

Response to the Report of the Provost's Advisory Committee on Building a Resilient University of Waterloo

Through our core mission commitments in Academics and Research, together with our strong differentiating commitments in co-operative education and other forms of work-integrated learning, innovation, application, and entrepreneurship, we have continuously demonstrated the value of the University of Waterloo as an integrator with society. Through these powerful channels, we are both in touch with understanding the evolving needs of society, and also committed to meeting those needs through our teaching, learning, research, and service.

The past two decades of growth and expansion of the University has created numerous invaluable benefits and successes, but has also created challenges of awareness, communication, co-ordination, alignment, and efficiency for the organization, and resultant confusion and stress to our students and employees in navigating the University and its systems.

Many of our traditional processes, policies, structures, organizational features, and ways of working have functioned adequately to date. But with the growth and transformation of the institution in recent years, these systems have not kept pace with the modernization and integration that will be necessary to create the cross-institutional co-ordination and efficiency desired by the University of Waterloo community, nor are they robust enough to build the foundation for realizing the vision of short/medium and long-term transformation of the University.

The challenges of the COVID-19-related operational shifts have helped to galvanize the importance of transforming the University's approach to operational co-ordination issues in order to advance institutional strategy. This is especially relevant when considering the leadership importance of universities in general, and the University of Waterloo in particular, as essential, relevant, functional, and sustainable structures in society. Of course, many of the challenges faced by universities have been shared widely across the post-secondary education sector, government, industry, and society in general. These issues are not uncommon; thus, we are engaged in a transformative co-evolution of the University of Waterloo together with other universities, government, industry, and society.

Undertaking this foundational operational and cultural transformation is necessary, both to address current challenges and build a strong foundation for our next period of transformation, as has recently been articulated in the Waterloo at 100 vision.

I commissioned the Provost's Advisory Committee (PAC) on Building a Resilient University of Waterloo in May 2022, with a mandate to identify key insights that could help inform institutional approaches to creating a resilient, co-ordinated, and people-centred design to organizational operations and planning. We strive to create a vibrant University of Waterloo, and to be sensitive and supportive of the students, staff, and faculty that make up the

community. I asked Mary Wells, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering to Chair this Committee; and asked Norah McCrae, Associate Provost, Co-operative and Experiential Education; and Jeff Casello, Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs to Co-Chair. The scope of work for the PAC was outlined in the [Terms of Reference](#).

I asked the Committee to ensure co-ordination and avoid duplication of effort by integrating and amplifying the efforts already underway on several crucial processes related to operational, planning, and cultural transformation. The University remains focused on maintaining a vibrant and thriving campus. This has been our commitment to the community since our founding and continues to guide us toward achieving our vision of Waterloo at 100.

To support this commitment, I asked that a decision-making framework be provided to act as a foundation for resilient approaches, with a focus on creating a broad understanding and perpetuation of the shared vision, mission, values, and priorities of the institution. This framework would be used across many levels of the organization and stakeholders, in order to create the on-campus experience we strive for through transforming our operations and planning.

PAC Findings

After preliminary rounds of consultations, I agreed with the PAC's determination of the need to narrow the focus of the Terms of Reference to concentrate on engagement at the leadership level, consulting those decision-makers whose responsibility it is to operationalize strategic objectives and co-ordinate cross-functional resources for successful implementation. As a result, the PAC consulted with the President, the Provost, Executive Council members, Associate Deans, Chairs of departments, senior staff, and drew on some external perspectives in discovery interviews and the development of recommendations.

In August 2023, the PAC presented their findings in a [comprehensive report](#) that highlights prevalent obstacles in achieving resiliency. Recurring perspectives and insights that came from leadership focus groups identified opportunities for improvement when navigating existing structures. Challenges in how people, processes, and systems intersect across University operations led to the development of a Resiliency Framework, and six overarching recommendations.

At the centre of the Resiliency Framework are three fundamental components that support resiliency, characterized by the PAC as **sustainable, co-ordinated, and empowered**. These components are in turn, enabled by five key areas: **People & Leadership, Culture, Infrastructure, Governance, and Resources**. In addition, the theme of **"One University"** was emphasized, reinforcing the need to de-silo for improved co-ordination, collaboration, and co-operation between departments.

PAC Recommendations

PAC made six core recommendations for the University to focus on while building resiliency. Below is a summary of these recommendations and some preliminary actions taking place that support them. I will be updating the community as more activities occur that align with the Framework and these recommendations.

1. Create an accelerator for resiliency

As noted in the PAC report, some of this critical work has already begun, including the implementation of an **integrated planning approach** to budgeting and planning that will facilitate cross-functional awareness and co-ordination on operations and initiatives. This transformational approach to our institutional planning is the foundation upon which we will build infrastructure and process improvements that reinforce resiliency. At this stage in our journey towards a resilient Waterloo, integrated planning is the accelerator, and we will focus on the development of the organization and structure to support this. Many recommendations in the PAC report that are in progress will rely on this planning system to propel actions forward. As this develops, there will be a commitment to continued attention to the fundamental objective of identifying opportunities for using the PAC Framework.

2. Shift our University culture towards “One University”

Culture-related initiatives like establishing and embedding new institutional values, implementing the WatSEE Framework, and moving towards “One University” by reimagining performance management and the rewards model, are all relying on integrated planning approaches. These projects are deep into the planning process and are progressing quickly into the implementation stage.

3. People and leadership (an empowered University)

Creating an “empowered” University through people and leadership supports is another recommendation that is relying on integrated planning. Programs that will provide learning opportunities for leadership in relation to equity, diversity, inclusion, anti-racism, decolonization, and Indigenous peoples in Canada; and the amplification of existing professional development programs, such as the OHD Leadership Foundations, the Academic Leadership Program, and Leadership Essentials will be driven forward with streamlined co-ordination through an integrated plan and dedicated leadership development.

And of course, creating an empowered University entails a commitment to enhancing the community through increased campus supports and accessibility. Aligning and co-ordinating portfolios with similar functions and needs will be critical to attain

streamlined operations, and is both an organizational imperative as well as a leadership challenge. The University will commit to developing and supporting leaders prepared to work in co-ordinated ways across the University.

4. Infrastructure (the thriving University)

This recommendation aims to address issues related to both our physical and IT infrastructure, and includes initiatives to create an updated Campus Master Plan. Integrating space and workforce planning, campus development, and deferred maintenance planning are integral to co-ordinated development of the institutional infrastructure, as are co-ordinated user-focused IT business systems and infrastructure.

5. Governance, administration, and decision-making (the co-ordinated University)

Creating streamlined operations through a de-siloed approach and refreshed annual work planning is key to achieving a co-ordinated University. This also includes Board of Governors and Senate governance reviews to create better communications and co-ordination, as well as major reorganizations that have occurred (and will occur) to streamline portfolio operations. Work will focus on awareness and alignment across groups and levels, and the cascading of plans, priorities, and actions across the University.

6. Resources (the sustainable University)

Prioritizing the use of resources is fundamentally important in building the “One University” concept and in the facilitation of resiliency. Integrated planning and the Waterloo Budget Model will direct the prioritization and processes related to these resources across the University in a cascading way, ensuring that execution of initiatives and the implementation of resources is co-ordinated and efficient.

This comprehensive PAC report and complementary Resiliency Framework has provided an approach to address the key areas that will help us attain our vision of Waterloo at 100. The recommendations from the report will inform, guide, and drive institutional planning and operational transformation, and will structure discussions and the reporting process on progress towards milestones.

I intend to place current and future institutional projects and initiatives within the context of the Resiliency Framework, and to highlight in communications and on the [Provost’s Advisory Committee on Building a Resilient University of Waterloo webpage](#) the connectedness of these projects and initiatives to the Framework and the recommendations of the PAC report. This will

ensure that the community has insights into the strategic connections of our work, with ongoing access to a repository of institutional initiatives in the context of the PAC report.