

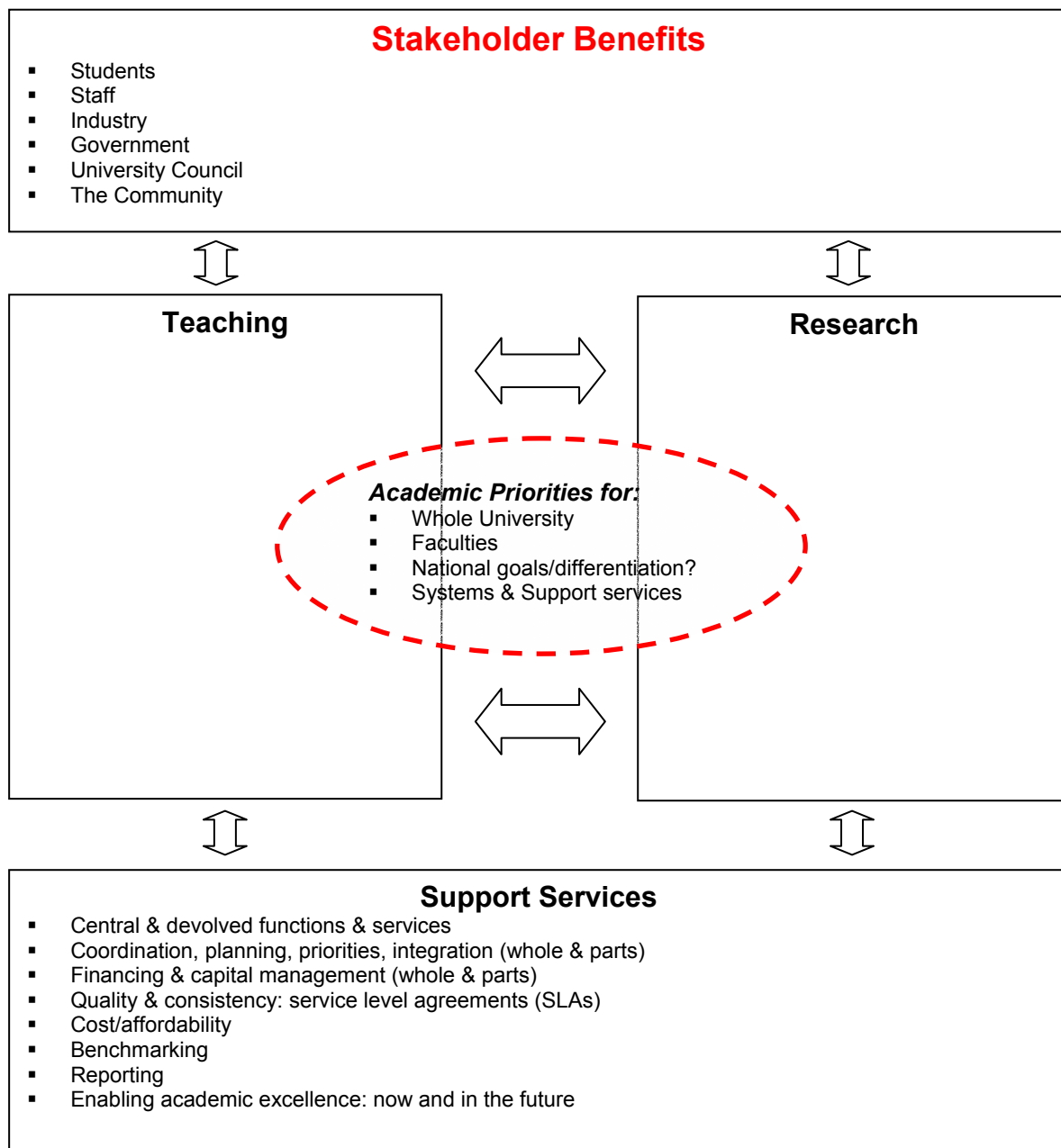
Driving Higher Education Performance in the 21st Century: *Supporting the Delivery of Stakeholder Benefits*

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1.0 High-level Conceptual Model for Higher Education Support Services

In a complex system, it is essential to pay constant attention to the requirements of the whole and its parts. This is often best managed by working out the most effective governance/coordination processes at the “interfaces” between the various functional and capability blocks (i.e. IT or HR is a function, research a capability).

The purpose of this high-level model is to provoke thought through stark simplicity. The model below is about as simple a rendering of a university as we could come up with. It does not represent formal reporting lines but renders one view of the benefit “flows” that must be managed and planned for.



2.0 Casestudy: Research Governance & Management

2.1 Purpose

The purpose of this short Casestudy is to conceptualise how substantial benefits might be delivered to key stakeholders in the research domain.

All models are wrong, some are useful. This model is almost certainly “wrong” but may assist Universities to conceptualise how support processes might work differently in the future.

2.2 Context

Research performance is a key driver of success for modern research-intensive Universities. However, in our experience, large research organisations such as Universities are struggling to understand how to provide the most effective support services for their research enterprise. For the purposes of this paper, the term “research support” includes functions such as IP management, contractual sign-off, finance, human resources, grant writing advice, grant administration, facilities, OHS, ethics, risk & compliance and reporting.

2.3 Leveraging research professionals

Professionals are the key value creators in knowledge-intensive organisations and professional services firms such as legal practices, engineering companies and Universities. The role of support services in a professional context is to constantly create new processes and structures to leverage professional time and expertise, and to actively reduce unproductive time. The necessity of clarity of purpose around the key outputs required of support services, and the implications for how such services should be structured and managed, is not always well understood.

For this reason, simply demanding higher levels of performance from support services or diagnosing where blame lies, will be fruitless without understanding the complexity of the system, the differing success drivers, and the key benefits stakeholders need.

2.4 Stakeholder Benefits Analysis

At a high level, stakeholders would appear to need the following generic benefits from support services. As will be noted, some benefits are unique to a one stakeholder group; others flow through the whole system.

Researchers/Research Centres/CRCs & Institutes

- Predictable and repeatable levels of transactional performance (turnaround times, data accuracy)
- Competitive cost (cheaper than alternatives for agreed level of service)
- Strategic advice (advice on IP, overseas grants, Foundations etc)
- Minimal opportunity costs (distraction from their core function as researchers)
- Brand enhancement (poor research support performance can damage the brand of the individual researcher, Centre or Institute, as can poor research funding applications)
- Administrative systems that leverage and enable academic work

Faculties

- Capacity to meet their specific needs for research support & advice (capability & performance tailored to their particular requirements)
- A greater number of active and productive researchers
- Predictable and repeatable levels of transactional performance (turnaround times, data accuracy)
- Competitive cost (cheaper than alternatives for agreed level of service)
- Strategic advice (advice on IP, overseas grants, Foundations etc)
- Integrated approach from the various support processes
- Effective project management
- More predictable research pipeline
- Greater proportion of grants to younger researchers
- Value for money/costs controlled

University as a whole

- Strategic advantage in the marketplace (better research support performance, greater return for expenditure on support services)
- Brand enhancement
- Key risks articulated & managed
- Opportunities realised (capacity to actively advise/support researchers & to assist them to land more opportunities more often)
- Maximum return/usage from research fixed assets; efficient use of capital
- A greater number of active and productive researchers
- More predictable research pipeline
- Systems for funding retention of key staff when funding is “just missed”, delayed or deferred
- Advantages of scale (access to world-class advice, capacity to “open doors” to international support and recognition)

Government/Community

- Solutions for key problems/concerns
- Return on funds invested; accountability
- Critique and critical commentary; “socially active”
- A more highly educated workforce/society at an acceptable cost
- Economic engine
- Global skills; regional leadership
- Responsive intellectual leadership

2.5 Experimental Governance Schematic for Research (or teaching)

In modern, complex organisations it is often more productive to think in terms of governance mechanisms for a key business process rather than in terms of reporting lines alone. Old-style command and control structures really are failing us as a means of making professional organisations productive. Most professionals manage at least two reporting lines, and many manage considerably more as they naturally operate in and through networks. There will always be an ongoing tension between professional networks and management reporting lines which needs constant hands-on attention. To assist in managing these tensions professionals – including academics and researchers - need to know what is held “tight” and what is held “loose” in their organisation, and why. That is, there must be a clear, agreed purpose, outcomes and operating principles on the one hand, and considerable personal autonomy in implementation/execution on the other.

Research support, for example, will increasingly need to operate as a series of cross-functional projects – reflecting the growth of cross-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary research - as well as maintaining and developing individual functions/disciplines such as legal support or human resources.

More effective coordination, collaboration & integration amongst and between individual support entities should streamline cost and improve overall performance both for Faculties, and the University as a whole. This is often achieved by separating strategy and governance from operational issues. By necessity, this way of working implies service providers have to manage their operational accountability and deliver benefits to clients (through SLAs) and their management accountability to their line manager (through performance management agreements). This does not imply that the adoption of formal matrix management is necessary but that support services need to deliver agreed benefits to several stakeholders in a timely, sustainable fashion.

Research Governance Schematic

