

COVID-19 Forum – TAG Senior Management 12.00, 17/03/20

Daniel Randell **(DR)** – USASA

Matt Posetti **(MP)** – Swinburne Student Union

Alison Scott **(AS)** – JCU

Lorena Carrasco **(LC)** – CITSA

General

MP Swinburne has paused all teaching for the rest of this week, suspended all face-to-face teaching going forward, and will return next week with online teaching wherever practical.

Swinburne is a dual-sector facility, the vocational teaching may prove to be difficult to deliver online.

Will closing their commercial outlets next week, looking to replace those, and BBQs, with an "essentials" food bank set up in their offices, operating on reduced hours.

Looking to move social events online on platforms such as Facebook Live, such as trivia nights, cocktail workshops, etc, to maintain community.

Important that they maintain a value of service for their fee-paying members.

AS No cases yet, it is believed that the warmer FNQ weather may be inhibiting its spread for now, although they are anticipating an outbreak late April to mid-May.

Working quickly to put a business continuity plan into place, as the university's current business continuity plan is effectively redundant in this instance as the disruption will potentially impact over a longer term than a typical natural disaster such as fire, flood or cyclone.

DR All face-to-face classes cancelled as of next week, migrating online.

USASA is very well prepared with their business continuity plan and are ready to go, although the assumption was of an up-to four-week suspension of classes, but the VC has announced the intention for classes to remain online until the end of June. A full campus closure is anticipated over the coming weeks.

University communications are unreasonably slow. As an example, USASA's Campus Fair is due to kick off tomorrow. Currently, the university has been unable to say whether it would be allowed to proceed.

Feedback from students is “please don’t keep telling me that we’re fine, tell me what you’re doing, and tell me what you’re doing to ensure that I am safe”.

Coordinating communications with the university to ensure a common message.

LC CIT is an ACT government facility, so they are working very closely with them. CITSA GM is a member of the Crisis Management Team.

Business continuity plan in plan, with focus on their extensive commercial operations: food outlets, bookshop, functions, printing, and cleaning.

As the ACT currently only has two COVID cases (and none on campus) students still be encouraged to attend class. This is also driven by their lack of technological capacity to deliver courses online.

TAG Many universities are bringing forward non-teaching weeks to absorb the current suspension of attendance.

TAG, as part of a tertiary sector peak representative group, is approaching the ATO with a proposal for GST relief for 2020 to mitigate the impact of the crisis. More information will be forthcoming shortly, pending discussions with ATO.

It is expected that assistance from the various universities may be muted as the financial impact of the crisis will be significant.

Staff and Closures

DR Student Support Counter staff will shut from next week until further notice.

All their casual students are students, and this is their only source of income. USASA will pay them for four weeks, reviewing every two weeks. The VC’s announcement of closure until the end of June has consequentially thrown a spanner in their calculations.

Advocacy, and Financial Counselling Teams are being bombarded with appointments and will transition over the next few days to only video and phone meetings.

Working from home checks mandatory for all staff to ensure they have safe work environments.

Supporting staff where necessary with improved internet connections or upgraded software and will cover incurred costs such as extra power consumption.

As campus is technically not closed, staff are not being told that they must work from home, rather it is done voluntarily.

Looking at the value of the work being done from home, aiming to ensure that it remains focused on creating and maintaining the student community, albeit remotely.

LC Some staff (eg cleaners) are not able to work from home in their current capacity. Looking to redeploy to other tasks that can be undertaken at home.

If staff forced to remain home, will be through the application of accrued leave.

MP Looking at blended rostering of on-campus and working from home. Tackle some projects that have been parked.

Working to a timeline of post-Easter but expects that that may change at any moments.

Good relationship with university communications ensures common messaging.

AS Essential staff will be working from home. ICT are encouraging them to take their PCs home to ensure that programs, apps and capabilities are universal, and thusly serviceable by ICT.

Commercial operations on campus are tenanted. These are run as a service, with little revenue capacity for the university. The bigger issue is if they fold permanently.

TAG There is a finite availability of accrued leave for any business. What is the solution if campus closures extend for months, and available leave is exhausted? What is the organisation prepared to cover in that event? Negative accrual can pose a problem going forward, creating a liability and a possible obligation of ongoing employment for that staff member.

How do we ensure that staff working from home have a safe work environment? Is self-assessment effective? FWA feels that employers who compel staff to undertake a self-assessment of their home working space have established concern for the well-being of staff and compliance to the law.

CentreLink is waiving the Newstart waiting period for casual staff.

Event Restrictions

DR All club events, on or off campus, have been cancelled, as have all USASA events, regardless of size.

TAG Considerations are changing so quickly. In the last 24 hours the view has gone from restricting attendance numbers at events, to cancelling all events.

University Assistance

MT SSU runs commercial operations at a service, not as a revenue and profit generator, with many simply breaking even. Consequently, any cessation to trade will only affect revenues, not the ability to remain viable.

LC Financial impact of closing campus will be significant but feels confident that their strong relationship with the institute will ensure that they are supported.

MP 50% of revenues is SSAF, 50% they generate themselves. Feels that there is no capacity whatsoever for the university to support them further through the crisis.

Feels that other revenue opportunities may arise through advertising local business on SSU social pages to engage students who are not on campus but still require food, services, etc from local establishments.

Student Views

MP Believes that students are not overly concerned. Situation is “humid, in a positive sense”.

DR Students are very unhappy with cancellations taking place next rather than immediately. Even rumbles of a protest. The university is greatly underprepared to convert immediately.