



Flinders  
UNIVERSITY

## Case Study: Challenging Change



# WE ARE ON KAURNA LAND...

We recognise that Flinders University operates on Indigenous peoples' traditional lands and waters, and acknowledge their continued responsibility to care for country at the University's various teaching locations, including the lands and waters of the following peoples: Kaurna (main campus at Bedford Park), Arrernte, Boandik, Bungarla, Gunditjmara, Jawoyn, Larrakia, Nauo, Ngarrindjeri, Peramangk, Ramindieri, Wurundjeri, Yolgnu.

TODAY, OVER 300  
ABORIGINAL AND  
TORRES STRAIT  
ISLANDER STUDENTS  
ARE ENROLLED  
IN COURSES AT  
FLINDERS UNIVERSITY.

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# Case study: Challenging change at Flinders

- Why we needed change and basic outcomes
- What we changed
- How we did it
  - What worked well
  - What we learnt
- Closing thoughts on driving change
- Next steps

# Poll question

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Where are you with your change?

- My organisation has recently completed a major change.
- My organisation will undertake major change soon.
- No big changes for my organisation at the moment.
- Change never stops!  
Continuous change is upon us.



# About Flinders

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- Opened in southern Adelaide suburbs in 1966
- Named after British navigator and cartographer, Matthew Flinders
- Growing research University with a focus on Medicine and Nursing
- 1000 academic staff, 1300 professional staff
- 2 Adelaide campuses [Bedford Park and Victoria Square (Adelaide CBD)]; significant NT presence [Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Alice Springs] and regional SA & Victoria locations
- Teaching internationally: Hong Kong SAR, Singapore, Beijing, Tianjin & Kuala Lumpur



# 2025 Agenda Strategic Plan





## Our values

### Integrity

- Maintain the highest professional and ethical standards at all times
- Be accountable for our actions and follow through on our commitments
- Embrace diversity and promote equity, inclusion and social responsibility
- Treat others with courtesy and respect
- Foster a safe and healthy environment for work and study

### Courage

- Trust and empower
- Seize opportunities and embrace change
- Learn from experience
- Be open and transparent in our communications
- Pursue critical and open inquiry

### Innovation

- Solve problems by "thinking outside the box"
- Promote personal enterprise and creativity
- Encourage teamwork and collaboration
- Be responsive and innovative when faced with new challenges
- Actively engage with business and industry

### Excellence

- Strive for excellence in every endeavour
- Commit to quality and continuous improvement
- Celebrate our achievements
- Deliver exceptional levels of service
- Develop future leaders

## Our ethos

### Student centred

Our underlying ethos of being student centred is a distinguishing feature of the Flinders experience and is the measure by which we judge the impact of innovations in teaching and student support.



# Why make change Flinders in 2015

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- Very erratic financial years, very decentralized management
- Rich and poor faculties & schools
- Highest “staff as % revenue” in sector
- Low automation and reliance on lower-level staff profile
- Multiple areas doing same function
- Rankings falling 1996 to 2015
- Staff satisfaction with processes very low





# Did we change?

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- Yes, in waves starting in 2016 and up to 2019
- New strategy, leadership, structure, job roles
- Significant staff change
- Our multi-year transformation was challenging and unpopular with staff - but the results...

# High level results

- Fewer structures, flatter, common and simple model
- More automation possible - smaller, flatter and more agile organisation
- Costs went down, income went up, better year end results
- Flinders rose 91 places in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings
- QS World University Rankings over the same period, rising from the 551-600 group to 424.
- Research income went up 42%
- Staff satisfaction scores, progress, etc. up too ...



# Your Voice Results – the positive

Category	2020 result favourable	Increase from 2018	2020 result in comparison to sector
Technology* – kept up to date	61%	+18%	+8%
Student Satisfaction	71%	+18%	+8%
Progress – organisational performance	55%	+13%	-3%
Change – way Uni is run	38%	+18%	-2%
Innovation – Uni is innovative	57%	+8%	+11%
Safety	82%	+8%	+10%

\*Both technology measures improved (makes good use - +17%)



# 4 waves of change

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1. 2016 Preparation: Planning phase & VERS/VR round
2. 2017 Academic structure: Faculty/School to College
3. 2017-18 Professional structure & workforce: Professional Services Project (PSP)
4. 2018 Academic workforce

# 1. Preparation: Planning phase & VERS/VR

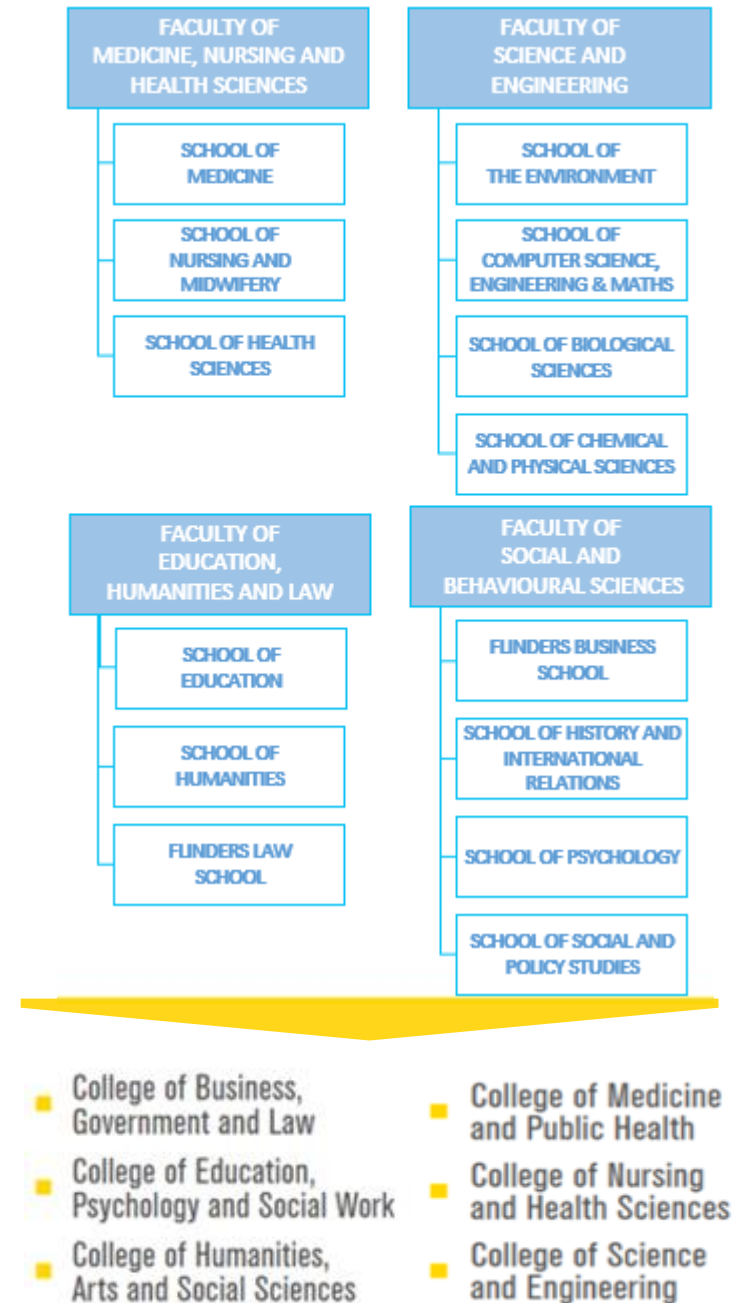
- Major changes were discussed with new VC in 2015
  - Alignment of leadership; use of consultants and ownership and cost considerations
- Initial VERS & VR involved approximately 100 academic and professional staff
  - Wise thing to do before change
- College structure concept paper floated

# 2. Academic structure: Faculty/School to College

- From two layers (Faculty/School) to one layer (Colleges)
- This changed budgets and leadership; fewer offices and better aligned support
- Required a concept of research themes and teaching disciplines (not structures).

In retrospect: wise simplification, many benefits & a few problems

- Most accept it now, some really like it, a few still don't



### 3. Professional structure & workforce: the PSP

- Gathered all professional staff into 14 services (IT, Finance, Student services, etc.) matrixed into the 6 colleges. Simplification of some areas.
- Nearly 300 roles disestablished with half that number ending up redundant
- Rewrote PDs for all professionals, defined a common model, asked many managers and staff to help redesign – did it to ourselves
- Got many things right, some things wrong, missed some functions

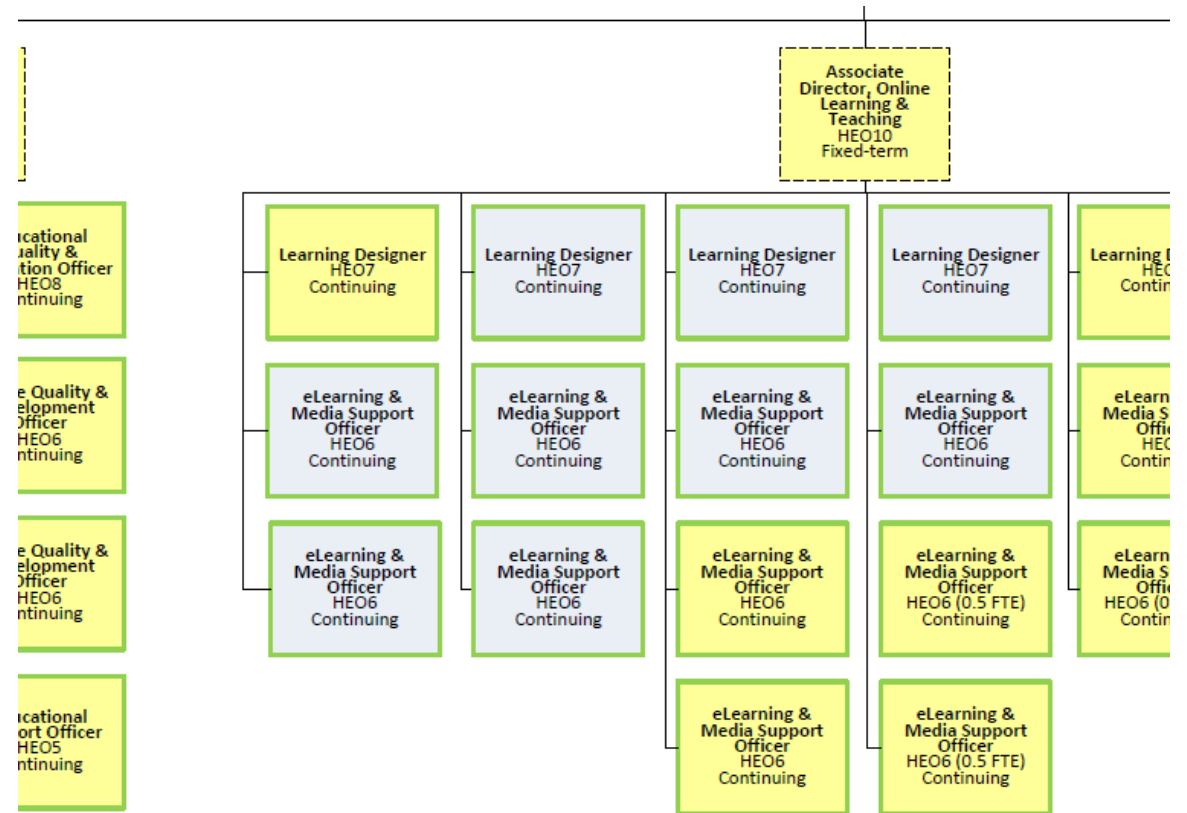
### 4. Academic workforce

- Had almost all blended roles - created a path to research only and teaching only roles
- Also re-opened VR options. Approximately 90 staff departed and created new positions
- Allowed Colleges to redesign their teams



# How – Design of structure

- Town halls for planning and to develop design principles
- Benchmarks & metrics for resources – in and out of sector
- What roles and how many – many diagrams!
- Looking at current roles – challenging due to many generalists
- **Worked:** Basic model for regular services, reduced duplication, not fully prescriptive allowing colleges to adapt/flex roles
- **Less successful:** Missed things that do not regularly occur e.g. accreditation, role gaps
- **Learning:** Design most of structure - some things to the “too hard basket” e.g. for us lab technical, rural & remote, data quality!



I need help with...

How can we help?



Education



Research



General



Facilities



Technology



Knowledge



Staff Ideas Gateway

## How – Technology

- Service One – all service requests completed in 2 minutes or less
- Internal facing websites through process
- Business analytics



# How – Communications

- Timing determined by EB
- Used broad reach emails, and individual emails
- 1:1 supervisor meetings for individuals affected
- Q&A style townhalls during the changes. Difficult but needed!
- Over-communicating almost impossible, high empathy essential, many critics.

**Worked:** 1:1s, keeping leadership together, comms plans, mapped ‘who had to do what’, engaged experts.

**Less successful:** Some comms ill timed, not audience specific.

**Learning:** No amount of “change management” is going to make someone “desire” job loss. ADKAR. Honesty – which will be challenged. Conspiracy assumed.



# How – Industrial & culture

- Need industrial expertise on site throughout.
- Staff – some fears/concerns unfounded. Ensure leadership is present, trust will take a hit.
- Culture – hit hard but recovers. Staff involvement, forward thinkers and new staff help rebalance and rebuild trust.
- Unions - were opposed, were vocal and critical, and remained so (even to this day).
- **Worked:** Heavily compliance focused – complied 100%.
- **Less successful:** Involving many people who were only minimally impacted, matching roles: used a 70% match in skills but discounted staff desire.
- **Learning:** Involve people in planning new roles.



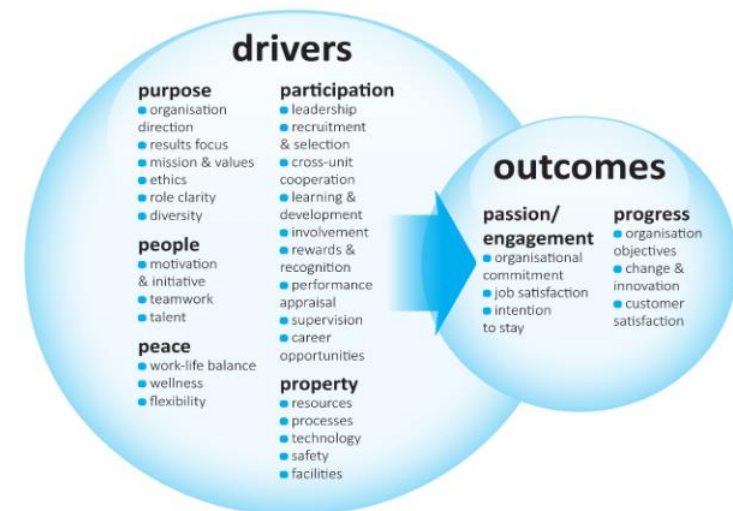
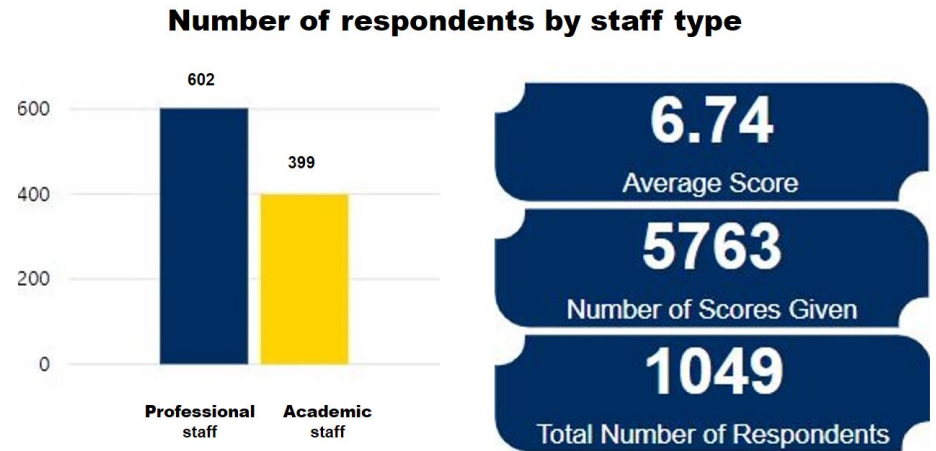
# How – Follow-up, fixing things, and time

- Ongoing workshops & Service Review after the changes.
- Accept that some things were wrong and adjust – everyone needs to be flexible.
- Takes time to settle, get to know the operating model and roles, and it's OK to adjust.
- Additional change and sponsorship training for leadership.

**Worked:** Services surveys, Annual performance reviews, YourVoice.

**Less successful:** Backward looking review.

**Learning:** The organisation is always changing – your model needs to be built for it.



# How – Next steps in maturing

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We now need:

- Leadership development going a few layers down
- Ongoing self measurement and asking staff what is and is not working
- Enabling and encouraging locally driven improvements – especially processes
- Constant refinement of operating model as business naturally changes
- Still better succession and internal opportunities, noticeable in the Your Voice data...



# Your Voice Results – work to still be done

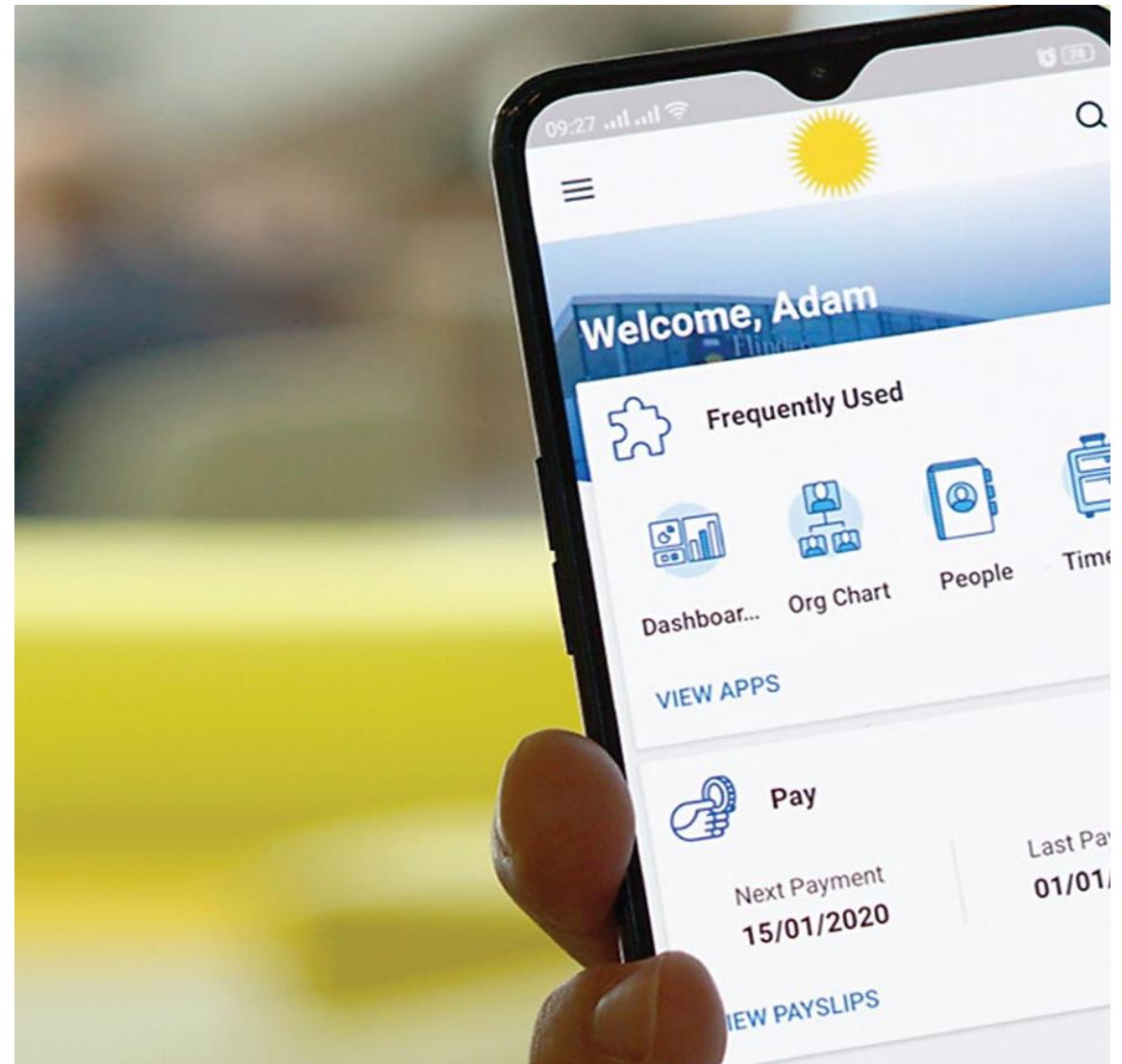
Category	2020 result	Increase from 2018	2020 result in comparison to sector
Career opportunities* – career progression	27%	0%	-11%
Career opportunities* – time and effort on career planning	22%	+3%	-13%
Change – how handled	27%	+13%	-5%
Processes – policies and procedures efficient and well-designed	28%	+10%	-9%

\*Rigid structure has reduced informal career development and role mobility

# Closing thoughts on challenging change

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- Perfect is the enemy of good – you have to start.
- It can be done – acceptance, willpower and leadership cohesion needed.
- You will make missteps and with emotions high, expect ample feedback.
- Must have a strong P&C team and best change skills as you can get – an argument for getting external assistance.
- Significant effort and challenge but resulting in improvements in performance and performance culture.





# Questions?



# STAY UPDATED



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