



July 2021

The Honourable Professor French  
Chancellor  
University of Western Australia  
35 Stirling Highway  
Crawley WA 6009

We write on behalf of the Executive committee of the Development Studies Association of Australia (DSAA) to express our deep concerns regarding the proposed changes to UWA's School of Social Sciences, that would dissolve the discipline of Anthropology & Sociology, and drastically reduce the faculty positions in the discipline of Politics, Asian Studies and Media & Communications.

In a time of global pandemic and many significant national social and economic challenges, it is troubling that any university—and particularly a 'world-class' institution such as UWA—would consider the removal of disciplines with a particular focus on understanding the human condition, and Australia's place within the Asian region. The analyses of social and cultural phenomena that these disciplines provide could not be more relevant and necessary to our present time, and to post-pandemic recovery within Western Australia, nationally, and internationally.

It is extremely worrying and disappointing that the School of Social Sciences has been targeted in the process of 'restructuring' and 'rebranding', despite the acknowledgement from the Vice Chancellor that the School of Social Science has responded to the three key priorities for 2021 – financial sustainability, student growth load and improved student experience.

Having closely followed the events of recent days, a number of key concerns regarding the stated rationale for the change-proposal stand out:

1. **Financial Need:** There is no financial modelling visible in the School of Social Science's Plan for organisational change, and it is not clear how targets for individual schools and business units have been established. The university is seeking a 10% reduction in costs across the institution, but it is not clear why this cost saving has been so heavily targeted at the Social Sciences.
2. **Declining enrolments:** It is our understanding that enrolments in Anthropology and Sociology rose by 36% in 2021.
3. **Student impact:** It is our understanding that postgraduate and undergraduate students have not received any communication from the university regarding the proposed plan and the implications for them. We are concerned about the wellbeing of PhD

Candidates, particularly international students. In addition, it is our view that the replacement of research/teaching-research positions with teaching-focused roles will diminish capacity for HDR supervision, and will undermine the development of future scholars to Australia's scholarly community.

4. Anthropology and Indigenous Studies: We find the constant conflation of Anthropology with Indigenous Studies highly problematic. It misrepresents the academic focus of these two important areas, and overlooks the broad range of interests attracting students into these two disciplines.

We, the DSAA Executive Committee, urge you to reconsider the current change proposal. As you will be aware, the proposed changes are directly at odds with a number of the University of Western Australia's stated priorities and commitments. The proposal is an ill-informed way forward in preparing the leaders of our future to be well equipped for facing global challenges. It is an insult to current staff and students, and the wider social sciences in Australia. Therefore, we urge you to withdraw this proposal.