful link between UWS, the academic communities, the professions and the communities that make up the region, and places and people beyond. This approach promotes recognition of the interrelationship between the success of the University’s academic and research activity and the overall development of the region. The benefits would include: harnessing high level professional and regional input; bringing together external perspectives from across GWS; fundraising for the University through a coordinated UWS development program and recognising that the campuses would not have a separate life but be part of an organic whole that is nurtured and guided at a regional level by the College Advisory Councils and in overall governance by the Board of Trustees.
C Integrating the Community in a range of University entities

There is a wide raft of formal and informal groups that are actively engaged in the development, operation and achievements of the University in all aspects of our academic program, research and innovation, and commercial and entrepreneurial activities. Most of these groups enjoy the benefits of the participation of external community, professional and industry representatives. One option considered in the development of the proposals to reshape UWS was the use of these forums to more actively and explicitly involve the community in the life of the University as an alternative to advisory or community-based Councils. Each of these forums would have a broad ambit to support the overall governance of the University. This would involve groups such as Boards of University-related companies, educational review groups, and Course Advisory Committees.

This option recognises that external contributors to UWS are most likely to give their time, expertise and resources to initiatives and activities that have obvious and tangible benefits for our students, the University and the broader community. This approach, encompassing groups such as the Foundation, UWS commercial companies, student development programs and the Ann Clark Trust, is thus more activity- and issue-specific and is built on the notion that real community engagement occurs through active and integrated participation in the life of the University.

(2) Campus Names

I proposed to the Board that campuses would be described geographically and their names and offerings should be logical and reflect their heritage and development. The names of the campuses should be agreed through the consultative process but follow some agreed principles. This approach should alleviate the present confusion in UWS nomenclature. Simply put, a campus would be described as UWS (name), where the qualifier makes geographical sense and is a meaningful reference to its location and heritage.

Possible names would include:

- UWS Macarthur or UWS Campbelltown
- UWS Bankstown or UWS Milperra
- UWS Parramatta or UWS Rydalmere
- UWS Nepean or UWS Penrith
- UWS Blacktown or UWS Quakers Hill or UWS Nirimba
- UWS Hawkesbury or UWS Richmond
- UWS Westmead would continue as an innovation precinct

Each campus would be under the management of a Campus Manager, who would have functional responsibility at the campus level, overseeing and reporting on the regular operations of that campus and be a focal point for day-to-day community liaison.

The organisation and representation of UWS would be in three forms – the University as a whole, the Colleges and the campuses.

I seek advice on these names and value the opinion of our community representatives.

I stated in my paper to the Board that the future of UWS is inextricably linked to that of Greater Western Sydney. Our success and achievements will be grounded and enhanced by our engagement with the communities of the region and beyond. I look to the community consultations to gather the aspirations, creativity and insight of the community leaders of the Greater West and to bring this input to the development of the final proposal to the Board of Trustees in March 2000. I welcome your views and advice.

Professor Kevin Sproats, whom I commissioned to undertake a wide-ranging consultation on my behalf, has commenced his work. Already he is finding that no one of the models will be effective in imaging the community in the life and governance of UWS. Rather, a combination will be needed.

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