Standing Committee on Social Issues

New South Wales university governance

Final report

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New South Wales university governance – Final report

September 2026

Chair: Hon Dr Sarah Kaine MLC

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Terms of reference

1. That the Standing Committee on Social Issues inquire into and report on the crisis in the New South Wales university sector, as raised by the petition from 2,619 petitioners of New South Wales dated 7 August 2025 to the Legislative Council, and in particular:
    (a) the current legislative governance frameworks that regulate universities in New South Wales, in particular:
        (i) the structure, powers and responsibilities of university councils as defined in each university's enabling Act
        (ii) the consistency and variation in governance provisions across the existing New South Wales public university Acts
        (iii) alignment of governance practices with the objects and functions outlined in each university's Act
        (iv) reporting obligations to the NSW Parliament, Department of Education and NSW Auditor General under the Acts, including compliance with these reporting obligations
        (v) the powers granted to universities under their Acts to engage in commercial activities and manage controlled entities
        (vi) powers and responsibilities of the Minister under the Acts.
    (b) the delineation of responsibilities between the state and federal jurisdiction for the regulation and oversight of universities
    (c) the role of governance structures in safeguarding the public mission of universities, academic freedom, research ethics, student welfare, and social outcomes
    (d) the accountability of university councils, in particular:
        (i) the qualifications, experience and appointment processes for council members,
        including elected staff, student and graduate representatives
        (ii) mechanisms for dismissal, remuneration, and conflict of interest management as permitted under the Acts
        (iii) the extent to which councils reflect contemporary governance standards and stakeholder representation
        (iv) public access to council decisions, strategic plans, and financial reports.
    (e) the ability for current legislative and governance arrangements to provide oversight of university staffing, financial management, and use of external consultants

(f) the ability for current legislative and governance arrangements to support the accessibility of university education and derive public benefit, in particular:

  (i) supporting diversity, inclusion and access for disadvantaged groups

  (ii) promotion of regional development, Indigenous engagement, and community
  partnerships

  (iii) advancing public discourse and civic responsibility.

(g) the reporting and oversight of controlled entities including international campuses

(h) opportunities for legislative reform to strengthen governance, transparency and accountability considering, in particular:

  (i) best practice governance arrangements for universities in other Australian
  jurisdictions and internationally

  (ii) lessons from recent audits, inquiries and performance reviews of New South Wales universities.

(i) any other related matters.

The terms of reference for the inquiry were self-referred by the committee on 18 August 2025.[1]

[1] *Minutes*, Standing Committee on Social Issues, 18 August 2025, Item 3.

Committee details

Committee members

Hon Dr Sarah Kaine MLC	Australian Labor Party	*Chair*
Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC	The Nationals	*Deputy Chair*
Ms Abigail Boyd MLC*	The Greens	
Hon Anthony D'Adam MLC	Australian Labor Party	
Hon Taylor Martin MLC	Independent	
Hon Rachel Merton MLC	Liberal Party	
Hon Bob Nanva MLC	Australian Labor Party	
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Chair's foreword

Public universities play an essential role in the social, economic, cultural and civic life of New South Wales. They are entrusted with significant public resources and responsibilities, including educating generations, advancing research and innovation, supporting communities, and contributing to informed public debate. The success of these institutions depends not only on their academic excellence but also on governance arrangements that are effective, transparent, accountable, representative and aligned with the public purposes for which universities were established.

This final report presents the culmination of the Standing Committee on Social Issues' inquiry into the New South Wales university sector. Building on our interim report, which focused on governance concerns at the University of Technology Sydney and the University of Wollongong, this report examines governance arrangements and decisions across the remaining eight universities established specifically by New South Wales enabling Acts: Macquarie University, the University of Sydney, the University of New England, the University of Newcastle, Charles Sturt University, Western Sydney University, Southern Cross University, and the University of New South Wales. These Acts not only establish the universities as statutory bodies, but also define their public functions, governance arrangements and responsibilities to the people of New South Wales.

This report continues our initial examination of the escalating reliance on consultants across the tertiary sector, and further examines the broader legislative and policy settings under which each institution operates. Through extensive evidence from staff, students, university leaders, experts and other stakeholders, the committee has undertaken a detailed examination of the structures, practices and cultures that shape decision-making across the sector, and how they must be improved.

The evidence gathered throughout this inquiry highlights concerns that extend well beyond any single institution. While universities operate in a challenging financial and policy environment, the committee repeatedly heard that current governance systems do not provide the transparency, accountability and effective oversight expected of publicly funded institutions. Across the sector, participants voiced concerns about increasing corporatisation, the concentration of decision-making authority among a relatively small group of senior executives and council members, declining opportunities for meaningful staff and student participation, diminished collegial governance, inadequate transparency in respect of major decisions and expenditure, and extensive reliance on external consultants. The committee was also troubled by evidence of declining trust within university communities, poor workplace culture and staff wellbeing, fears of reprisal among staff who raise concerns, and governance arrangements that often fail to adequately explain or justify decisions with significant consequences for staff, students and the broader community.

Universities operate within a complex framework of institutional autonomy, enabling legislation, Commonwealth funding and regulatory arrangements, and diverse governance structures. The committee strongly supports the principle of university autonomy. However, the evidence before us suggests that autonomy must be accompanied by stronger accountability arrangements than currently exist. The inquiry has revealed systemic weaknesses in governance structures and legislative settings that are no longer consistently delivering the transparency, representative decision-making, effective oversight and public confidence expected of public institutions. In the committee's view, the sector has, over time, drifted too far towards corporate models of governance and management, diminishing the centrality of universities' statutory purpose and public mission: the promotion of scholarship, research, free inquiry, the interaction of research and teaching, and academic excellence. The committee considers that effective governance reform must be grounded in reform of the universities' enabling acts to strengthen the statutory purposes and obligations of universities.

Throughout this inquiry, the committee was reminded that universities derive their legitimacy not only from academic achievement, but from public trust. Preserving that trust requires governance arrangements that are open, representative and accountable, and that consistently place the long-term public mission of universities ahead of short-term managerial priorities. At its heart, this inquiry is about ensuring that public universities remain accountable to the communities they serve. Universities are not private corporations; they are public institutions established by Parliament, supported by public resources, and entrusted with advancing education, research and the public good. Their governance arrangements must reflect that public responsibility.

This report therefore sets out a comprehensive framework for governance reform across New South Wales universities. Its recommendations are directed at reorienting university governance towards public stewardship, strengthening the representation of staff and students in decision-making, improving transparency and accountability, enhancing conflict of interest safeguards, strengthening oversight of executive decision-making and remuneration, improving scrutiny of consultant expenditure and controlled entities, protecting staff and student wellbeing, and restoring confidence in collegial governance processes. The committee considers that these reforms are necessary to ensure that universities remain focused on their legislated purposes and continue to serve the people of New South Wales in the manner expected of public institutions.

The committee recognises the dedication of the many staff, students and university leaders who contribute each day to the success of higher education in New South Wales. Throughout this inquiry, we heard powerful evidence from individuals whose commitment to teaching, research and public service remains unwavering despite significant organisational challenges. Their insights have been invaluable in informing the committee's work and recommendations.

I thank all those who contributed to the inquiry through submissions, correspondence and evidence at public hearings. I also acknowledge the constructive contributions of my fellow committee members and the professionalism and dedication of the secretariat throughout this substantial inquiry. It is the committee's hope that the findings and recommendations contained in this report will contribute to a renewed focus on transparency, accountability, collegiality and public purpose across the New South Wales university sector, helping to ensure that our universities continue to thrive in the service of students, staff and the wider community.

Hon Dr Sarah Kaine MLC
Committee Chair

Findings

Finding 1 **191**
The governance structures for New South Wales universities are not fit for purpose, nor implemented in such a way as to enable public confidence.

Finding 2 **192**
In the context of financial and policy challenges, universities have swung too far towards corporatisation at the expense of their fundamental public mission of education, research and service to the broader community.

Finding 3 **192**
The ascendancy of corporate management of universities, and the decisions that have followed, are having a profound impact on universities' human capital and academic infrastructure, with significant consequences for staff, students, and the broader university community.

Finding 4 **196**
The enabling Acts of New South Wales universities do not recognise the wellbeing, health and safety of staff and students, including the importance of psychologically safe and accessible learning and working environments, as core considerations in university governance and decision-making.

Finding 5 **198**
There is insufficient external oversight of university governance across all New South Wales universities, despite them receiving substantial public funding and performing significant functions in the service of the public.

Finding 6 **199**
Current legislative arrangements provide insufficient transparency regarding the appointment and reappointment of senior university office holders, and insufficient mechanisms for addressing serious governance failures.

Finding 7 **200**
There is insufficient transparency, prevention and management of potential conflicts of interest for university executives and staff, as well as for university council members.

Finding 8 **201**
Staff can be reluctant to raise concerns regarding governance, management practices or organisational decision-making due to fears of adverse consequences, reprisal or damage to future career prospects.

Finding 9 **203**
The governance arrangements established under New South Wales university enabling Acts do not sufficiently support broad and balanced representation on university councils.

Finding 10 **204**
There is insufficient transparency in the direct appointment of university council members, including regarding appointees' skills and experience, and the extent to which they meet the requirements of the role. There is also insufficient independent scrutiny of university council appointment processes, thus limiting public accountability and confidence in appointment decisions.

Finding 11 **205**
The effectiveness of university councils depends not only on their composition and appointment processes but also on the governance capability of their members. There is no consistent requirement across New South Wales universities for induction and ongoing governance training for council members.

Finding 12 **208**
University councils, senates and boards lack access to an independent governance support function with the authority, capability and professional standards necessary to support effective oversight of management decisions.

Finding 13 **210**
There is insufficient transparency regarding university council decisions, including the financial basis for their decisions, despite their significant impacts on staff and students.

Finding 14 **213**
There is insufficient transparency in the processes used to determine executive remuneration at New South Wales universities.

Finding 15 **215**
There is insufficient transparency regarding the purpose, justification and outcomes of consultancy expenditure by New South Wales universities.

Finding 16 **217**
There is insufficient transparency, accountability and informed consent regarding the sharing of university staff and student data with third-party organisations for benchmarking, analytics and comparative performance purposes.

Finding 17 **218**
There is insufficient transparency regarding the activities, governance and financial performance of university-controlled entities and commercial operations.

Finding 18 **218**
Variations in accounting presentation and disclosure practices make it difficult for staff, students and the public to understand the financial position of universities and assess claims regarding financial pressures.

Finding 19 **219**
Consultation processes within New South Wales universities are often undertaken after key decisions have effectively been made, limiting opportunities for meaningful staff and student participation in decision-making.

Finding 20 **223**
Collegial governance arrangements have been weakened at a number of New South Wales universities, reducing opportunities for academic expertise, and staff and student perspectives to inform institutional decision-making.

Finding 21 **225**
The recurring underpayment of staff across New South Wales universities reflects a systemic failure of governance, compliance oversight and organisational culture.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 **194**

That the New South Wales Government undertake a comprehensive review of the enabling Acts of all New South Wales universities to reorient universities towards their public mission of education, research and service to the broader community. In doing so, it should have regard to each of the recommendations of this report and the submissions to this inquiry.

Recommendation 2 **196**

That the New South Wales Government, as part of its review of university enabling Acts, consider amendments to the legislation to:

- require university governing bodies to have regard to the wellbeing, health and safety of staff and students when exercising their functions and making significant strategic, organisational and operational decisions
- promote psychologically safe workplaces and prevent bullying, harassment and other harmful workplace behaviours
- enhance the objects and functions of universities to explicitly recognise the provision of safe, effective and accessible learning environments for students
- enhance the statutory functions and duties of governing bodies to expressly include responsibility for promoting the wellbeing, welfare and educational experience of students, and the wellbeing, health and safety of staff, when making decisions affecting university communities.

Recommendation 3 **197**

That, in order to better protect the psychosocial safety of staff and address fears of reprisal, the New South Wales Government, as part of its review of the enabling Acts, consider how the legislation can provide checks and balances on the very significant power held by Heads of School, Deans and other senior leaders.

Recommendation 4 **198**

That the Legislative Council Portfolio Committee responsible for Tertiary Education:

- annually inquire into and report on universities' fulfilment of their responsibilities under their respective enabling Acts
- commence its annual inquiry following the lodgement of the universities' annual reports in NSW Parliament.

Recommendation 5 **199**

That the New South Wales Government improve legislative provisions relating to the:

- transparency of appointments and reappointments of Vice-Chancellors and Chancellors, including safeguards such as limits on successive

terms of appointments, to strengthen accountability and public confidence
- appointment, performance oversight, suspension and removal of Chancellors, Vice-Chancellors and university councillors, to ensure there are clear and effective accountability mechanisms where serious governance failures occur.

Recommendation 6 **200**

That the New South Wales Government:

- require regular conflict of interest declarations by senior executives and staff exercising significant financial, procurement or decision-making responsibilities
- mandate New South Wales universities to maintain a centralised register of interests for all executives, staff and council members
- mandate New South Wales universities to maintain and publish a public register of interests for all university council members and university executives.

Recommendation 7 **201**

That the New South Wales Government consider establishing an independent external mechanism through which university staff can confidentially raise governance, integrity and maladministration concerns, with appropriate whistleblower protections.

Recommendation 8 **203**

That the New South Wales Government amend the enabling Acts for all New South Wales universities to strengthen representative governance by:

- increasing minimum requirements for 50 per cent elected academic staff, professional staff and student representation on university councils
- recognising that relevant governance, financial and institutional expertise may be drawn from within the university community as well as from external appointees
- achieving greater diversity in university council membership, including through the appointment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disabilities and individuals from other underrepresented groups, as well as from local communities, whose lived experience can contribute to effective governance and public accountability
- requiring elected representatives to be represented on all standing council committees and subcommittees
- requiring elected representatives to constitute a majority on all standing council committees and subcommittees that deal with:
  - appointments to senior leadership positions
  - appointments to university councils
  - the remuneration of senior executives

- ensuring elected representatives are able to seek advice and input from the constituencies they represent in performing their governance responsibilities
- clarifying that, for the purposes of minimum elected representation requirements and membership of council committees and subcommittees, ex-officio members are not to be counted as elected representatives
- requiring university enabling Acts to provide, where practicable, for at least one graduate or alumni representative on each governing body, elected by that institution's alumni
- requiring the president, or equivalent position, of the student representative council to be an ex-officio member of the university council in addition to any other elected student representatives.

Recommendation 9 **204**

That, in order to improve effectiveness and transparency in university council appointments, the New South Wales Government:

- consider establishing an independent review of university council appointment processes that examines options to strengthen public accountability and external oversight of appointments, including consideration of alternative governance models used in Australian and international universities
- seek to amend the enabling Acts for all New South Wales universities to require them to develop, maintain and publish a skills matrix for university council appointments, including an assessment of appointed members against the skills matrix in their annual reports.

Recommendation 10 **206**

That the New South Wales Government require universities to provide induction and ongoing specific governance training for university council members beyond the existing practice of completing the Australian Institute of Company Directors course, including training on:

- the public mission of universities
- conflicts of interest
- higher education regulation
- stakeholder engagement
- the duties and obligations imposed on council members under university enabling legislation
- practical guidance on how council members are to discharge their statutory duties and responsibilities in decision-making, including balancing financial considerations with the educational, research and public interest functions of universities.

Recommendation 11 **208**

That the New South Wales Government amend the enabling legislation for each New South Wales university to require the establishment of an independent university

council secretariat at each university, accountable to and operating under the direction of the university's governing body rather than university management. Each independent university council secretariat would provide professional governance support, advice and administrative services to the members of the governing body and be subject to a legislated code of conduct and minimum professional standards.

Recommendation 12 **208**

That the Department of Education appoint, through an open and merit-based process, the initial Head of the independent university council secretariat to be established at each university. All other members of each secretariat are to be employed by the Head of that secretariat.

Recommendation 13 **208**

That the New South Wales Government establish and support a network of independent university council secretariats across New South Wales universities to enable sharing of best practice across the sector.

Recommendation 14 **210**

That, to improve transparency in university council decision making, the New South Wales Government:

- require New South Wales universities to publish the minutes of university council meetings, including the rationale for major decisions affecting staff and students, subject to appropriate confidentiality requirements
- review the operation of commercial-in-confidence provisions to ensure they are used only where necessary and do not prevent disclosure of matters of significant public interest
- require universities not to rely on adjusted financial measures in the public justification of restructures, budget decisions and other significant organisational changes where those measures do not accord with audited financial statements, and to disclose any material differences between adjusted and audited results
- consider further measures to require greater transparency about, and justification of, the financial rationale for restructures and other significant decisions.

Recommendation 15 **211**

That the New South Wales Government improve legislative provisions for transparency and accountability in university executive decision-making.

Recommendation 16 **214**

That the New South Wales Government:

- require universities to disclose in their annual reports in a standardised format:
  - the process and considerations by which remuneration for their Vice-Chancellors and senior executives is determined, including

performance measures, key performance indicators, bonuses, incentive arrangements, allowances, loan arrangements, reimbursements and other material non-salary benefits
  - the performance against the key performance indicators and performance measures used to assess Vice-Chancellors and senior executives
  - whether remuneration decisions were informed by external benchmarking, remuneration frameworks, independent advice, details of the methodology used, or other comparative assessment processes.
- require the detailed rationale for any review or adjustment of remuneration for Vice-Chancellors and senior executives to be published in the university council minutes
- consider whether an independent remuneration framework or advisory mechanism would improve transparency, consistency and public confidence in the determination of remuneration for Vice-Chancellors and senior executives.

Recommendation 17 **215**

That, to enable greater transparency in consultancy appointments in the university sector, the New South Wales Government:

- require universities to disclose in their annual reports details of major consultancy expenditures, including their purpose, justification, procurement process and, where practicable, the outcomes achieved
- develop a mandatory procurement and reporting guideline for consultancy engagements that includes requirements to seek competitive tenders unless an exemption applies, to publish reasons for direct procurement, and for greater public disclosure of consultancy contracts.

Recommendation 18 **217**

That the New South Wales Government prohibit New South Wales universities from providing staff or student data to private third-party organisations for sector-wide benchmarking, analytics or comparative performance products unless the explicit informed consent of affected staff and students has first been obtained, in line with the National Health and Medical Research Council's Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. In doing so, the Government should require universities to:

- publicly disclose all third-party benchmarking and analytics arrangements involving staff or student data
- clearly inform staff and students how their data will be collected, used, shared, retained and incorporated into benchmarking products
- provide meaningful opportunities for staff and students to opt out of secondary uses of their data without adverse consequences
- publish details of governance arrangements applying to benchmarking programs, including the categories of data shared, participating

organisations and the purposes for which benchmarking outputs may be used
- ensure independent oversight of benchmarking arrangements that are relied upon in significant decisions relating to organisational restructuring, workload allocation, staffing levels or service delivery.

Recommendation 19 **218**

That the New South Wales Government strengthen public reporting requirements for university-controlled entities and commercial operations, including disclosure of governance arrangements, financial performance, key risks and their contribution to the university's public mission. Reporting requirements should apply on a mandatory basis and include sufficient detail to enable the Parliament, staff, students and the public to understand the activities and performance of university-controlled entities and their relationship to the university's statutory objects and functions.

Recommendation 20 **219**

That the New South Wales Government, in consultation with NSW Treasury and relevant regulators, establish enhanced reporting requirements for university annual reports, including explanatory disclosure of significant accounting treatments, contingent labour expenditure, consultancy expenditure, asset classifications and material changes in financial reporting practices. These requirements should promote greater consistency and comparability between universities and include sufficient explanatory information to allow non-specialist readers to understand the impact of significant accounting treatments and financial reporting decisions.

Recommendation 21 **220**

That, to bring about more genuine consultation within all universities, the New South Wales Government consider:

- amending university enabling Acts to require universities to demonstrate how staff and student feedback has informed major organisational change proposals before decisions are finalised
- additional mechanisms to enhance cultural and practical change in this regard including requirements to:
  - publish consultation outcomes, including responses to key stakeholder concerns and explanations of how feedback was incorporated into final decisions
  - demonstrate that consultation occurred before decisions were substantially settled
  - provide reasons where stakeholder feedback was not adopted.

Recommendation 22 **223**

That the New South Wales Government review governance provisions in university enabling Acts to strengthen the role of collegial governance bodies in major academic and organisational decisions. The review should consider:

- mechanisms to ensure that academic boards and other collegial governance bodies have a meaningful role in significant academic, strategic and organisational decisions
- mechanisms to strengthen accountability, transparency and staff participation in the appointment and operation of academic leadership positions, including Deans, Executive Deans and Heads of School
- relevant international governance models that promote representative participation, independent scrutiny and accountability while maintaining institutional effectiveness.

Recommendation 23 **225**

That the New South Wales Government require universities to:

- ensure governing bodies and senior executives demonstrate effective oversight of wage compliance, workforce management and payroll assurance, including independent auditing and clear accountability for underpayments
- develop and maintain in-house expertise in the interpretation and application of industrial instruments, including awards and enterprise agreements, and strengthen institutional knowledge of industrial relations systems and laws to support compliance, reduce reliance on external consultants and minimise the risk of underpayments
- report annually on wage compliance assurance activities, identified underpayments, remediation actions and controls implemented to prevent recurrence, including the use and oversight of contingent labour arrangements.

Conduct of inquiry

The terms of reference for the inquiry were self-referred by the committee on 18 August 2025.

The committee received 138 submissions and six supplementary submissions.

The committee held eight public hearings: seven at Parliament House in Sydney and one in Newcastle.

Inquiry related documents are available on the committee's website, including submissions, hearing transcripts, tabled documents, correspondence, answers to questions on notice and answers to supplementary questions.

Chapter 1 Introduction

This inquiry into the New South Wales university sector commenced at what is widely seen as a time of crisis in universities around Australia. It began as a result of a petition from 2,619 petitioners to the Legislative Council documenting concerns about job losses, course cuts and inadequate governance practices across NSW universities. It proceeded on the premise that public universities play a critical role in the social, economic and civic life of New South Wales. They are entrusted with substantial public resources and responsibilities, including the provision of higher education, the advancement of research and innovation, and service to the broader community. Given this public purpose, it is essential that the governance arrangements which guide universities are robust, transparent and aligned with the long-term interests of students, staff and the people of New South Wales.

This final report concludes the committee's detailed examination of ten universities around the State. Two of these, the University of Technology Sydney and the University of Wollongong, were the focus of our interim report. The remaining eight – Macquarie University, the University of Sydney, the University of New England, the University of Newcastle, Charles Sturt University, Western Sydney University, the University of New South Wales and Southern Cross University – are examined in turn in this report. In addition, as in the interim report, the committee makes detailed conclusions and recommendations in respect of the use of consultants and governance requirements and practices across the sector.

This first chapter provides background information setting the scene for the remainder of the report. It sets out how the committee conducted the inquiry, then outlines significant external developments relevant to the inquiry. It then summarises the recommendations made in the committee's interim report, along with the NSW Government's response to them.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.1 The inquiry was self-referred on 18 August 2025.

1.2 The committee received 138 submissions, as well as additional information, answers to questions on notice, and responses to supplementary questions.

1.3 The submissions are listed at appendix 1. Public submissions are available on the committee's website.

1.4 The committee held the following public hearings:

- Sydney – Friday 7 November 2025
- Sydney – Wednesday 17 December 2025
- Sydney – Wednesday 1 April 2026
- Sydney – Wednesday 29 April 2026

- Newcastle – Thursday 30 April 2026
- Sydney – Friday 12 June 2026
- Sydney – Monday 13 July 2026.

1.5 A list of the witnesses who gave evidence at the hearings is provided at appendix 2.

1.6 Links to hearing schedules, transcripts of evidence, answers to questions on notice, responses to supplementary questions, and other documents are available on the committee's website.

1.7 On 8 April 2026, the committee presented an interim report.

Acknowledgements

1.8 The committee thanks everyone who contributed to the inquiry through written submissions and public hearings. It particularly acknowledges those who shared their personal experiences, which helped shape this report's findings.

Context and external developments

1.9 The inquiry has attracted public attention, including media coverage highlighting concerns about governance and oversight in the university sector.[2] In addition, during the course of the inquiry the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption commenced its own inquiry into governance practices at the University of Wollongong, the NSW Auditor-General's released a report on university finances and governance, and the Australian Government announced the development of new requirements on higher education providers to strengthen university governance.

1.10 Together, these developments reflect broader concerns about transparency, accountability and governance practices across New South Wales universities, which underpin the matters examined in this report.

NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), Operation Scandi

1.11 On 2 June 2026, ICAC announced that it would conduct a three-week public investigation into allegations concerning the University of Wollongong, Operation Scandi. The ICAC hearings ran from 22 June to 10 July 2026.[3]

[2] Sally Rawsthorne, '"Not fit for purpose": Two NSW universities called out by inquiry', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 April 2026, p 1; Michael McGowan and Sally Rawsthorne, 'ICAC attends campus to investigate University of Wollongong', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 May 2026, p 1.

[3] Media release, Independent Commission Against Corruption, 'ICAC to hold public inquiry into allegations concerning the University of Wollongong', 2 June 2026.

1.12 Notably, the ICAC investigation included whether (now former) Chancellor Michael Still, or any other University of Wollongong staff or contractor, partially exercised their official functions by failing to manage the conflict of interest relating to the employment of Mr John Dewar AO as interim Vice-Chancellor and the engagement of KordaMentha Pty Ltd.

1.13 The investigation further examined:

- whether the University's Chief Governance Officer and Secretary, Alyssa White, or any other University of Wollongong staff, partially exercised their official functions by intentionally subverting recruitment processes for governance roles, to benefit persons associated with Alyssa White.
- whether, since 2024, Chancellor Michael Still, Alyssa White, or any other University of Wollongong staff or contractors, partially and/or dishonestly exercised their official functions by improperly awarding or influencing the award of work to Aspirall Consulting International Pty Ltd.[4]

1.14 At the time of the conclusion of this committee's report, ICAC had not yet handed down its findings.

NSW Auditor-General's *Universities 2025* report

1.15 On 11 June 2026, the NSW Auditor-General tabled the *Universities 2025* report. All universities received 'clean' audit opinions, but the audit identified widespread control deficiencies, particularly in information technology and cyber security, governance oversight, and payroll. It also found systemic governance risks, including weak conflict of interest processes, limited oversight of contingent labour and consultancy spending, and financial pressures driven by reliance on international student revenue.[5]

1.16 The Auditor-General's report also highlighted the university sector's reliance on a small number of major consulting firms, a matter that has been a recurring theme for this inquiry. The five consultants receiving the highest expenditure across the sector in 2025 were:

- Deloitte
- KPMG
- KordaMentha

[4] NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption, *University of Wollongong - allegations concerning Chief Governance Officer and Secretary, Chancellor and staff (Operation Scandi)*, https://www.icac.nsw.gov.au/investigations/current-investigations/2026/university-of-wollongong---operation-scandi.

[5] Audit Office of New South Wales, *Universities 2025* (11 June 2026), https://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/our-work/reports/universities-2025.

- McKinsey & Company
- Ernest & Young.[6]

1.17 Three of the Auditor-General's six recommendations related directly to the content of this inquiry. These were recommendations 2, 4 and 5 listed below:

2. Universities should ensure that engagement of consultants is supported by:
   a) adherence to the procurement policy
   b) robust assessment of whether an exemption to the procurement policy is required
   c) performing conflict of interest checks
   d) post-completion assessments to confirm services delivered met the university's objectives
4. Universities should strengthen policies and procedures for managing conflicts of interest by:
   a) requiring all employees to make annual declarations of interests, potential conflicts and secondary employment, including nil returns
   b) providing clear guidance on the types of interests to be disclosed
   c) maintaining an up-to-date centralised register of interests covering all employees.
5. Universities should strengthen the governance of controlled entities by clarifying roles and responsibilities over legislative compliance for each of the entities.[7]

Australian Government announcement

1.18 On 13 July 2026, the Federal Minister for Education, the Hon Jason Clare MP announced the establishment of a set of University Governance Principles to be incorporated into the Higher Education Standards Framework Amendment (Threshold Standards) Instrument 2026 to require higher education providers to strengthen university governance.[8]

1.19 The Principles were developed by the Australian Government's Expert Council on University Governance. Universities will be required to report to regulator TEQSA annually against these new Principles on an "if not why not" basis.[9]

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6 Answers to questions on notice, Mr Bola Oyetunji, New South Wales Auditor-General, 15 July 2026, p 1.

7 Audit Office of New South Wales, *Universities 2025* (11 June 2026), p 6.

8 Media Release, Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education, 'Stronger standards for university governance and tackling racism', 13 July 2026.

9 Media Release, Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education, 'Stronger standards for university governance and tackling racism', 13 July 2026.

1.20 The Principles set expectations across eight key themes:

> Accountability: Governance structures and accountabilities are well-defined, effective and transparent.
>
> Diversity of perspectives: Composition of the governing body enables purpose and performance.
>
> Independence: Academic standards and freedom are respected and protected.
>
> Transparency: Purpose, strategy and performance are clear and openly communicated.
>
> Trustworthy: The university operates lawfully, ethically, responsibly, and consistent with its public purpose.
>
> Inclusive and responsive: Expectations of the university's community and stakeholders are understood, respected and responded to.
>
> Sustainable: Risks are understood and managed effectively.
>
> Responsible: Workforce and remuneration are structured fairly and responsibly.[10]

1.21 The committee notes that, with the exception relating to academic standards and freedom, all of these principles concern matters of institutional governance, accountability, transparency, risk management and remuneration. As such they fall squarely within the New South Wales jurisdiction – as per the establishment of each university and their respective governing bodies under New South Wales legislation – or are at least areas of shared responsibility with the Commonwealth.

1.22 Public universities will be required to publish:

- the outcomes of governing body meetings and decisions
- consultancy spending and its purpose
- external roles held by vice-chancellors and senior executives
- annual remuneration reports, including vice-chancellor remuneration.[11]

1.23 The committee notes that these requirements closely align with key issues identified during this inquiry. Evidence received by the committee highlighted concerns regarding the transparency of governing body decisions, the use of

[10] Media Release, Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education, 'Stronger standards for university governance and tackling racism', 13 July 2026.

[11] Media Release, Hon Jason Clare MP, Minister for Education, 'Stronger standards for university governance and tackling racism', 13 July 2026.

consultants, external interests and potential conflicts involving senior university officials, and the oversight and reporting of executive remuneration.

Terminology

1.24 The committee notes that universities use different terms for their governing bodies, including university councils, senates and academic boards. This report uses the name adopted by each university. Where these bodies are referred to collectively it is as 'university councils' or 'councils'.

Interim report

1.25 The committee's interim report focused on transparency and accountability in university governance, particularly in decision-making, the use of consultants, and oversight of commercial activities.[12] It also gave a detailed examination of the recent governance crises at the University of Technology Sydney and the University of Wollongong.

1.26 The report comprised four chapters examining governance and reporting arrangements across New South Wales universities, including how universities manage complex commercial structures, disclose their use of consultants, and apply public information requirements. It found that existing mechanisms did not provide enough transparency, accountability, or public confidence. The report made four recommendations, captured in Table 1 below.[13]

Government response

1.27 The government response to the interim report was received on 8 July 2026. Table 1, setting out the response to each of the four recommendations is set out below.

Table 1 NSW Government responses to recommendations in the interim report of the inquiry into the NSW university sector

Recommendation	Response
Recommendation 1 That the NSW Auditor-General conduct a performance audit of the University of Technology Sydney, focusing on	Under consideration The NSW Auditor-General is an independent statutory office that reports to the Parliament of NSW. The Auditor-

[12] Standing Committee on Social Issues, NSW Legislative Council, *New South Wales university sector - Interim report: University of Technology Sydney, University of Wollongong and consultants* (2026), p xii.

[13] Standing Committee on Social Issues, *New South Wales university sector - Interim report,* p xii.

governance integrity, financial management, the use of consultants in decision-making, workforce management, psychosocial risk oversight, and the governance of controlled entities.	General independently decides on the audit priorities of his office.
Recommendation 2 That the Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education exercise the power under section 21D of the *University of Wollongong Act 1989* to request a report from the University of Wollongong Council on its commercial activities and those of related entities, including University of Wollongong Global Enterprises.	Under consideration The NSW Government notes an investigation relating to the University of Wollongong is currently underway by the Independent Commission Against Corruption. The NSW Government will further consider this recommendation following the conclusion of this investigation.
Recommendation 3 That NSW Treasury amend the Treasury Policy and Guidelines issued under the *Government Sector Finance Act 2018* to remove the exemption for university councils and require all NSW universities to disclose all consultant expenditure, whether expensed or capitalised.	Support in principle NSW Treasury has initiated consultation with universities relating to this recommendation. As universities operate separately from the broader government sector, Treasury will work to ensure that university reporting on consultant expenditure will provide consistent, reliable and collectable data.
Recommendation 4 That the NSW Government review the application of the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* to universities, including by removing or narrowing exemptions that permit non-disclosure of consulting engagements commissioned by university governing bodies, and strengthening oversight of contract register compliance to ensure commercial-in-confidence claims are applied consistently and satisfy the public interest test.[14]	Under consideration The NSW Government will consider this recommendation in more detail once the inquiry's final report has been published. In the interim, the NSW Department of Education will consult with the NSW Information and Privacy Commission and consult with NSW universities to encourage best practice contract register compliance, recognising the importance of transparency to public trust in universities.

[14] Standing Committee on Social Issues, *New South Wales university sector - Interim report,* p xii.

Scope of this report

1.28 This report examines the use of consultants across the New South Wales university sector, returning to certain consulting firms discussed in the interim report (KPMG and Nous), then each of the remaining consultants who gave evidence to the committee.

1.29 Having examined the University of Technology and the University of Wollongong in our interim report, this report examines in turn the governance arrangements and governance performance in each of the remaining institutions around the state.

1.30 The report concludes by summarising the concerns identified across the sector during the inquiry, examining key aspects of contemporary governance arrangements, and presenting the committee's findings and recommendations on how the NSW Government should act to reset statutory requirements in order to improve university governance across every institution around the state. While our recommendations are directed explicitly to the NSW Government, they are also directed in principle to the executive leadership and governing boards of each institution.

1.31 The report comprises eleven chapters. The remaining chapters are as follows:

- Chapter 2 – Use of consultants
- Chapter 3 – Macquarie University
- Chapter 4 – University of Sydney
- Chapter 5 – University of New England
- Chapter 6 – University of Newcastle
- Chapter 7 – Charles Sturt University
- Chapter 8 – Western Sydney University
- Chapter 9 – University of New South Wales
- Chapter 10 – Southern Cross University
- Chapter 11 – Governance.

1.32 While the committee's conclusions and recommendations are contained within the final chapter, each chapter also includes a summary of suggested actions to address the issues raised by inquiry participants.

Chapter 2 Use of consultants

In our interim report the committee found that existing internal governance and reporting mechanisms at New South Wales universities are not sufficient to ensure transparency, accountability and alignment with universities' public mission, particularly in relation to complex commercial activities and large-scale organisational decision-making. This chapter builds on the committee's earlier examination of the growth and nature of consultant involvement in the university sector by first returning to the evidence of two consultants, KPMG and Nous Group, examined in our interim report. It then turns to the evidence of Ernst & Young, Australia, KordaMentha and Pilbara Group, presented at the 1 April 2026 hearing. It considers that evidence in light of the concerns identified in chapter 4 of the interim report regarding consultant influence, transparency and governance practices. The chapter identifies key themes across these firms and situates their evidence within the broader patterns of consultant engagement in the university sector.

Key messages from the interim report

2.1 The committee's interim report highlighted significant concerns about transparency, accountability and governance across the New South Wales university sector. In particular, it examined the growing use of consultants in university decision-making and found that existing reporting arrangements do not provide sufficient visibility over consultant engagements, their influence on major decisions, or the expenditure associated with those engagements. The committee also identified shortcomings in the disclosure of commercial activities and governance arrangements, which limited public scrutiny and confidence.[15]

2.2 To address these shortcomings, the committee recommended that NSW Treasury amend the Treasury Policy and Guidelines issued under the Government Sector Finance Act 2018 to remove the exemption applying to a council of a university, thereby requiring all NSW universities to disclose all consultant expenditure – whether expensed or capitalised – in accordance with section 2.6 of TPG25-10a.

2.3 As noted in chapter 1, the NSW Government response indicated NSW Treasury supported the recommendation in principle and had initiated consultation with universities. It stated that Treasury will work to ensure that university reporting on consultant expenditure will provide consistent, reliable and collectable data.[16]

[15] Standing Committee on Social Issues, NSW Legislative Council, *New South Wales university sector - Interim report: University of Technology Sydney, University of Wollongong and consultants* (2026), p xii.

[16] Government response to the interim report of the inquiry into the New South Wales university sector, 8 July 2026, p 2.

2.4 The committee further recommended that that the NSW Government review the application of the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* to universities, including:

> (a) removing or narrowing exemptions that permit non-disclosure of consulting engagements commissioned by university governing bodies
>
> (b) strengthening oversight of contract register compliance to ensure that claims of commercial-in-confidence are applied consistently and satisfy the public interest test.[17]

2.5 The Government response indicated that further consideration would be given to this recommendation following the release of the committee's final report. It stated that in the interim, the NSW Department of Education would consult with the NSW Information and Privacy Commission and with universities to encourage best practice contract register compliance, recognising the importance of transparency and public trust in the universities sector.[18]

Auditor-General recommendations

2.6 The findings of the interim report align with recommendations made by the NSW Auditor-General in the *Universities 2025* report.

2.7 As noted in chapter 1, The Auditor-General recommended that universities strengthen controls around consultant engagements by ensuring compliance with procurement policies, conducting conflict of interest checks, assessing the need for procurement exemptions, and undertaking post-completion assessments to confirm that consulting services achieved their intended objectives. The Auditor-General also recommended stronger conflict of interest arrangements, including annual declarations by employees, clearer disclosure requirements and the maintenance of centralised register of interests.[19] Together, these recommendations reinforce the need for stronger governance, oversight and accountability in the engagement of consultants.

Consultant expenditure in the university sector

2.8 Consultant engagement is a significant area of expenditure across the university sector. Universities spent a total of $139 million on consultant expenses in 2025.[20]

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17 Standing Committee on Social Issues, *New South Wales university sector - Interim report*, p xii.

18 Government response to the interim report of the inquiry into the New South Wales university sector, 8 July 2026, p 2.

19 Audit Office of New South Wales, *Universities 2025* (11 June 2026), p 6.

20 Audit Office of New South Wales, *Universities 2025* (11 June 2026), p 1.

2.9 The Auditor General advised the committee that based on consultant expenses reported by universities in 2025, the five largest consulting firms engaged by expenditure were Deloitte ($26.46 million), KPMG ($19.71 million), KordaMentha ($3.79 million), McKinsey & Company ($2.25 million) and Ernst & Young ($1.82 million). These figures reflect amounts recorded by universities as consultant expenses and do not include payments classified as other professional services or amounts capitalised to assets.[21]

2.10 The concentration of spending among a small number of firms highlights the importance of robust procurement, transparency and oversight arrangements and provides context for the committee's examination of consultant practices in this chapter.

Revisiting matters in the interim report

2.11 In our interim report the committee documented important evidence in respect of the consultants KPMG, Deloitte and Nous Group. As noted above and in chapter 1 of this final report, the Auditor General ranked Deloitte and KMPG first and second respectively as the consultants receiving the highest expenditure across the university sector in 2025.[22] Further events in respect of KPMG and Nous Group during the inquiry are documented below.

KPMG

2.12 In our interim report the committee explored the consultancy work of KPMG in the university sector, specifically in respect of the University of Technology Sydney's 'Operational Sustainability Initiative', whereby the firm was engaged under a $7 million contract including extensions of up to $180,000 per week.[23]

2.13 Since the publication of the interim report, significant allegations emerged in the public domain regarding KPMG's internal governance arrangements and management of conflicts of interest.

2.14 In June 2026 KPMG was referred to the National Anti-Corruption Commission after a whistleblower alleged that the firm used confidential information from its client Lendlease to pitch for and win audit contracts from other large firms. The referral was swiftly followed by the Commonwealth Government announcing an independent review of KPMG Australia, and barring it from tendering for any new federal contracts until 30 September 2026.[24] Additionally, the NSW Government

[21] Answers to questions on notice, Mr Oyetunji, 15 July 2026, p 1.

[22] Answers to questions on notice, Mr Oyetunji, 15 July 2026, p 1.

[23] Answers to questions on notice, KPMG, 12 March 2026, p 2; Standing Committee on Social Issues, *New South Wales university sector - Interim report*, pp 51-52.

[24] Nicholas McElroy, 'KPMG referred to anti-corruption watchdog amid three-month freeze on Commonwealth Contracts', *ABC News*, 16 June 2026, https://www.abc.net.au/

sought assurances from KPMG about the management of confidential information and whether any personnel under investigation are currently working on NSW Government contracts.[25] The NSW Government further announced the suspension of new procurements involving KPMG and an approval and reporting process for existing engagements with the firm.[26]

2.15 In light of those developments, the committee invited KPMG to provide further evidence at a hearing scheduled for 13 July 2026 and sought additional information regarding the firm's protocols for managing conflicts of interest and confidential information. By correspondence dated 9 July 2026, KPMG declined the invitation to appear, citing the fact that it had previously appeared before the inquiry on 18 February 2026 and advising that the personnel it considered most appropriate to address the committee's questions were on annual leave. KPMG instead provided a written response addressing matters relating to the whistleblower and the issues raised by the committee.[27]

2.16 Since that time a much larger picture of systemic poor governance at KPMG has emerged and a full crisis has engulfed the firm.

Nous Group

2.17 As noted in our interim report, the committee scrutinised the work of Nous Group across the university sector via a hearing in February 2026 with Mr Timothy Orton, Managing Principal and Chief Executive Officer, and in subsequent written questions. Nous Group is an international management consultancy firm founded and owned in Australia. Its UniForum product, which it described as a 'benchmarking program' that has been used by 75 universities around the world draws data from subscribing universities to inform their decision-making by enabling them to 'see the way their administrative services are organised compared to others'.[28] Nous disclosed to the committee that between 2016 and 2026 its aggregate revenue from NSW universities was $25.7 million.[29]

news/2026-06-16/kpmg-freeze-on-government-contracts-amid-corruption-referral/106802576.

[25] Hon Courtney Houssos MLC, Minister for Finance, *Answers sought from KPMG on government contracts* (3 June 2026), https://www.nsw.gov.au/ministerial-releases/answers-sought-from-kpmg-on-government -contracts.

[26] NSW Government Procurement Board, *PBD-2026-03 KPMG Procurement Restrictions* (17 June 2026), https://arp.nsw.gov.au/pbd-2026-03-kpmg-procurement-restrictions.

[27] Correspondence from Mr Chris Matthews, National Education Sector Lead Partner, and Ms Claire McGuinness, NSW Government Lead Partner, KPMG, to Chair, 9 July 2026.

[28] Evidence, Mr Timothy Orton, Managing Principal and Chief Executive Officer, Nous Group, 18 February 2026, pp 22-23 and 25.

[29] Answers to supplementary questions, Nous Group, 12 March 2026, p 4. These figures were noted as approximate and as excluding GST.

2.18 The committee's invitation for Mr Orton to appear at a further hearing in July 2023 was declined, citing that he would be overseas at that time.[30]

2.19 The committee subsequently received a detailed submission addressing Mr Orton's evidence to the committee from two academics from the Australian National University, Dr Tim McLellan and Dr V. Chitra, informed by their research project examining the impact of benchmarking data and external consultant advice on the functioning of universities. Drs McLelland and Chita noted that their submission drew on documents obtained under freedom of information and the Government Information (Public Access) process, as well as oral and written evidence from this inquiry and that of the Senate inquiry into university governance. By way of broad observation, the authors noted that 'consultant led change management and university benchmarking are reshaping tertiary education across Australia, with consequences that include loss of careers, [loss of] research knowledge and importantly, an increasingly hostile and bleak learning environment for young Australians'.[31]

2.20 Drs McLellan and Chitra identified two instances of an apparent discrepancy between the documentary record and Nous Group's evidence to our inquiry as well as separate evidence to the Senate university governance inquiry. In doing so, they pointed to 'wider concerns about Nous Group's business model and the conflicts of interests it generates'.[32]

2.21 As the first allegation of Nous Group having been less than honest with the committee, Drs McLelland and Chitra noted that in their answers to committee questions, Nous representatives minimised the extent to which the company's UniForum and consulting businesses generate opportunities for one another in their evidence to the committee. In doing so the authors explained a concern that the partnership between Nous' UniForum benchmarking services on the one hand and the company's consulting business on the other, creating a situation where 'Nous sells both the benchmark (UniForum) and the 'solutions' to fix poor results.[33]

2.22 They noted that when asked about this apparent conflict by the committee, Nous had strongly defended its integrity, stating that it 'applies the highest professional and ethical standards to our work'. Additionally, in explaining how the two arms of the company work, Nous attested to a carefully managed independence between its business arms explicitly disagreed with the assertion that it steers UniForum members towards Nous Consulting's services.[34]

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30 Email from Mr Warrick Louey, General Counsel, Nous Group, to the secretariat, 30 June 2026.

31 Submission 137, Dr Tim McLellan and Dr V. Chitra, pp 1-2.

32 Submission 137, Dr Tim McLellan and Dr V. Chitra, p 1.

33 Submission 137, Dr Tim McLellan and Dr V. Chitra, p 1.

34 Answers to supplementary questions 8 and 9, Nous Group, 12 March 2026, pp 7 and 8.

2.23 Drs McMcLelland and Chitra, however, advised the committee that a UniForum report prepared by Nous expressly presented ANU with "the case for change," while Nous Consulting later received substantial contracts to assist with the resulting restructuring program. In addition, the authors cited a separate email showing staff in Nous' consulting business encouraging ANU to engage Nous' 'separate' UniForum business.[35]

2.24 As to the second allegation, the submission authors pointed to Nous Group's response to another question from the committee about how the company separates its proprietary insight from client-specific confidential information. Nous' answer included the statement that, 'University specific information is kept confidential to that particular university'.[36] However Drs McLellan and Chitra provided details of Nous having shared information about UNSW Canberra with the Australian National University (ANU) during the course of research that ANU had contracted Nous to undertake specifically about UNSW Canberra. The authors cited an email exchange between a Nous Consultant and ANU's then Vice-Chancellor Professor Genevive Bell, noting that the consultant stated that they were providing information 'based on publicly shared/shareable information', which Professor Bell then referred to as 'an interesting set of intelligences'.[37] Drs McLellan and Chitra commented:

> At the very least, the vagueness of Nous's language in this email warrants further investigation. Most especially, Nous need to demonstrate that their ability to provide ANU with intelligence on UNSW Canberra's lease arrangements and exposure was not in any way connected to Nous' previous work for UNSW. If there is any such connection—if, for example, this "quick call around" included conversations with Nous staff who had conducted work for UNSW—this would bring into question the veracity of Tim Orton's testimony to the NSW Legislative Council. Orton did not tell the Council that only trade secrets or certain categories of client information are treated as confidential; he made a general statement that all client-specific information is treated as confidential.[38]

2.25 The submission authors went on to 'note the relationship of potentially misleading Nous testimony to wider concerns' regarding an 'unaddressed, structural conflict of interest inherent in Nous Group's operation of UniForum since 2021', and '[a]pparent gaps between the conflict-of-interest policies Nous has described to Federal and NSW legislative bodies and its actual practice'. [39]

35 Submission 137, Dr Tim McLellan and Dr V. Chitra, p 3.

36 Answers to supplementary questions 33, Nous Group, 12 March 2026, p 17.

37 Submission 137, Dr Tim McLellan and Dr V. Chitra, p 6.

38 Submission 137, Dr Tim McLellan and Dr V. Chitra, p 7.

39 Submission 137, Dr Tim McLellan and Dr V Chitra, pp 1-2.

Further consultants' perspectives

2.26 Given the significant public funds spent on consultants by universities, as well as the significant role consultants have come to play in shaping university decision-making, the committee continued to gather evidence from consulting firms following the delivery of its interim report. This section outlines consultants' perspectives on their role, the nature of their work, and how they manage independence, conflicts of interest and privacy obligations within the sector.

2.27 Across the evidence from Ernst & Young, Australia, KordaMentha and Pilbara Group, several common themes emerged, including the framing of consultant roles as technical or advisory, questions about independence and conflicts of interest, and ongoing concerns about transparency, data use and reporting.

2.28 The committee's examination of other major consulting firms highlighted a number of related issues concerning consultant engagement, independence, conflicts of interest and transparency within the university sector.

Ernst & Young, Australia (EY)

2.29 EY, a global professional services firm, responded to questions about the scale and nature of its engagement with NSW universities. Mr Dean Yates, Government and Health Services Leader for EY Oceania, noted that over the 2024-2025 financial year, the work EY did 'for the New South Wales higher education sector represented just under 0.5 per cent of EY Australia's total revenue, or approximately $13 million'.[40] He indicated that this level of engagement remained similar in magnitude over recent years, confirming that there has been no significant growth in consultancy expenditure with EY specifically.[41] Mr Yates also emphasised EY's strong interest in the sector, noting that EY is 'one of Australia's largest graduate employers', recruiting around 600 graduates annually, and therefore has an ongoing interest in the sustainability of the university sector.[42]

2.30 EY characterised its work with universities as primarily technical and assurance-focused, rather than centred on strategic restructuring or change management.[43] The firm identified three main areas of engagement:

- **assurance engagements** – such as internal audit, where EY reviews a specific program or project to ensure risks are being managed effectively

[40] Evidence, Mr Dean Yates, EY Oceania, Government and Health Services Leader, EY, 1 April 2026, p 2.

[41] Evidence, Mr Yates, 1 April 2026, p 7; Answers to questions on notice, EY, 6 May 2026, p 2.

[42] Evidence, Mr Yates, 1 April 2026, p 2.

[43] Evidence, Mr Yates, 1 April 2026, p 10.

- **cybersecurity support** – this includes strengthening clients' cyber capabilities so they can safeguard sensitive information and respond appropriately to potential incidents
- **platform implementation** – this involves supporting clients with once-in-a-generation IT platform upgrades to their operating systems.[44]

2.31 EY noted that its work in the NSW university sector mainly focuses on these three areas and that it is typically undertaken at arm's length.[45] EY also confirmed that it is not currently advising any NSW university on cost reduction, workforce restructuring or workforce reduction.[46]

2.32 The committee examined how EY manages potential conflicts of interest, particularly where the firm may provide multiple services to the same institution. Mrs Leigh Walker, Risk Management and Independence Leader for EY Oceania, reported that strict internal processes govern such situations. These include preliminary internal assessments of whether work can be undertaken, client approval, and the use of 'ethical dividers' or information barriers between teams.[47] EY acknowledged that, in practice, universities themselves play a key role in determining whether it is appropriate for a firm to undertake simultaneous engagements.[48]

2.33 The committee also asked EY representatives about transparency and accountability in consultancy spending. Mrs Walker advised that EY supports greater standardisation in how universities report expenditure on consultants, noting current inconsistencies in definitions and disclosure practices across the sector. She pointed to the potential value of NSW Treasury defining and promulgating standardised terms, and also being the central repository for such information, as a key means to improve transparency:

> If there was a standardised disclosure and standardised definitions around what is a consultant, what is a contractor, what is a third-party supplier, so that there is comparability across the sector. We do think that is something that could be done by Treasury to define that and to be the central holder of that information that universities or any other public sector entities should be disclosing that information.[49]

2.34 In their 2023 submissions to the Legislative Council's inquiry into the NSW Government's use and management of consulting services, and the Federal inquiry into the management and assurance of integrity by consulting services,

[44] Evidence, Mr Yates, 1 April 2026, p 2; Answers to questions on notice, EY, 6 May 2026, p 3.

[45] Evidence, Mr Yates, 1 April 2026, pp 9-10.

[46] Answers to questions on notice, EY, 6 May 2026, p 3.

[47] Evidence, Mrs Leigh Walker, EY Oceania, Risk Management and Independence Leader, EY, 1 April 2026, p 7.

[48] Evidence, Mrs Walker, 1 April 2026, p 7.

[49] Evidence, Mrs Walker, 1 April 2026, pp 7-8.

EY made two recommendations to enhance transparency and consistency in consultancy disclosures:

- develop and implement a centralised data collection platform to report publicly on the outcome of all tendering processes in NSW, including contract extensions
- develop a consistent set of codes to identify the types of services provided by consultants and require the use of these in reporting.[50]

2.35 The committee also explored EY's role in providing independent assurance over major university projects, including circumstances where it assesses the performance or governance of other consultants. EY described its role in such cases as providing 'independent assurance over the whole program' rather than evaluating individual firms in isolation.[51] Its work focuses on governance, risk management and accountability structures, with recommendations aimed at improving how universities oversee complex, multi-party projects. EY indicated that such independent assurance is considered best practice for large technology and change management programs.[52]

2.36 Finally, the committee questioned whether EY has sufficient institutional expertise in the higher education sector on which to base its role. Mr Yates responded that while EY does not, to his knowledge, employ staff who had worked directly at a New South Wales university, the firm had many staff who had worked as consultants within university settings.[53] He noted that the company's assurance model requires it to remain independent from client organisations.[54]

KordaMentha

2.37 KordaMentha describes itself as 'a proudly independent, founder owned and led advisory firm'.[55]

2.38 Within the context of its examination of governance at the University of Wollongong (UOW), the committee questioned Mr John Dewar AO, a KordaMentha partner, about his role at the firm, which coincided with his position as interim Vice-Chancellor of the UOW between June 2024 and February 2025.[56] Mr Dewar previously served as Vice-Chancellor of La Trobe University from 2012 to 2014.

50 Answers to questions on notice, EY, 6 May 2026, p 5.

51 Evidence, Mrs Walker, 1 April 2026, p 9.

52 Evidence, Mrs Walker, 1 April 2026, p 9.

53 Evidence, Mr Yates, 1 April 2026, p 9.

54 Evidence, Mr Yates, 1 April 2026, p 9.

55 KordaMentha, *About us*, https://kordamentha.com/about.

56 Evidence, Mr John Dewar AO, Partner, KordaMentha, 1 April 2026, p 2; Answers to questions on notice, Mr John Dewar AO, Partner, KordaMentha, 5 May 2026, p 3.

2.39 Mr Dewar advised the committee that in his role with KordaMentha he advises on education matters across multiple sectors, including higher education.[57]

Conflict of interest

2.40 Media reports in 2024 and 2025 raised concerns about a potential conflict of interest arising from Mr Dewar's ongoing association with KordaMentha during his tenure as interim Vice-Chancellor of the UOW and KordaMentha's subsequent engagement by the University.[58]

2.41 The committee examined the governance arrangements put in place to manage these issues, seeking to understand the separation between Mr Dewar's advisory and decision-making roles, and how conflicts were identified and managed in practice.

2.42 On 3 June 2024, the UOW Chancellor, Mr Michael Still, wrote to Mr Dewar in a letter titled 'Your ongoing roles'.[59] This letter included the following paragraphs about Mr Dewar's ongoing role with KordaMentha:

> You have confirmed that your ongoing role at KM during the Term will be unpaid and will comprise one day per fortnight during which time you will provide leadership to a team of consultants in the Higher Education practice.
>
> You have also confirmed that during the Term:
>
> you will not be involved in any consulting work to regional NSW universities or that would create a conflict with UOW; and
>
> you will not play a role in seeking to have the University engage KM to provide any services to the University, and that if KM is so engaged through any separate procurement process, you will not be involved in the management of those services.[60]

2.43 Mr Dewar agreed to take unpaid leave from KordaMentha while at UOW and told the committee at the 1 April 2026 hearing that he 'took unpaid leave throughout the entire period [he] was at the University of Wollongong'.[61] However, in later answers to supplementary questions he corrected:

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57 Evidence, Mr Dewar, 1 April 2026, p 2.

58 Ben Langford, 'UOW V-C "appointed separately" from consultancy firm where he is a partner', *Illawarra Mercury*, 10 September 2024; Kelly Fuller, 'Former University of Wollongong chief John Dewar grilled by inquiry about KordaMentha contract', *ABC News*, 1 April 2026, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-04-01/john-dewar-uow-inquiry-kordamentha-conflict-concerns/106520466.

59 Answers to questions on notice, Mr Dewar, 5 May 2026, p 1.

60 Answers to questions on notice, Mr Dewar, 5 May 2026, p 1.

61 Evidence, Mr Dewar, 1 April 2026, p 5.

> I was inadvertently paid for the full month of June 2024 by KordaMentha despite not working from 22 June 2024 as salary had already been advanced in full for that month by the time I commenced at UOW.[62]

2.44 Mr Dewar advised that KordaMentha's initial engagement, awarded through a competitive tender process in 2024, was worth approximately $310,000.[63]

2.45 Under questioning by the committee about any perceived or actual conflict of interest arising from his financial interest in the partnership, Mr Dewar acknowledged that as a partner of KordaMentha he 'was entitled to a fixed remuneration, part of which was made up of a fixed amount of profit'. Challenged as to whether there was not a direct conflict of interest arising from his work at UOW benefiting KordaMentha's profitability as a firm and therefore his direct financial interest, Mr Dewar responded, 'No. I don't accept that'.[64]

2.46 The committee also sought more information about the nature of KordaMentha's engagement. Mr Dewar explained that the firm's work involved reviewing the University's operating model and identifying opportunities for improved efficiency.[65] He noted that he had told the Chancellor he would 'need some help' and that UOW required external support to return to financial sustainability.[66]

2.47 Mr Dewar asserted that UOW chose him for his experience as a vice-chancellor, not because of his KordaMentha role.[67] He also acknowledged that, before his appointment, the Chancellor had indicated to him that KordaMentha 'might be invited to tender' and that he knew the firm was under consideration, but said he had no role in the procurement.[68]

2.48 Mr Dewar emphasised that such arrangements are not unusual, noting that 'it's quite common for consultants from any firm to do executive secondments for a period of time'.[69] He described his ongoing KordaMentha involvement as limited and largely social, aimed at staying in touch with colleagues.[70] He said he did not manage KordaMentha's work at UOW, but confirmed he sat on the program control board as a member overseeing that work, chaired by the Chancellor.[71]

2.49 As noted in chapter 1, in July 2026, three months after appearing before the committee, the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption held public

62 Answers to questions on notice, Mr Dewar, 5 May 2026, p 3.

63 Answers to questions on notice, Mr Dewar, 5 May 2026, p 7.

64 Evidence, Mr Dewar, 1 April 2026, p 6.

65 Evidence, Mr Dewar, 1 April 2026, p 7.

66 Evidence, Mr Dewar, 1 April 2026, p 4.

67 Evidence, Mr Dewar, 1 April 2026, p 10.

68 Evidence, Mr Dewar, 1 April 2026, pp 3-4.

69 Evidence, Mr Dewar, 1 April 2026, p 10.

70 Evidence, Mr Dewar, 1 April 2026, p 6.

71 Evidence, Mr Dewar, 1 April 2026, p 8.

hearings for its investigation into allegations concerning UOW. Both Mr Dewar and Mr Michael Still, former Chancellor, gave evidence as persons of interest in respect of whether they partially exercised their official functions by failing to manage the conflict of interest relating to the employment of Mr Dewar as interim Vice-Chancellor and the engagement of KordaMentha.

2.50 During his evidence to ICAC Mr Dewar admitted that he wanted his appointment as interim Vice-Chancellor of UOW to benefit the Korda Mentha, creating 'if not actual then certainly perceived conflicts of interest'.[72]

2.51 Soon after he was appointed to the role, KordaMentha secured review work at UOW that later grew to contracts worth $3.8 million. Questioned as to whether Mr Still had told him the procurement process for the consultancy was going to be designed in a way that KordaMentha would win the work, as evidenced by an email between the two men, Mr Dewar responded, 'Yes'.[73] Mr Still rejected suggestions the process was designed to favour KordaMentha.[74]

2.52 ICAC took further evidence that internal financial UOW data was shared with Mr Dewar before he took on the role as interim Vice-Chancellor, while KordaMentha prepared the bid for the university work.[75]

Transparency

2.53 Mr Dewar told the committee that he supports greater transparency in reporting consultancy expenditure across the university sector. He agreed that current practices are inconsistent and that reported figures often combine consultancy spending with other costs, such as contractor payments and international student recruitment agent fees. He suggested that clearer reporting would better reflect actual spending on consultants and contractors.[76]

[72] ABC News, 'John Dewar accepts UOW appointment would benefit KordaMentha, ICAC hears', 2 July 2026, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-07-02/uow-icac-john-dewar-kordamentha-benefit-conflict-interest/106870804.

[73] ABC News, 'John Dewar accepts UOW appointment would benefit KordaMentha, ICAC hears', 2 July 2026.

[74] AMB News, 'How a $4000K job exposed conflicts of interest at University of Wollongong', 11 July 2026., https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-07-11/uow-job-that-triggered-icac-probe/106902420

[75] ABC News, 'John Dewar accepts UOW appointment would benefit KordaMentha, ICAC hears', 2 July 2026.

[76] Evidence, Mr Dewar, 1 April 2026, p 8.

Pilbara Group (ABM Technologies Australia Pty Ltd)

2.54 Pilbara commenced operations in 1999. The company develops large-scale operational models for complex organisations including custom 'higher education costing models for a competitive edge and financial sustainability'.[77]

2.55 Mr Lea Patterson, President and CEO, noted that Pilbara began modelling for higher education institutions in Australia around 2007, following earlier work in defence and other sectors. Its other two areas of expertise are:

- oil and gas decommissioning models
- environmental models.[78]

2.56 Mr Patterson advised that Pilbara's higher education models are based on a tailored, activity-based methodology deigned to identify the costs of teaching, research, community support and commercial activities. The models quantify costs, revenue and margins at a granular level, including for individual courses and subjects.[79] The models integrate data from multiple source systems, including financial management, HR, payroll, facility management, timetabling and student management systems.

2.57 Mr Patterson explained that, unlike standard spreadsheet-based approaches, which often capture only partial or high-level data, Pilbara's models cover the entire institution. The models capture relationships of subjects to degrees and organisational units, and identify cross-subsidisation within and between teaching, research and schools.[80]

2.58 Questioned by the committee about the extent to which Pilbara analyses the data provided to it, Mr Patterson advised that the company does not provide any analysis, strategic advice or guidance to its university clients. Rather, it delivers models and standard reports, which are analysed internally, primarily by university finance teams.[81]

2.59 When asked how Pilbara generates revenue while offering its benchmarking tool at no cost to participating universities, Mr Patterson explained that the business model relies on two primary revenue streams:

- software licence fees for its proprietary modelling platform
- consulting fees for building the initial model and then updating that model on a regular basis.[82]

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77 Evidence, Mr Lea Patterson, President, CEO, Pilbara, 1 April 2026, p 11; Pilbara, *Company*, https://www.pilbaragroup.com/company/.

78 Evidence, Mr Patterson, 1 April 2026, p 11.

79 Evidence, Mr Patterson, 1 April 2026, p 11.

80 Evidence, Mr Patterson, 1 April 2026, p 11.

81 Evidence, Mr Patterson, 1 April 2026, p 11.

82 Evidence, Mr Patterson, 1 April 2026, p 12.

2.60 He clarified that universities may choose to contribute data to the benchmarking tool, which is aggregated and anonymised. Access to the tool is then provided at no additional cost to participating institutions.[83]

2.61 At the time of the 1 April 2026 hearing, Pilbara was working with Charles Sturt University, Macquarie University, the University of New England, the University of Technology Sydney, Western Sydney University and the UOW. It had previously worked with the University of Sydney and the University of Newcastle.[84]

2.62 Mr Patterson advised that Pilbara's current-year revenue from these engagements was $95,700 from Charles Sturt University, $107,415 from Macquarie University, $90,860 from the University of New England, $91,960 from the University of Technology Sydney, $87,780 from Western Sydney University and $46,530 from UOW. Revenue included software licensing and services to update university models.[85]

2.63 Macquarie University provides a detailed example of how these arrangements operate in practice.

Pilbara's role in Macquarie University (MQ) restructure

2.64 The committee examined Pilbara's role in MQ's restructuring, noting that the firm was identified as having been engaged by MQ through a freedom of information request. Mr Patterson explained that Pilbara's role was to design and maintain MQ's activity-based cost model.[86] Specifically, Pilbara:

- developed the university's activity-based cost model
- produced standard reports
- updated the model annually using full-year data from MQ's systems
- updated the associated reports each year.[87]

2.65 Mr Patterson further noted that MQ undertakes analysis of model outputs. Pilbara provides the data and reporting framework but does not participate in internal decision-making or interpretation of results.[88] He also emphasised that the model operates 'at that low level of detail, so they can see those costs, all the way down to those individual subjects and courses'.[89]

2.66 In answers to questions on notice, Pilbara noted that it charged MQ a total of $463,474 between 2022 and 2025 (inclusive of software and services). However,

83 Evidence, Mr Patterson, 1 April 2026, p 12.
84 Evidence, Mr Patterson, 1 April 2026, p 11.
85 Evidence, Mr Patterson, 1 April 2026, p 16.
86 Evidence, Mr Patterson, 1 April 2026, p 12.
87 Evidence, Mr Patterson, 1 April 2026, pp 11-12.
88 Evidence, Mr Patterson, 1 April 2026, p 14.
89 Evidence, Mr Patterson, 1 April 2026, p 12.

in response to supplementary questions covering the same period, Pilbara reported a total of $466,334.[90]

Privacy and consent

2.67 The committee asked Pilbara representatives about whether university staff are given the opportunity to consent to their payroll and other personal data being provided to an external provider and used in this way. Mr Patterson responded that the university provides the data to Pilbara, and that consent is not within the company's remit.[91]

2.68 After the hearing, Pilbara confirmed that it has not carried out a privacy assessment of the personal information, including payroll data, that universities provide. However, the firm advised that its standard contracts include obligations relating to data protection, privacy and confidentiality under the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth).[92]

The use of data in restructuring decisions

2.69 In a similar vein, the committee asked if the reports are used to justify cuts and restructures, noting that universities including Macquarie have in place enterprise bargaining agreements that proscribe the quantification of casual versus permanent staff for the purpose of maximising efficiency. Pilbara representatives confirmed that they model as they are requested, and that the rules and regulations about the use of the data are the university's responsibility, starting, 'It would be up to them to let us know any changes they want made'.[93]

2.70 The committee asked about how, in the scenario in which a university produces a report based on Pilbara's modelling then uses it as the basis for restructuring or staff cutting decisions, staff or unions might access the data for the purpose of verifying it. Mr Patterson confirmed that the modelling is made available to a university's primary users, generally the finance department, some of whom share it with individual schools. He further confirmed that subject to the university choosing to share it with schools or faculties, these parties could then verify its accuracy.[94]

2.71 Questioned as to whether the model might drive work intensification, Ms Michelle Brook, Program Manager, Pilbara explained how it operates in the scenario of ancient history:

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90 Answers to supplementary questions, Mr Lea Patterson, President, CEO, Pilbara, 29 April 2026, p 1.

91 Evidence, Mr Patterson, 1 April 2026, p 17.

92 Answers to supplementary questions, Mr Patterson, p 5.

93 Evidence, Mr Patterson, 1 April 2026, p 14.

94 Evidence, Mr Patterson, 1 April 2026, p 17.

> I think, as part of the benchmark—we report on where that client sits in comparison to other clients within the sector. They see the median of that particular dimensional benchmark that they're looking at. If they can see that, on average for ancient history, there's an average number of hours needed to teach, prepare and mark and assess a particular discipline, then they will see where they sit in that range. Are they doing it in the bottom quartile or are they in the top quartile with respect to the number of hours needed to teach? What they do with that information is entirely up to them and it's internal to that institution. It just gives them where they sit compared to the other clients.[95]

Ability to identify individual staff

2.72 The committee raised further concerns that, even with de-identification, the level of detail could enable indirect identification of individuals, exposing them to inappropriate scrutiny and risk in staffing-related decisions. When asked whether the data protects allows identification of individual staff within a specific school, Ms Michelle Brooke, Program Manager, Pilbara responded, 'I suppose if people went into that level of detail, they could within that school, yes'.[96]

Committee comment

2.73 The fact that our own inquiry has coincided with the Auditor-General's report addressing universities' use of consultants, as well as an ICAC investigation into conflicts of interest arising from the UOW's engagement of consultants, underscores the very real risks for integrity and responsible use of public money in this area. It also illuminates the public interest to be served by greater controls over and transparency in the university sector's burgeoning use of consultants. Universities in this state spent $139 million on consultants in 2025.

2.74 Events since our interim report regarding both KPMG and Nous Group highlight the risk of conflicts of interest at play in respect of consultants in this sector, as in others. The integrity scandal that has engulfed KPMG speaks for itself regarding behaviour within the firm, the poor standards it has applied to the management of confidential information, and its actions when such matters of integrity are brought to light. In addition, the scandal further reinforces the imperative for robust governance arrangements, transparency and accountability in major consulting firms engaged by public institutions.

2.75 In the immediate term, the committee is concerned about the ongoing engagement of KPMG in the university sector and suggests that universities follow the lead of the NSW Government by suspending any further engagement with the firm and establishing heightened reporting for current engagements. There is no reason why universities should accept a lesser standard.

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95 Evidence, Ms Michelle Brooke, Program Manager, Pilbara, 1 April 2026, pp 15-16.

96 Evidence, Ms Brooke, 1 April 2026, pp 17-18.

2.76 The informed and detailed suggestions that Nous Group misled this committee, as well as a Senate Committee, are also deeply concerning. As noted above, the submission authors Drs McLellan and Chitra raised questions about whether evidence provided by Mr Orton of Nous Group is consistent with documentary records concerning university benchmarking, consulting engagements and management of conflicts of interest. On the material presented to us, we conclude that Mr Orton has not given honest evidence in his written answers to the committee. Rather, in respect of two separate matters the standards of integrity in his firm to which he has attested have been shown to be untrue by evidence subsequently provided to the committee.

2.77 The committee underscores how very seriously it, and the broader Parliament, takes any provision of misleading evidence. Such actions go to the very heart of the integrity of Parliament as an institution, and indeed, may constitute a contempt. Additionally, when any witness appears before a committee they swear to speak truthfully and are bound by this solemn undertaking. The same concerns in respect of Mr Dewar are discussed in relation to KordaMentha, below.

2.78 From a broader policy perspective, the allegations in respect of both Nous and KPMG highlight the importance of ensuring that consultant activities affecting public universities are subject to appropriate transparency, disclosure obligations and scrutiny.

2.79 The evidence that we and these other integrity agencies have gathered also brings to life larger questions about the impact that the use of consultants is having on the culture, values and operations of our educational institutions. As the committee expressed in our interim report, there is a very real tension between the corporatisation of universities – assisted and reinforced by consultants – and the public mission of universities. Overuse of consultants weakens internal capability and risks fundamental social benefits in the pursuit of corporate outcomes.

2.80 The committee was deeply concerned by Mr Dewar's evidence to both ICAC and to our own inquiry. The ICAC investigation was announced two months after our own hearing with him and addressed the very same matters of actual and perceived conflicts of interest. His evidence to ICAC speaks for itself and the committee awaits the Commission's findings with substantial and serious interest.

2.81 In respect of our own inquiry, the committee was troubled by the inconsistency between Mr Dewar's oral evidence and his subsequent written responses. While Mr Dewar initially stated that he had taken unpaid leave from KordaMentha for the entirety of his appointment as interim Vice-Chancellor, he later disclosed that he received payment from the firm in June 2024.[97]

[97] Evidence, Mr Dewar, 1 April 2026, p 5; Answers to questions on notice, Mr Dewar, 5 May 2026, p 3.

2.82 Furthermore, we were very concerned that, although Mr Dewar stated that his remuneration was fixed and not linked to the firm's performance, he retained an entitlement to profit distributions.[98] Moreover, Mr Dewar appeared to lack insight into the seriousness of any direct or perceived conflict of interest, and would not, under repeated questioning, admit to any such conflict having existed. His evidence to ICAC indicates that he now has insight. Indeed, significant discrepancies have emerged between the evidence that Mr Dewar gave to the committee and his subsequent evidence and admissions to ICAC. The committee considers these discrepancies to be highly significant. The committee concludes that in aspects of his evidence Mr Dewar misled our inquiry regarding the nature of his relationship with KordaMentha and the extent of the conflicts of interest arising from his appointment. Once again, the committee regards such actions as a very serious matter, and a potential contempt. It is also a very serious matter that Mr Dewar appears to have contravened his solemn undertaking to speak truthfully under oath.

2.83 These matters in respect of consultants to the university sector once again demonstrate the imperative for robust disclosure obligations and other strong protections to ensure careful avoidance of conflicts of interest in the context of university governance. This is an important focus of our final chapter.

2.84 The evidence before the committee underscores the importance of robust conflict of interest controls, comprehensive systems for disclosure and accurate record-keeping. They reinforce the Auditor-General's recommendation that universities strengthen conflict of interest arrangements through clear disclosure requirements, regular declarations and central registers of interests.[99]

2.85 Where senior university office holders maintain ongoing associations with consulting firms that engage with the university, governance arrangements must not only manage actual conflicts of interest effectively but also demonstrate that perceived conflicts have been identified, disclosed and independently scrutinised.

2.86 The evidence before our committee and ICAC also reinforces the Auditor-General's recommendations that universities strengthen procurement controls, undertake rigorous conflict of interest checks, assess the justification for procurement exemptions and conduct post-completion assessments reviews to determine whether consulting services have achieved their intended objectives. The UOW example of a cavalier approach to consultant procurement raises very serious concerns as to practices across the sector.

2.87 In addition, the evidence regarding Pilbara's engagement by Macquarie University raises broader concerns about transparency, accountability and oversight in the use of external consultants across the university sector.

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98 Evidence, Mr Dewar, 1 April 2026, p 5.

99 Audit Office of New South Wales, *Universities 2025* (11 June 2026), p 6.

2.88 While Pilbara maintains that it provides modelling and reporting services only, the committee notes that its cost model operates at a highly granular level and may inform significant institutional decisions. The committee is also troubled by evidence that individuals may be identifiable within small organisational units despite de-identification measures.[100]

2.89 The committee considers that consultant-developed tools and datasets can exert substantial influence over decisions affecting staff, courses and organisational structures while remaining subject to limited external scrutiny. This makes strong governance and oversight arrangements essential.

2.90 In the committee's strong view, greater transparency regarding consultant engagements, methodologies, data use and outcomes is necessary to maintain confidence in university decision-making. The following chapter examines these issues further by examining Macquarie University's recent restructuring and other aspects of its governance.

[100] Evidence, Ms Brooke, 1 April 2026, pp 17-18.

Chapter 3 Macquarie University

As the third case study for this inquiry and the first of this final report, this chapter examines governance concerns specific to Macquarie University (MQ). The chapter commences by outlining the major restructuring events that took place in 2024-2025, culminating in the reduction of the university's workforce by 61 full-time teaching positions, concentrated in the Faculties of Arts and Science and Engineering. It documents the sequence of announcements and consultation processes, most significantly the Workplace Change Proposal implemented in mid-2025. It then examines staff perspectives on the reforms themselves, their processes and impacts. Next the chapter sets out the statutory framework established by the *Macquarie University Act 1989*. It then assesses the implications for transparency, accountability and the university's public mission, in light of the evidence from participants regarding representation on University Council, perceptions of weakened governance, actions towards the union, poor transparency, and other concerns.

Major restructuring in 2024-2025

3.1 This section outlines the sequence of major restructuring decisions and related consultation processes during 2024 and 2025, which inquiry participants aligned with the governance concerns in respect of MQ examined later in this chapter.

2024 announcements

3.2 On 6 August 2024, via documents on SharePoint, the university informed staff of its intention to delete most double degrees. In doing so, it offered no opportunities for feedback and expected staff to answer questions from members of the public at the MQ Open Day on 10 August 2024, less than a week later.[101]

3.3 On 7 August 2024, the university released a workplace change proposal to disestablish departments and create new schools, with submissions due by 2 September 2024. Staff completed surveys and submissions, however management made no modifications to the proposal except a name change for Indigenous Studies; nor did it share the survey results. Both changes took effect in January 2025.[102]

3.4 On 12 December 2024, the university released the *Macquarie Advantage Education Principles* without consultation. In doing so, it necessitated urgent

[101] Answer to supplementary questions, Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh, School of International Studies, Macquarie University, 20 May 2026, p 75; Evidence, Associate Professor Nicole Matthews, School of Communication, Society and Culture, Macquarie University, 1 April 2026, p 49.

[102] Answer to supplementary questions, Associate Professor Bayeh, 20 May 2026, p 75.

course assessment changes during the shutdown period, when many staff were on leave, with changes due by 30 January 2025 for a semester starting 28 February 2025.[103]

Academic Workforce and Future Planning blueprint paper

3.5 On 4 March 2025, the university released a draft blueprint paper titled *Academic Workforce and Future Planning* for staff consultation.[104] The blueprint paper set out a proposed framework for the university's academic work and workforce profile to deliver its strategic vision within internal and external constraints.[105] According to Professor Chris Dixon, Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts, the university developed the academic blueprint paper to 'engage the University community in shaping the future design of academic work and workforce planning, including the development of any formal workplace change proposals'.[106] The consultation ran from 3 to 30 March 2025 and included:

- surveys
- faculty 'town hall' style meetings
- engagement with the staff union.[107]

3.6 While responses were received from 395 individual staff members and the staff union,[108] the committee heard that the university did not share the results of the staff survey, nor provide feedback to staff.[109]

3.7 On 8 May 2025, MQ published a revised blueprint paper in response to survey results and written submissions. This version included key insights and suggestions gathered during consultation.[110]

Curriculum Review Discussion Paper

3.8 On 23 April 2025, MQ released a *Curriculum Review Discussion Paper* (hereafter the curriculum discussion paper). It set out a review of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences courses with the aim of keeping them relevant, focused and fit for future challenges, with changes planned for 2026 to 2027. The committee was

103 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 28; Answers to supplementary questions, Associate Professor Bayeh, 20 May 2026, p 75.

104 Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Chris Dixon, Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University, 6 May 2026, p 23.

105 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Dixon, 6 May 2026, p 5.

106 Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Dixon, 6 May 2026, p 24.

107 Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Dixon, 6 May 2026, p 24.

108 Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Dixon, 6 May 2026, p 24.

109 Answer to supplementary question, Associate Professor Bayeh, 20 May 2026, p 75.

110 Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Dixon, 6 May 2026, p 24.

advised that staff again received no feedback regarding their response to the curriculum discussion paper.[111] The curriculum discussion paper identified programs for reduction or expansion.[112]

Workplace Change Proposal

3.9 On 3 June 2025, the university released a *Workplace Change Proposal*, outlining the scope and reasons for the restructuring and commencing a consultation period of just over one month.[113] According to the university, the consultation process 'provided an extended period for staff feedback and discussion and engagement with the NTEU. A proposed Implementation Plan was then circulated on 18 September 2025 which provided a further opportunity for feedback.'[114]

3.10 The proposal identified three primary drivers for realigning the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Science and Engineering to:

- optimise education and research so they remain relevant, world-leading and responsive to student and employer needs
- maintain the highest standards of excellence while aligning activities with the university's mission of benefit, service and engagement
- ensure financial resilience amid increasing funding and policy uncertainty.[115]

3.11 With respect to the faculties not subject to the workplace change the university advised the committee:

> The review found that two of the University's four faculties - Macquarie Business School and the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Human Sciences - were already well advanced in aligning academic work and workforce capacity. In these faculties, adjustments could be made incrementally. However, it was found that change was needed in the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Science and Engineering to ensure their workforce profiles are aligned with their education and research strategies.[116]

3.12 The workplace change proposal outlined a major academic and workforce restructure including cuts of approximately 75 full-time equivalent academic roles and 70,000 teaching hours:

- 42 roles in the Faculty of Arts

111 Answer to supplementary questions, Associate Professor Bayeh, 20 May 2026, p 75.

112 Evidence, Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh, School of International Studies, Macquarie University, 1 April 2026, p 38.

113 Answer to supplementary questions, Associate Professor Bayeh, 20 May 2026, p 75.

114 Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Dixon, 6 May 2026, p 25.

115 Answers to supplementary questions, Associate Professor Bayeh, 20 May 2026, Attachment B, p 4.

116 Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Dixon, 6 May 2026, p 24.

- 33 roles in the Faculty of Science and Engineering.[117]

3.13 The proposal also outlined major curriculum changes, including discontinuing or teaching out a wide range of degrees, majors and units, especially in the humanities and some science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields, and merging or consolidating academic units.[118] The stated aim was to resize the workforce and align teaching and research with student demand, employability and institutional strengths, while positioning the university to 'respond to the needs of the world' and support student success.[119]

3.14 MQ later advised students that, from 2026, they would study a more focused curriculum with fewer majors and streamlined options. On its website, MQ emphasised that the changes would deliver a 'transformative education' for study and better align courses with future careers.[120] Unlike many Australian universities, MQ does not have a traditional independent student union, therefore limiting a formal avenue through which students could collectively scrutinise, challenge, or advocate in relation to these changes. The committee heard that these announcements contributed to significant uncertainty for both staff and students.[121]

3.15 On 9 July 2025, Professor Dixon emailed all staff with an update on the Faculty of Arts curriculum review. He referred to the discussion paper that initiated the review and emphasised that curriculum development is not a workplace change process but part of the university's routine review cycle. He noted that the work would be iterative and continue through 2025 and into 2026, with further consultation anticipated. The committee was advised that the email sought to separate the discussion paper from the proposal, resulting in proposed curriculum changes from the discussion paper being integrated into the October 2025 implementation plan without proper consultation and feedback.[122]

3.16 Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, MQ, advised the committee that the university subsequently reduced the university's workforce by 61 full-time

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117 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 26; National Tertiary Education Union, *Macquarie University's brutal cuts plan scraps key courses and jobs* (3 June 2025), https://www.nteu.au/News_Articles/Media_Releases/Macquarie_University%E2%80%99s_brutal_cuts_plan_scraps_key_courses_and_jobs.aspx.

118 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 26.

119 Macquarie University, *Proposed curriculum changes 2026*, https://students.mq.edu.au/study/faculties/proposed-curriculum-changes.

120 Macquarie University, *Proposed curriculum changes 2026*, https://students.mq.edu.au/study/faculties/proposed-curriculum-changes.

121 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, p 49; Evidence, Associate Professor Bayeh, 1 April 2026, pp 38 and 47.

122 Answers to supplementary questions, Associate Professor Bayeh, 20 May 2026, pp 106-107.

teaching positions: 45 voluntary redundancies, 9 forced redundancies and 7 pre-retirement contracts.[123]

Staff perspectives

3.17 Evidence to the committee, both from the NTEU and from individual staff members, raised fundamental questions about the MQ reforms themselves along with the process of their adoption. Overall, the NTEU presented the MQ restructure as a case study in 'governance failure'.[124] It contended that the restructuring exposed weaknesses in accountability, transparency and consultation, and called for broader regulatory and legislative reform across the New South Wales university sector.[125] The specific concerns of staff are discussed in turn below.

'A manufactured financial crisis'

3.18 The NTEU argued that the MQ restructuring reflected broader corporatisation trends in the university sector, prioritising financial outcomes and cost reduction over educational quality, staff wellbeing and the university's public mission.[126]

3.19 A key criticism was that MQ's financial position did not justify the scale of the changes. The NTEU cited internal modelling suggesting that MQ could meet savings targets without redundancies. In doing so, the union cited:

- the university's Business and Capital Review Report for the year to June 2025, which recorded a surplus of $65.7 million, which was $36.0 million favourable to budget
- a Moody's credit opinion from July 2025 which maintained the University's Aa2 (stable) rating, reflecting its 'strong brand name', 'growing reputation', and 'good financial policy and strategy'
- the university's own figures show teaching as highly profitable, with the Faculty of Arts' $45 million costs in teaching and research generating $180 million in revenue, and each Arts academic generating an average surplus of $500,000 per year.[127]

3.20 The NTEU referred to further information obtained under the government information public access (GIPA) process to further illuminate the absence of financial justification:

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123 Answers to questions on notice, Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, 6 May 2026, p 4.

124 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 11.

125 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 6.

126 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 8.

127 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 10.

> Documents obtained by the NTEU via a GIPA request prove this is not a financial necessity but an explicit choice. Management's own documents presented a "Case 1: No workplace change" option that would achieve the University's $55 million savings target. Management instead chose "Case 3" (full redundancies) with the internal justification: 'Why not go all the way?"[128]

3.21 The NTEU thus argued that large-scale job cuts were a strategic choice rather than a financial necessity, describing the situation as a 'manufactured financial crisis'.[129]

Poor consultation process

3.22 The NTEU made the case to the committee that the consultation process for the change proposal was 'fundamentally flawed' and prevented meaningful staff feedback.[130] The union identified four key issues:

- Ignored evidence: The university's management had justified cuts with claims that contradict the university's own data. For example, it proposed cutting seven of the ten most popular Bachelor of Arts majors while citing low student demand.
- Withheld information: Management refused to release enrolment projections, financial modelling and workload calculations underpinning the proposal, despite repeated requests from staff and the union
- No equity analysis: The university did not assess the diversity and inclusion impacts of the proposed redundancies before making its decision, as required by clause 47.8(b) of its Enterprise Agreement.
- Inadequate timing: The university scheduled consultation during peak end-of-semester marking, a major leave period, and Northern Hemisphere conference season, which limited staff capacity to respond.[131]

3.23 Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh, a senior lecturer in the School of International Studies, who was made involuntarily redundant (see case study below) addressed the issue of staff consultation in detail. In substance, echoing the NTEU, she stated that staff were asked to respond to proposals without being provided with key underlying data, modelling or explanations, and that feedback provided through formal processes was not meaningfully addressed, nor reported back to staff.[132] She further indicated that, in her experience, decision-making processes did not incorporate relevant considerations at an early stage. She described situations in which issues such as equity impacts and staff wellbeing

[128] Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 2.
[129] Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 10.
[130] Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 28.
[131] Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 28.
[132] Answer to supplementary question 3, Associate Professor Bayeh, 20 May 2026, p 75.

were addressed only after decisions had effectively been made, rather than being integrated into deliberations prior to finalisation.[133]

3.24 Against that background, concerns about consultation ultimately led to external regulatory intervention, highlighting issues of compliance with work health and safety consultation obligations. This is discussed later below.

Targeting of disciplines

3.25 A number of inquiry participants expressed very strong concerns about the cuts within the Faculty of Arts.

3.26 Raewyn Connell, Professor Emerita at the University of Sydney and foundation professor of sociology at Macquarie University, and Michael Fine, Honorary Professor in Social Sciences at Macquarie University, highlighted in their joint submission the apparent lack of justification or consultation in respect of very significant cuts:

> We are both distressed to see how the teaching and research contributions of a fine, productive, and highly respected group of scholars could have been targeted for elimination, evidently without consultation with the staff affected or development of a clear rationale or justification for the action.[134]

3.27 Professors O'Connell and Fine elaborated that the Faculty's 'detailed proposal for staff reductions provided no evidence of a decision-making process based on student numbers, research funding or income streams from teaching or research, past, current or future'.[135]

3.28 The NTEU argued that the cuts to staff and curriculum in the 2025 Change Proposal targeted and disproportionately affected certain disciplines, with 'slated sackings' having included:

- Sociology: 11 of 14 lecturers
- Ancient History: 9 of 12 professors.
- Politics: 4 of 8 lecturers.
- Education: 10 lecturers.
- Media & Communications: 7 lecturers.
- Science & Engineering: 23 lecturers across all four schools.[136]

3.29 Dr Harrigan and Associate Professor Matthews, on behalf of the union, went so far as to allege that the union's executive and their home disciplines were targeted

133 Answer to supplementary question 6, Associate Professor Bayeh, 20 May 2026, p 112.

134 Submission 52, Professor Raewyn Connell and Professor Michael Fine, p 4.

135 Submission 52, Professor Raewyn Connell and Professor Michael Fine, p 4.

136 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 26.

for staff cuts during the restructure.[137] Associate Professor Matthews stated that by contrast, 'the home disciplines of faculty directors and heads of school were all declared out of scope during the last round of redundancies'.[138]

3.30 The NTEU further reported that the student curriculum would be narrowed with up to six majors abolished, including performing arts, politics and gender studies. Within the Bachelor of Arts, the number of available majors would be cut from 23 to six, with 11 existing majors moved into specialised degrees, 'fragmenting study pathways and threatening their viability'.[139]

3.31 The union positioned these decisions within a governance context, arguing that they are in direct contravention to the university's object and functions under the *Macquarie University Act 1989*. Specifically, it cited the University's object of 'the promotion … of scholarship, research, free inquiry, the interaction of research and teaching, and academic excellence", and its principal functions as including 'the provision of courses of study… across a range of fields' and 'the participation in public discourse'.[140]

Work health and safety impacts

3.32 The NTEU highlighted to the committee that the change process caused ‘unprecedented staff distress, including anxiety, depression, and even suicidality'. Overall, it characterised the 2025 change process as 'a profound WHS crisis' in which the process itself became a primary psychosocial hazard. The NTEU rejected MQ’s psychosocial risk assessment as 'woefully inadequate', noting that it relied on vague, unverifiable and unenforceable mitigation measures.[141]

3.33 The union further argued that the 'root cause of the psychosocial harm is a 'profound lack of organisational justice' that included:

1. Incoherent or unsubstantiated justifications for the change.

2. "Biased, non-transparent, arbitrary or malicious criteria" for targeting staff.

3. Selection panels with "no independence or disciplinary expertise".

137 Evidence, Dr Nicholas Harrigan, Senior Lecturer in Quantitative Sociology, National Tertiary Education Union Macquarie University Branch President, 1 April 2026, p 36; Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, p 49.

138 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, p 49.

139 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 26.

140 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 26.

141 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 17.

4. "Callous and indifferent language" from senior managers, such as, "sometimes you need to give management dead bodies".[142]

3.34 It concluded that, 'A legislative framework that allows a University Council to oversee such a harmful and unlawful process is fundamentally broken'.[143]

3.35 The union also cited a SafeWork improvement notice as evidence of systemic failures in MQ's WHS practices and governance.

SafeWork NSW Improvement Notice

3.36 On 1 October 2025, concerns about the restructuring escalated when SafeWork NSW issued an improvement notice to MQ.[144] The regulator found that the university failed to meet its duty to consult staff and health and safety representatives in accordance with work, health and safety (WHS) procedures on the proposed workplace changes. It directed MQ to consult Tier 3 (local) WHS Committees in affected areas, and to identify hazards, assess risks, and eliminate or minimise risks arising from the changes.[145]

3.37 Dr Nicholas Harrigan, Senior Lecturer in Quantitative Sociology and President of the MQ Branch of the NTEU, expressed to the committee his strong disappointment that SafeWork found no failures in managing risks or general consultation, merely a failure to follow the agreed consultation process.[146] He told the committee that, SafeWork relied upon MQ's provision of its employee assistance program counselling service as sufficient to meet the university's WHS responsibilities. He argued that this was a fundamentally wrong view of the legislation, and that 'SafeWork let Macquarie off the hook'.[147]

3.38 Professor Eric Knight, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (People and Operations) and Professor of Strategic Management, MQ, advised the committee that in response to the improvement notice, the university developed and shared an updated risk assessment plan with staff.[148] He noted that, following these steps, SafeWork NSW confirmed in early November 2025 that MQ had complied with all WHS requirements set out in the improvement notice.[149]

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142 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 17.

143 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 17.

144 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 40.

145 Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Eric Knight, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (People and Operations), Professor of Strategic Management, Macquarie University, 6 May 2026, p 22.

146 Answers to questions on notice, Dr Nicolas Harrigan, Senior Lecturer in Quantitative Sociology, National Tertiary Education Union Macquarie University Branch President, 20 May 2026, pp 20-23.

147 Evidence, Dr Harrigan, 1 April 2026, p 49.

148 Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Knight, 6 May 2026, p 22.

149 Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Knight, 6 May 2026, p 22.

3.39 Evidence before the committee nonetheless indicated that the work health and safety impacts persisted among staff, with many experiencing ongoing psychosocial risks.[150] Associate Professor Nicole Matthews, School of Communication, Society and Culture, MQ, advised the committee that as a member of the Faculty of Arts health and safety committee she knew of staff hospitalised with mental illness, physical conditions and cardiac issues caused by stress. She also reported that many staff were too scared to lodge WHS claims under the apprehension that if they did, their subjects would be cut.[151]

3.40 Dr Harrigan, Associate Professor Matthews and Associate Professor Bayeh, on behalf of the union, highlighted to the committee the very strong fear among MQ staff about speaking up against management decisions.[152] Associate Professor Bayeh attested that 'A climate of fear permeates the faculty' and cited the finding of the Australian University staff wellbeing report that 56 per cent of surveyed Macquarie staff fall into the very high risk level of psychological harm, rising to 84 per cent when the high risk category is added.[153]

3.41 Associate Professor Bayeh raised with the committee her strong belief that she was unfairly targeted for involuntary redundancy. Her case study is captured below.

Case study – Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh

Evidence before the committee included detailed accounts from Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh, a long-serving academic at MQ and an NTEU member, whose experience illustrates a number of the governance and procedural concerns identified in this chapter.

The committee also received evidence regarding Associate Professor Bayeh's redundancy. On 27 March 2026, the Macquarie University Redundancy Review Committee considered her appeal against involuntary redundancy and found unanimously that the university had not acted fairly and properly in selecting her for redundancy against the stated criteria.

Notwithstanding this finding, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) confirmed the redundancy on 14 May 2026.

Associate Professor Bayeh also raised concerns about the broader context in which the decision was made. She told the committee that she was concerned that her participation as a witness in the inquiry may have been a factor considered in the final redundancy decision.

On 18 June 2026 the committee wrote to Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, MQ, seeking an explanation and a detailed assurance as to whether the participation

150 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, p 49.

151 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, p 49.

152 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, p 49.

153 Evidence, Associate Professor Bayeh, 1 April 2026, pp 38-39

of former Associate Professor Bayeh in the inquiry had any bearing on the decision to confirm her involuntary redundancy. In doing so, the committee stated, 'In light of our concerns, we seek your explanation and detailed assurance that the decision to confirm the involuntary redundancy was not influenced by A/Prof Bayeh's participation in the inquiry'.[154] On 19 June 2026, the committee received a letter from Professor Dowton advising that the decision to confirm the redundancy of Associate Professor Bayeh was not influenced by her participation in the inquiry.[155]

In its correspondence, the committee also noted broader concerns that witnesses to the inquiry had reported fears of reprisals from university leaders and emphasised the importance of the university ensuring that participants could provide evidence free from fear of retaliation.[156]

On 25 June 2026, the committee wrote to Professor Dowton again, requesting that he advise why the committee should not conclude that the decision to confirm former Associate Professor Bayeh's redundancy was retaliatory.[157] The committee's concern reflected the circumstances of the matter, including the Redundancy Review Committee's unanimous finding that the university had not acted fairly and properly in selecting former Associate Professor Bayeh for redundancy, and the subsequent decision to nevertheless confirm the redundancy.

On 6 July 2026, the committee received a response from Professor Dowton providing further information and advising again that the decision to confirm the redundancy of former Associate Professor Bayeh was not influenced by her participation in the inquiry. It stated that the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) 'engaged in a comprehensive, independent and impartial review process prior to making the Decision' and documented the review process.[158]

In none of the correspondence did the university explain why Associate Professor Bayeh was made redundant despite the unanimous finding of the MQ Redundancy Review Committee that the university had not acted fairly and properly in selecting her for redundancy. We take up the broader issue of non-transparent and unaccountable managerial decision-making in the final chapter.

The committee notes that, at the time of reporting, proceedings relating to former Associate Professor Bayeh’s matter had not been finalised before the Fair Work Commission.

154 Correspondence from Chair to Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor and President, Macquarie University, 18 June 2026, p 2.

155 Correspondence from Professor S. Bruce Dowton Vice-Chancellor and President, Macquarie University, to Chair, 19 June 2026, p 1.

156 Correspondence from Chair to Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor and President, Macquarie University, 18 June 2026, p 2.

157 Correspondence from Chair to Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor and President, Macquarie University, 25 June 2026, p 2.

158 Correspondence from Professor S. Bruce Dowton Vice-Chancellor and President, Macquarie University, 6 July 2026, to Chair, pp 1-3.

The enabling legislation

3.42 The concerns raised during the restructuring about consultation, transparency, decision-making authority and the role of the University Council direct the committee's attention to the statutory framework governing MQ.

Objectives

3.43 The objectives of the university, as stated in the *Macquarie University Act 1989* (the Act), are the promotion, within the limits of the University's resources, of scholarship, research, free inquiry, the interaction of research and teaching, and academic excellence.[159]

Functions

3.44 To fulfil its objectives, MQ's principal functions, as prescribed by the Act, include:

- provision of facilities for education and research of university standard
- encouragement of the dissemination, advancement, development and application of knowledge informed by free inquiry
- provision of courses of study or instruction across a range of fields, and the carrying out of research, to meet the needs of the community
- participation in public discourse
- conferring of degrees and other awards
- provision of teaching and learning that engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry
- development of governance, procedural rules, admission policies, financial arrangements and quality assurance processes sufficient to ensure the integrity of the University's academic programs.[160]

3.45 Consistent with the broader NSW university governance framework, the Act also authorises MQ to undertake commercial activities to support its objects and principal functions.[161]

Composition of the University Council

3.46 As noted in chapter 1 of the interim report at paragraph 1.18, a University Council is the governing body of a university and has the functions conferred or imposed

[159] *Macquarie University Act 1989*, s 6(1).

[160] *Macquarie University Act 1989*, s 6(2).

[161] *Macquarie University Act 1989*, s 6(3).

on it by or under the enabling legislation.[162] Section 8B of the Act prescribes that the MQ Council must have a minimum of 11 and a maximum of 22 members, with a total number determined from time to time by a resolution passed by at least two-thirds of the members of the Council.[163] A majority of the total number must be external persons, and no single category may constitute a majority.[164] The Council must notify the Minister within 7 days of any resolution passed under s 8B.[165]

3.47 Public information as at mid-July 2026 states that the MQ University Council comprises 15 members including:

- three official members (Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Chair of Academic Senate)
- eight appointed members (six council appointed and two ministerially appointed)
- four elected members (two academic staff, one professional staff and one student).[166]

3.48 Against this statutory framework, inquiry participants identified a series of interconnected governance concerns.

Governance concerns

3.49 Evidence to the inquiry converged on the following themes at MQ: weak representation and a self-appointing council; limited challenge and a culture of fear; sidelined staff input; certain actions towards the union; poor transparency; and a shift away from the university's public mission.

Inadequate representation on council

3.50 Some inquiry participants raised concerns that appointed external members may constitute a majority of the MQ University Council. The NTEU suggested that the current governance framework has fostered a council structure dominated by externally appointed corporate members (reported to be approximately 86 per cent).[167] If accurate, this composition may give rise to a potential contravention of s 8B(7) of the Act, which provides that 'the number of members in any one

[162] *Macquarie University Act 1989*, s 8A(2).

[163] *Macquarie University Act 1989*, s 8B(2).

[164] *Macquarie University Act 1989*, s 8B(6) and (7).

[165] *Macquarie University Act 1989*, s 8B(8).

[166] Governance Services, *Current Macquarie University Council members*, Macquarie University, https://www.mq.edu.au/about/about-the-university/structure-governance/council/members.

[167] Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 6.

category of members must not at any time constitute a majority of the total number of members'.[168] According to the union, this dominance limits internal representation and weakens scrutiny over decisions. Dr Harrigan stated in evidence that 'the University Council itself appoints its own members. It's just a self-governing club'.[169]

3.51 The NTEU argued that this composition reflects a 'classic council capture' at MQ where a largely self-selecting, externally dominated body entrenches its own authority and priorities. The union highlighted that this captured governance structure has driven a managerial culture that prioritises property performance and executive 'special projects' over the university's core public mission of education and research.[170] The NTEU further contended that an externally appointed, corporate-dominated council does not serve to adequately protect the public interest and instead reduces transparency, accountability and the role of the university community in decision-making.[171]

3.52 The NTEU told the committee that it supports mandating more democratic governance arrangements to restore community voice and accountability, including at MQ:

> We strongly support the proposal to legislate a minimum 50% elected staff and student representation on every Council. This is the only effective structural mechanism to restore internal accountability and ensure governance aligns with the University's statutory object.[172]

3.53 Associate Professor Matthews advised that she joined the University Council on 1 January 2026.[173] At the committee's 1 April 2026 hearing, she declined to comment on whether a culture of contestability exists on the University Council, or whether reports and assumptions are tested in areas such as workforce planning and strategy, on the basis that she was a new appointee and had attended only one meeting at that time, and that she was bound by confidentiality agreements not to disclose council proceedings.[174]

3.54 Associate Professor Matthews instead described her experience on the university's academic senate, the 'next level down' in governance below the council.[175] She observed that while some senate members seek to encourage

168 *Macquarie University Act 1989*, s 8B(7).

169 Evidence, Dr Harrigan, 1 April 2026, p 45.

170 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 6.

171 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 20.

172 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 20.

173 Governance Services, *Current Macquarie University Council members*, Macquarie University, https://www.mq.edu.au/about/about-the-university/structure-governance /council/members.

174 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, p 50.

175 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, p 50.

discussion around decision-making, 'the "atmosphere of fear" aspect makes it very difficult for elected representatives to speak' openly.[176]

3.55 She also expressed a view that the senate's classification of key issues as 'operational' actively prevents their discussion in the senate. Matters such as staffing, casualisation, facilities, staff-student ratios, and discipline balance are treated as management issues and thereby excluded from senate deliberation. In her view, this shifts responsibility to the University Council, limiting debate and relocating decision-making to a body that is both less transparent and less grounded in educational expertise.[177] This shift into the less visible governance forum, she argued, undermines trust and confidence in what are highly significant decisions:

> Such critical issues can only be addressed at council meetings because of this prohibition of discussion in senate, and that's a body at which very few members have a background in education or even in the provision of public services. The lack of transparency of council deliberations means that staff, students and the community more broadly really cannot be confident that issues like staff-student ratios, casualisation of teaching, inclusion on campus, political bias or even nepotism in resourcing decisions are being adequately addressed.[178]

3.56 Consistent with this concern, Associate Professor Matthews questioned whether members of Council have sufficient tertiary education expertise to properly assess the implications of their decisions. She expressed concern that without practical teaching experience, decision-makers may not fully understand the consequences of resourcing choices.[179]

3.57 Associate Professor Matthews contended that there is a prevailing perception that the MQ University Council operates according to a business model, as many universities do, with a focus on the financial bottom line:

> … I think the general sense is that this is a business, and it's a business that needs to make a profit. It's a competitive business where our job is to compete with other institutions. That is an unquestioned assumption of the way universities are run, and that has all sorts of knock-on implications. I think in the world view that universities are just businesses, if it's just a business, then the cheaper you can make it, the better, right?[180]

3.58 In addition to the shift of 'operational discussions' away from scrutiny and transparency, Associate Professor Matthews pointed to a further systemic constraint on effective contestability within governance structures – a cultural

176 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, p 50.

177 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, p 38.

178 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, p 38.

179 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, p 51.

180 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, p 51.

pressure to avoid conflict. In combination, these factors in her view reduce the capacity of governance bodies to effectively test assumptions, interrogate decisions, and draw on relevant academic expertise.[181] Associate Professor Matthews observed that within such a context, 'Decisions are often rushed, secretive and made by those without specialist knowledge. Where expertise doesn't match with management preferences, it's sidelined'. As an example, she stated, 'The rationale for job and course cuts [at MQ] has never been adequately explained. Redundancies have been made in areas with booming enrolments.[182]

3.59 Associate Professor Matthews pointed to a broader pattern in which collegial governance processes are systemically sidelined, with significant implications for transparency, accountability and decision-making across MQ.[183] These issues are examined further in the following section.

Weakened governance

3.60 Evidence before the committee, including the NTEU submission, indicated that authority at MQ has become concentrated within a small group of senior executives, with limited opportunity for broader academic input or scrutiny. The union's representatives pointed to the problems documented above in respect of the 2024-2025 change process as reflective of the weakened governance processes.

3.61 Associate Professor Bayeh observed that MQ was once a collegial workplace, contending that the 'excessively unsafe work environment' now present is a direct result of a 'failure of governance'.[184] She argued that the poor consultation that characterised the restructure process was part of a broader pattern of sidelining established processes.[185] The NTEU also pointed to weakened collegial governance in that staff were not given access to data, modelling and assumptions underpinning restructuring decisions, which limited their ability to engage with or challenge them.[186] In supplementary evidence, Associate Professor Bayeh further asserted that 'diversity, equity and inclusion issues are not treated as a priority' in the university's decision-making processes.[187]

3.62 The NTEU reinforced these concerns, describing a governance model characterised by an 'accountability gap' and executive dominance.[188] It argued that the university's decision making, including large-scale redundancies,

181 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, pp 50-51.
182 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, p 37.
183 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, pp 50-51.
184 Evidence, Associate Professor Bayeh, 1 April 2026, p 39.
185 Answer to supplementary question 3, Associate Professor Bayeh, 20 May 2026, p 75.
186 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 32.
187 Answer to supplementary question 6, Associate Professor Bayeh, 20 May 2026, p 112.
188 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 6.

without meaningful staff engagement and despite viable alternatives, indicated a breakdown in shared governance processes.[189]

Actions towards the union

3.63 As an example of the breakdown of relations between the university's senior leadership and the union, the committee heard that Professor Dixon, personally removed NTEU posters from the MQ campus.[190] In addition, video and pictorial evidence of this action was provided to the committee.[191] Associate Professor Matthews told the committee 'the union posters were regularly torn down' and that 'it was part of a culture of hostility'.[192]

3.64 Questioned during his appearance at the hearing about this, Professor Dixon acknowledged removing the posters, noting that he considered them non-compliant with university policy on approved noticeboard spaces. Asked how he would characterise his relationship with the NTEU, he responded, 'When you say the NTEU, I suspect that probably three-quarters of my faculty are members of the NTEU. I would suggest that I have pretty good working relationships with most of my colleagues in the faculty.'[193]

3.65 When the committee asked whether such conduct by a senior leader might lead to a perception that there is a particular cultural attitude towards the treatment of trade unions at the university, Professor Eric Knight, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (People and Operations) and Professor of Strategic Management, assured the committee that the university was committed to making sure that it maintains a good working relationship with the NTEU:

> … I am concerned to make sure that the union has good outlets for discussion and for raising concerns as part of any workplace changes or, more generally, in the work of the university … I think what's important here is that we've got a good system and good safeguards to make sure that we have a respectful workplace and where there are concerns and issues that they can be raised in the appropriate fora and adjudicated as they relate to important considerations such as the workplace changes.[194]

3.66 The committee notes that, in response to questions taken on notice, MQ advised that in 2019 orders were made against the university under the General

189 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 26.

190 Evidence, Professor Chris Dixon, Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University, 1 April 2026, p 30; Evidence, Dr Harrigan, 1 April 2026, p 47.

191 Additional information to answers to questions on notice, Dr Nicholas Harrigan, Senior Lecturer in Quantitative Sociology, National Tertiary Education Union Macquarie University Branch President, 20 May 2026.

192 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, p 41.

193 Evidence, Professor Dixon, 1 April 2026, p 30.

194 Evidence, Professor Eric Knight, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (People and Operations), Professor of Strategic Management, Macquarie University, 1 April 2026, p 34.

Protections provisions of the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth). The orders related to adverse action arising from a decision to declare an employee's position redundant in 2017.[195]

Poor transparency

3.67 Linked to these governance concerns, inquiry participants questioned whether MQ provides clear, timely, and sufficiently detailed information about how key decisions are made.[196]

3.68 The NTEU highlighted that the prevailing approach to governance at MQ limits visibility during decision-making, especially before staff consultation and it may prevent stakeholders from understanding or influencing decisions at an early stage.[197] Its submission documented the union's resort to the GIPA process in order to obtain what it saw as essential and rightful information regarding the restructure decisions.[198]

3.69 In this context, the committee asked about MQ's commitment to transparency. Professor Dowton responded that the university does uphold transparency, stating, 'I believe we do, yes'.[199] He further emphasised that the university complies with legal requirements when redacting documents, noting that 'all redactions… are conducted in accordance with [the] Act'.[200] He explained that information is removed to protect privacy, security, or confidential matters prior to decisions being finalised.[201]

3.70 Indicating a narrow view of transparency, focused on legal compliance rather than openness, Professor Dowton noted that MQ withholds information when it:

- names individuals and raises privacy concerns
- includes sensitive or security-related material
- relates to matters still under consideration.[202]

3.71 When asked about consultancy spending and reporting transparency, Professor Dowton responded that he supports transparency, personally approves every

195 Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Knight, 6 May 2026, p 4.

196 Answer to supplementary question 3, Associate Professor Bayeh, 20 May 2026, p 75.

197 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 37.

198 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, pp 10, 20, 40 and 48.

199 Evidence, Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, 1 April 2026, p 21.

200 Evidence, Professor Dowton, 1 April 2026, p 21.

201 Evidence, Professor Dowton, 1 April 2026, pp 21-22.

202 Evidence, Professor Dowton, 1 April 2026, pp 21-22.

consultant and contractor employed at the university, and is 'very assiduous' in doing so.[203]

3.72 Responding to questions regarding MQ's use of consultants, Professor Dowton also advised that:

- the university's consultancy spend last year was $1.7 million
- MQ does not use consultants to design change processes, which are 'designed internally'
- Pilbara Group is engaged for about $100,000 per year to provide a cost-of-teaching tool.[204]

3.73 Evidence received from Pilbara Group in respect of its work for MQ is documented in chapter 2 in the context of the company's other consultancies. There we noted that Pilbara designed and maintained MQ's activity-based cost model. Specifically, it developed the model, produced reports, updated the model annually using MQ data and updated the associated reports annually.[205] Mr Lea Patterson, President and CEO of Pilbara further advised that his company provides the data and reporting framework to MQ the university itself undertakes analysis of model outputs.[206] Pilbara was engaged by MQ at a cost of $466,334 between 2022 and 2025.[207]

Personal loan to the Vice-Chancellor

3.74 The committee also notes disclosures in the MQ Annual Reports that raise further transparency issues. Since 2013, the reports have included a footnote about a loan of $875,000 to Professor Dowton to acquire a residence. The *2025 Annual Report* states:

> During 2013, a Loan Agreement in the amount of $875k was signed between Macquarie University and Professor S B Dowton for acquiring a residence in Sydney. The balance at the reporting date was $250k (2024: $325k). The loan incurred $15k (2024: $22k) interest and $12k (2024: $12k) was paid for the year ended 31 December 2025.
>
> Pursuant to the Loan Agreement, the University uses this property for University functions, for a fee assessed at a fair value using comparable market rental for similar properties. Professor S B Dowton waived all fees payable under the Loan Agreement in 2025 (2024: nil).

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203 Evidence, Professor Dowton, 1 April 2026, pp 24-25.

204 Evidence, Professor Dowton, 1 April 2026, pp 24-25. Pilbara's evidence is examined in detail in chapter 2 on consultants.

205 Evidence, Mr Lea Patterson, President, CEO, Pilbara, 1 April 2026, pp 11-12.

206 Evidence, Mr Patterson, 1 April 2026, p 14.

207 Answers to supplementary questions, Mr Lea Patterson, President, CEO, Pilbara, 29 April 2026, p 1.

> There are no other loans to key management personnel.[208]

3.75 As at 31 December 2025, $250,000 remained outstanding. The property is used for university functions at a market rate, and Professor Dowton waived all fees in 2025.[209]

3.76 In order to more fully understand the details of the loan in the interests of transparency and effective governance, the committee wrote to Professor Dowton on 18 June 2026 seeking further details on the loan's terms, governance oversight and fee waiver.[210] Professor Dowton responded on 6 July 2026.[211] While he addressed the committee's questions, the committee considered that his response did not provide sufficient detail beyond that already disclosed in MQ's annual reports. On 30 July 2026, the committee again wrote to Professor Dowton seeking additional information regarding the loan arrangement.[212] On 11 August 2026, Professor Dowton provided further information in response to the committee's request and noted that his earlier correspondence had included information which is not published in the University's annual reports, including a breakdown of the loan terms, details of the principal repayments, matters considered in approving the loan, remuneration arrangements and fringe benefits tax. The further information provided addressed the interest rate, loan repayments, and the arrangements under which the university is charged for use of the property for official university business.[213] Each of these letters is published on the committee's website under 'other documents'.

Other concerns

3.77 In addition to governance structures and processes, inquiry participants raised concerns about the broader impacts of these practices on institutional performance, student outcomes and workforce conditions at MQ.

Institutional performance and educational outcomes

3.78 Participants highlighted to the committee that recent restructuring and an increased commercial focus in MQ's governance have been associated with perceived declines in performance, alongside growing concerns about staffing,

208 Macquarie University, *Macquarie University Annual Report 2025* (2025), p 130.

209 Macquarie University, *Macquarie University Annual Report 2025* (2025), p 130.

210 Correspondence from Chair to Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor and President, Macquarie University, 18 June 2026.

211 Correspondence from Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor and President, Macquarie University, to Chair, 6 July 2026.

212 Correspondence from Chair to Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor and President, Macquarie University, 30 July 2026.

213 Correspondence from Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor and President, Macquarie University, to Chair, 11 August 2026.

equity and workplace conditions. They identified international rankings as a key indicator of these concerns, particularly in relation to staffing levels and student support. For example, the NTEU noted in its submission, under the heading 'failure to safeguard student welfare', that the *Times Higher Education Supplement* ranks MQ as having the worst staff-to-student ratio in Australia (50:1).[214]

3.79 Dr Harrigan summarised these concerns, noting that 'every year we witness quality education further undermined, with cuts to staff, units, degrees, contact hours, assessments – everything except class sizes, which go up'.[215] Union representatives attested to staff cuts despite rising student numbers, for example in respect of the highly popular Bachelor of Media and Communications.[216] The NTEU highlighted that these pressures have increased workloads, reduced contact hours and constrained the quality of teaching, emphasising that larger class sizes and limited staff capacity are affecting both the student experience and educational outcomes.[217]

Workforce conditions and impacts

3.80 Participants linked these trends to broader workforce impacts for MQ staff over a number of years. They reported declining job security, worsening conditions and reduced morale. They further reported that the recent restructuring, including cuts to teaching hours and course offerings as detailed in the first half of this chapter, has intensified these pressures and contributed to a 'degradation of safe, fair and professional workplace'.[218]

Gender equity

3.81 Participants also raised concerns about gender equity in leadership. The committee heard that since 2024, MQ has not qualified as an employer of choice for women because it does not meet the requirement that men and women each comprise at least 40 per cent of the executive, pointing to limited progress on inclusion commitments and poor leadership accountability for diversity outcomes.[219] The committee also heard that seven of the nine staff made involuntarily redundant were women.[220]

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214 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 8.

215 Evidence, Dr Harrigan, 1 April 2026, p 36.

216 Evidence, Dr Harrigan, 1 April 2026, p 40.

217 Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 8.

218 Evidence, Dr Harrigan, 1 April 2026, p 36.

219 Evidence, Associate Professor Matthews, 1 April 2026, p 37; Answer to supplementary questions, Associate Professor Matthews, School of Communication, Society and Culture, Macquarie University, 20 May 2026, p 154.

220 Evidence, Associate Professor Bayeh, 1 April 2026, p 39.

Committee comment

3.82 The evidence before the committee regarding Macquarie University raises serious and interconnected concerns about governance, transparency and accountability. While the committee recognises that universities must adapt to changing financial, policy and educational environments, the processes adopted in this instance give rise to significant questions about whether those changes were developed and implemented in a manner consistent with the university's statutory obligations and public mission, or with due respect for staff.

3.83 In particular, the committee notes evidence that major restructuring decisions were characterised by limited transparency, constrained access to underlying data and modelling, and consultation processes that many stakeholders did not experience as genuine or meaningful. The committee is concerned that these shortcomings undermined confidence in decision-making processes and contributed to significant uncertainty and distress among Macquarie staff, not least among those who lost their jobs. We take at face value the reports of significant psychological toll on individuals.

3.84 The committee also notes the Vice-Chancellor's evidence that MQ does not use consultants to design change processes, which are developed internally. However, evidence received regarding the role of the Pilbara Group that suggests a degree of ambiguity about the role of external advice in informing decisions underpinning organisational change. The committee considers that greater clarity regarding the contribution of external parties to major restructure decisions would assist confidence in, and scrutiny of, university decision-making processes.

3.85 It is clear to the committee that poor processes attached to the restructure led directly to a profound sense of mistrust on the part of MQ staff. Additionally, the committee observed a strong lack of faith in the rationale for the staff cuts in the Faculty of Arts that extended beyond allegations of targeting union members and encompassed deep concerns about the preservation of academic quality and teaching, and the loss of core disciplines. We return to this theme in the final chapter.

3.86 In addition, the committee was deeply concerned by allegations raised by current and former staff in evidence, and many informal reports to committee members, that there were strong fears of reprisal for speaking up, either within the university context or through participation in the inquiry. The committee was also not satisfied with the answers provided by the Vice-Chancellor regarding the redundancy of former Associate Professor Bayeh, nor persuaded that the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) conducted a comprehensive, independent and impartial review process prior to making the decision. Again, we address the issue of fear of reprisals by senior university leaders against staff – which were expressed time and again in this inquiry, across many universities – in our final chapter.

3.87 The committee further notes the findings of SafeWork NSW, which identified a failure to follow required consultation processes in relation to work health and safety obligations early in the MQ restructure. While the university subsequently took steps to comply with the improvement notice, the evidence suggests that broader concerns regarding psychosocial risks, workplace culture and staff confidence in reporting mechanisms persisted. These matters point to the importance of not only formal compliance, but also the effectiveness and integrity of consultation and risk management in practice when universities undertake restructuring and more generally.

3.88 Evidence to the inquiry also raised concerns regarding the composition and operation of the MQ University Council, including the balance between internal and external representation, the degree of contestability in decision-making, and the extent to which academic expertise informs governance. The committee notes that the concentration of decision-making within the University Council, matched with the exclusion of certain matters from collegial governance processes, may limit effective scrutiny and weaken institutional accountability.

3.89 The committee is also concerned by evidence suggesting that at MQ, key information was not disclosed in a timely or accessible manner, and that transparency has been approached primarily as a matter of legal compliance rather than as a broader institutional commitment to openness and accountability. Directly linked to this broader pattern of limited transparency, the committee notes concerns raised during the inquiry regarding the communication and disclosure of information relating to the university's residential loan arrangement with Professor Dowton. In order to obtain a fuller understanding of the arrangement, the committee wrote on two occasions seeking further information. Although additional information was subsequently provided, the committee considers that this experience reflected broader concerns raised during the inquiry regarding transparency and the accessibility of key information. We remain very sceptical as to the appropriateness of such a loan. More broadly, the committee considers that, as public institutions established under statute, universities must maintain a high standard of transparency, particularly regarding decisions that significantly affect staff, students and academic courses.

3.90 Finally, the committee notes the impacts arising from the MQ restructure and governance more broadly, as described by participants, including on workforce conditions, staff wellbeing, equity outcomes and the quality of the student experience. While the committee did not receive direct evidence from students in this case, the strength and credibility of staff concerns suggest that governance practices have had material consequences for the university’s ability to fulfil its core functions. The committee also notes the absence of an independent student union at MQ. While the committee did not receive direct evidence from students regarding the consequences of this arrangement, it considers that independent student representative bodies play a vital role in ensuring that student perspectives are communicated to university leadership and governance bodies. The committee is concerned by the absence of such a body at MQ and would

expect a public university to actively foster independent and effective student representation as part of a healthy culture of participation, accountability and institutional engagement.

3.91 Taken together, the evidence in this chapter indicates a pattern of governance practices at Macquarie University not fully aligned with the principles of collegiality, transparency, accountability and public purpose reflected in its enabling legislation. While the evidence relating to Macquarie University highlights significant concerns about transparency, governance, and workforce impacts, the committee notes that these issues are not unique to a single institution, with similar themes raised in evidence concerning other universities. The committee considers that these matters warrant careful consideration in the context of broader reforms to university governance in New South Wales, as discussed in later chapters. The following chapter examines the University of Sydney to assess whether these governance patterns reflect broader systemic issues across the New South Wales university sector.

Chapter 4 The University of Sydney

This chapter examines the University of Sydney (USyd), focusing on governance rather than organisational restructuring. Compared with most other universities considered by the committee, USyd has undergone less restructuring in recent years, and not the wholesale restructuring of many others. The chapter examines concerns raised during the inquiry about USyd's governance framework, including the composition and operation of its governing body, the Senate, decision-making processes and other aspects of governance. It further considers how governance is exercised through delegated authority across the institution, including within faculties and schools, and the extent to which accountability, transparency and consultation are maintained at these levels.

Next, the chapter outlines the statutory framework established by the *University of Sydney Act 1989* and considers evidence provided to the committee regarding transparency, consultation, and accountability. It further examines concerns about managerial practices, staff and student representation, and the broader implications for institutional governance and workforce impacts. Evidence gathered by the committee highlights that governance concerns may arise at multiple levels of the institution and are not confined to the Senate or executive level actions. Rather, many of the day to day decisions that have implications for operations and good governance are taken at the faculty or even more local level, and significantly, there is even less accountability at these levels. This means that any consideration of improving governance needs to take into account the cascading power and decision-making facilitated by the structure of universities.

The enabling legislation

4.1 The concerns raised during the hearing about consultation, transparency, decision-making authority and the Senate's role as the University's governing body direct the committee to consider the statutory framework governing USyd.[221]

Objectives

4.2 The objectives of the University, as stated in the *University of Sydney Act 1989* (the Act), are the promotion, within the limits of the University's resources, of scholarship, research, free inquiry, the interaction of research and teaching, and academic excellence.[222]

[221] Submission 50, The University of Sydney, p 1.

[222] *University of Sydney Act 1989*, s 6(1).

Functions

4.3 To give effect to these objectives, USyd's principal functions as prescribed by the Act, include the:

- provision of facilities for education and research of university standard
- encouragement of the dissemination, advancement, development and application of knowledge informed by free inquiry
- provision of courses of study or instruction across a range of fields, and the carrying out of research, to meet the needs of the community
- participation in public discourse
- conferring of degrees and other awards
- provision of teaching and learning that engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry
- development of governance, procedural rules, admission policies, financial arrangements and quality assurance processes sufficient to ensure the integrity of the University's academic programs.[223]

4.4 Consistent with the broader New South Wales university governance framework, the Act also authorises USyd to undertake commercial activities to support its objects and principal functions.[224]

Composition of the Senate

4.5 Section 8B prescribes that the USyd Senate (equivalent to other institutions' university council) must have a minimum of 11 and a maximum of 22 member.[225] The Senate must include official members, elected members, Senate appointed members, and ministerially appointed members.[226] A majority of the total number must be external persons, and no single category may constitute a majority.[227] The Senate must notify the Minister within seven days of any resolution under s 8B.[228]

4.6 As at September 2026, publicly available information indicates that the Senate comprises 15 fellows:

- three official fellows (the Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor and Chair of Academic Board)

223 *University of Sydney Act 1989*, s 6(2).
224 *University of Sydney Act 1989*, s 6(3).
225 *University of Sydney Act 1989*, s 8B.
226 *University of Sydney Act 1989*, s 8B(3).
227 *University of Sydney Act 1989*, s 8B(6) and (7).
228 *University of Sydney Act 1989*, s 8B(8).

- seven appointed fellows (five Senate-appointed and two ministerially appointed)
- five elected fellows (two academic staff, one professional staff, one undergraduate student and one postgraduate student).[229]

4.7 Evidence to the inquiry raised broader questions about governance arrangements at USyd.

Governance concerns

4.8 Evidence to the inquiry highlighted several concerns in respect of governance at USyd. These include reduced representation of staff, students and alumni on the Senate; weak student voice and consultation; a shift from collegial governance to more managerial decision-making; limited transparency; increasing workloads linked to management practices; and reliance on external consultants rather than internal expertise.

Inadequate representation

4.9 Inquiry participants raised concerns that the composition of the Senate does not provide sufficient representation for staff, students and alumni, and limits the capacity of those stakeholders to meaningfully influence decision-making.[230]

4.10 The committee heard that the Senate currently comprises 15 members, including three staff-elected fellows and two student-elected fellows, with the remaining positions filled through appointment or internal selection processes. In 2015 this was reduced from 22 members, cutting seven elected positions.[231] Committee members questioned whether this reduced size and composition had diminished stakeholder voice, noting that alumni, who historically held between five and 10 elected positions, are no longer represented through elections.[232] While the committee sought from the university the consultant report that led to this reduction of alumni representation, the document itself was not provided, only certain excerpts, with the response citing confidentiality.[233]

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229 University of Sydney, *Our Senate Fellows*, https://www.sydney.edu.au/about-us/governance-and-structure/governance/senate/our-senate-fellows.html.

230 Submission 100, Dr Robin Fitzsimons AM, p 1; Submission 9, University of Sydney Association of Professors, p 12.

231 Submission 76, Name suppressed, p 3.

232 Evidence, Professor Annamarie Jagose OAM, PhD, FAHA, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, University of Sydney, 29 April 2026, p 4.

233 Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Annamarie Jagose OAM, PhD, FAHA, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, University of Sydney, 29 May 2026, pp 9 and 23-24, quoting Baker, J., University of Sydney Senate Review (June–July 2015), commissioned by the Nominations and Appointments Committee on behalf of the Senate of the University of Sydney.

4.11 Dr Robin Fitzsimons, Honorary Fellow and Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of Sydney, emphasised that alumni previously formed the 'dominant membership' of the Senate and played a central role in ensuring accountability through democratic participation. She argued that the removal of alumni-elected positions has weakened both representation and transparency and reduced the connection between the university and its broader community. Dr Fitzsimons further observed that 'alumni provide a broad, diverse spectrum of expertise and accountability', and that their exclusion has eroded an important check on decision-making.[234]

4.12 Dr Fitzsimons also linked the decline in elected representation to broader governance outcomes. She noted that 'the effective diminution of elections' coincided with reduced transparency in Senate processes. She emphasised that alumni have a 'direct stake in the outcome and in the provisions to the community' and therefore play a critical role in maintaining the university's public mission.[235]

4.13 Mr Andrew West, a former elected Fellow, made a similar point. He argued that the shift away from elected representation has contributed to a concentration of influence in the executive and governing body. He suggested that, in the absence of strong elected constituencies, governing bodies risk 'capture' by senior leadership and have fewer mechanisms for independent scrutiny.[236]

4.14 Evidence from staff representatives reinforced concerns about limited internal representation. Dr Peter J. Chen, Senior Lecturer in Government and International Relations and National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) University of Sydney Branch President, spoke of the Senate operating in 'an information bubble created and maintained by university management.' He described a 'culture of management by flat, profound disinterest in the expertise of their own employees, and a disconnection from those activities that the public expect us to do: teach the next generation and create knowledge.' Dr Chen attributed this directly to the reduction in elected members of Senate. He emphasised that the current level of staff representation is inadequate for an institution of USyd's size and complexity, noting that three staff-elected fellows are 'less staff-elected representatives than we have campuses'.[237] He further noted that this cohort is not realistically able to consult with, or represent, the breadth of staff views, particularly given confidentiality constraints.[238]

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234 Evidence, Dr Robin B. Fitzsimons AM, Honorary Fellow and Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of Sydney, 29 April 2026, p 18.

235 Evidence, Dr Fitzsimons, 29 April 2026, p 18.

236 Evidence, Mr Andrew West, former elected Fellow, University of Sydney, 29 April 2026, p 19.

237 Evidence, Dr Peter J. Chen, Senior Lecturer in Government and International Relations, National Tertiary Education Union University of Sydney Branch President, 29 April 2026, pp 9 and 14.

238 Evidence, Dr Chen, 29 April 2026, p 14.

4.15 Dr Chen argued that these structural limitations contribute to a disconnect between the Senate and the university community and recommended increasing staff representation to at least one-third of the Senate to ensure that those 'with deep experience of the work that's actually done' are meaningfully involved in governance.[239]

Weak student representation and consultation

4.16 In their evidence to the committee, students voiced similar concerns about the adequacy of existing consultation mechanisms and the extent to which student perspectives are reflected in Senate deliberations. Participants also linked these concerns to broader questions of representation and accountability within the university's governance framework.[240]

4.17 Ms Grace Street, President, University of Sydney Students' Representative Council, argued that, while two student-elected positions remain, they represent only a 'bare minimum' level of representation and provide limited opportunity for students to influence Senate decision-making. She further questioned the effectiveness of current arrangements, stating that there is no consistent process to ensure that student representatives are able to engage with and report back to the wider student body.[241]

4.18 Ms Street supported proposals to substantially increase elected representation, recommending that at least 50 per cent of the Senate members be elected by staff, students and alumni. She emphasised that restoring alumni positions is 'particularly important' for strengthening democratic accountability and maintaining the university's connection to its community.[242]

4.19 The committee also heard evidence suggesting that the limited representation of internal stakeholders contributes to a lack of understanding among some Senate members of core student concerns and lived experience. Ms Jazzlyn Breen, Casework and Policy Officer, University of Sydney Students' Representative Council, argued that the current governance model may not adequately account for or respond to the needs and experiences of those most directly affected by university decisions. Referring to delays in student administrative and appeals processes by way of example, Ms Breen stated:

> A lot of these people don't know what it's like to be a student...They don't know that it's currently taking almost two weeks to get the outcome of a special consideration application. They don't know that the second-stage academic appeal board is so backlogged that it's taking three times the

239 Evidence, Dr Chen, 29 April 2026, p 14.

240 Submission 100, Dr Robin Fitzsimons AM, p 5; Evidence, Mr West, 29 April 2026, p 19; Evidence, Dr Chen, 29 April 2026, p 14; Evidence, Ms Grace Street, President, University of Sydney Students' Representative Council, 29 April 2026, p 31.

241 Evidence, Ms Street, 29 April 2026, p 31.

242 Evidence, Ms Street, 29 April 2026, p 31.

> time specified in policy to get students outcomes, which is sometimes delaying students' progression by a year.[243]

4.20 Another student highlighted that the university's establishing Act does not mandate regard to student or staff welfare, nor community expectations, and that as such, these have been negatively impacted by university governance decisions:

> The University Senate, as outlined by paragraph 16(1A)(c) of the University of Sydney Act, exists to control, manage, and exercise the affairs of USYD together with the Executive, doing so in line with the 'university's interests'. These interests must align with the objects and functions of the University outlined in section 6 of the Act, in allowing the University to undertake free inquiry and provide teaching and conferral of degrees at a university-level standard. There is no mention, however, of the need to safeguard the welfare of staff or students in this regard, nor is there any mention of the vital social role that the university should play in order to align with community expectations … I can attest that in overseeing and deciding on the 'academic activities' of the university, through arbitrary re-structuring of courses and degrees, the Senate and the Vice-Chancellor have directly impacted student wellbeing, by creating an atmosphere of uncertainty.[244]

Information sources for Senate Fellows

4.21 The committee asked Professor Annamarie Jagose OAM, FAHA, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, about the university's expectations of Senate Fellows, in light of the *Senate Fellows Role Statement* appended to the university's submission to the inquiry. The statement includes that, 'Senate Fellows should regard Committees of Senate and the Vice-Chancellor as their principal sources of information and advice concerning the University' and that 'Fellows should seek additional information on any matter from the Vice-Chancellor in the first instance'.[245]

4.22 In response to questions about whether it was appropriate for Senate Fellows to rely primarily on information provided through Senate processes and university management when overseeing USyd's administration, Professor Jagose stated that from a practical point of view, Senate Fellows receive information through Senate processes and that she presumed the guidance was intended as a means for seeking clarification through those processes, with the Vice-Chancellor, as a member of the Senate, being approached in the first instance. She stated that the

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243 Evidence, Ms Jazzlyn Breen, Casework and Policy Officer, University of Sydney Students' Representative Council, 29 April 2026, p 31.

244 Submission 76, Name suppressed, p 3.

245 Submission 50, The University of Sydney, p 61.

guidance was 'just a clarification point' and that there was no suggestion that information or materials could not be sourced from elsewhere.[246]

4.23 Challenged as to whether these aspects of the statement might reflect on the culture of the Senate that the university promotes in respect of information that Fellows may bring to their oversight role, Professor Jagose insisted:

> There's a very clear relationship between the governance and the leadership of the university as materialised in the Senate versus the university executive. It's not the only source of information, but the vice-chancellor would be a good source of information to get materials on the university's business.[247]

Weakened collegial governance processes

4.24 Beyond concerns regarding Senate composition and openness to Senate members proactively seeking information sources which enable oversight, the committee heard that broader governance arrangements at USyd may limit meaningful participation in decision-making. Professor John Buchanan, University of Sydney Business School, warned that collegial governance at USyd risks being sidelined.[248]

4.25 Professor Buchanan linked this risk at USyd to the committee's interim report findings on the sidelining of collegial decision-making at the University of Technology of Sydney and the University of Wollongong, where he noted it had reached 'an outrageous level'.[249] He emphasised that, although USyd has not reached this point, it shows clear potential for similar issues to emerge.[250]

4.26 Professor Buchanan described sustained institutional pressure within the USyd Business School. Over 15 years, enrolments rose by more than 120 per cent, while staff-to-student ratios worsened by approximately 50 per cent. Despite these pressures, staff remained highly collaborative and committed to the university's success. However, he emphasised that the new Dean did not sustain this goodwill and instead took it 'completely for granted,' contributing to an erosion of trust. Professor Buchanan characterised the concerns arising within the Business School as a governance issue operating at the faculty level, arguing that significant authority over organisational design, staffing and change management had been delegated to local leadership without corresponding mechanisms for meaningful collaboration or accountability.[251] In his role as Chair

246 Evidence, Professor Jagose OAM, 29 April 2026, pp 2-3.

247 Evidence, Professor Jagose OAM, 29 April 2026, pp 2-3.

248 Evidence, Professor John Buchanan, University of Sydney Business School, 29 April 2026, p 10.

249 Evidence, Professor Buchanan, 29 April 2026, p 10.

250 Evidence, Professor Buchanan, 29 April 2026, p 10.

251 Evidence, Professor Buchanan, 29 April 2026, pp 10, 12, 13 and 15.

of the NTEU Working Group Representative Committee at USyd Business School, Professor Buchanan further detailed the School's restructure and the accompanying experiences of staff. In doing so, he observed 'a complete failure by Faculty leadership to run an effective, inclusive change program.'[252]

4.27 Professor Buchanan argued that recent change processes in the school have relied on 'a compliance-driven approach to consultation' rather than genuine engagement. Staff consultation occurs through tightly controlled mechanisms such as limited-format submissions and management-controlled processes, which, he contended, reduces consultation to a procedural exercise instead of meaningful engagement. He highlighted that this approach has 'poisoned goodwill' and undermined trust. While acknowledging that staff had opportunities to provide feedback through meetings, surveys and formal consultation processes, Professor Buchanan reported that these mechanisms primarily channelled staff views rather than facilitating genuine power-sharing or collaborative decision-making. He suggested that management's focus was on demonstrating compliance with consultation requirements rather than engaging openly with alternative approaches proposed by staff.[253]

4.28 This concern was reinforced by Professor Laura J. Shepherd, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Sydney, who drew attention to broader systemic shortcomings in participation and transparency in university decision-making. According to Professor Shepherd:

> Decision-making at the University is neither inclusive nor transparent. There is little to no opportunity for collegial input into decision-making, even when the decision in question directly affects the work practices of a specific group.[254]

4.29 Evidence of declining trust includes a formal vote of no confidence in the Dean by more than 170 NTEU members, with only 18 per cent expressing confidence. Professor Buchanan made the case that this erosion of trust reduces the Business School's adaptive capacity and its ability to respond effectively to institutional challenges.[255]

4.30 Professor Buchanan suggested that this governance approach imposes significant institutional costs and reflects broader systemic shortcomings. He noted that compliance-driven consultation 'wastes time and … money,' citing a change proposal estimated to cost an additional $4.3 million annually, alongside the use of external consultants and the bypassing of local expertise. He described the process as an arbitrary 'just do it' approach that led to 19 mass staff meetings

[252] Submission 87, Professor John Buhanan, p 4.

[253] Evidence, Professor Buchanan, 29 April 2026, pp 10-11 and 13. See also Submission 87, Professor John Buhanan, p 4.

[254] Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Laura J. Shepherd, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Sydney, 27 May 2026, p 2.

[255] Evidence, Professor Buchanan, 29 April 2026, p 10.

in 18 months, each with at least 100 attendees.[256] Professor Buchanan criticised the role of external consultants in the change process, arguing that the work commissioned from Nous Group lacked transparency and accountability. He noted that neither the consultancy's terms of reference nor its final report had been made available to staff, despite the report informing significant organisational changes. He argued that the absence of feedback to staff regarding how information gathered through consultations and focus groups informed decision-making undermined trust and limited opportunities for informed scrutiny of the proposed changes, stating:

> Participants believed they were contributing to an open and constructive process, only to find that their input had been reframed or disregarded within a report that remains secret despite its significant and far-reaching impact.[257]

4.31 Professor Buchanan also raised concerns about the absence of effective internal accountability mechanisms at the university. He told the committee that senior management had not acted as a 'safety valve' and had instead indulged poor practices and concluded that the governance system 'is not fit for purpose'.[258] Importantly, these concerns were not directed solely at USyd's central governing bodies but at the operation of governance within faculties and schools, where many decisions affecting staff workloads, organisational culture, teaching quality and student outcomes are made. His evidence suggested that weaknesses in accountability can emerge at multiple levels of the institution and may not be adequately identified or addressed through existing governance structures.[259]

4.32 Dr Chen argued that the USyd should better recognise its 'natural federated nature rather than its unitary nature of organisation'. He advocated for the reinstatement of collegial processes at the faculty, major business unit and school levels, arguing that governance should draw more directly on the expertise of staff and those with 'deep experience of the work that's actually done'.[260]

Poor transparency

4.33 Linked to reductions in elected representation on the Senate and the potential sidelining of collegial governance processes, inquiry participants identified poor transparency in decision-making at USyd. Participants emphasised that reduced representation not only limits input into decisions but also reduces visibility over how and why decisions are made.[261]

256 Evidence, Professor Buchanan, 29 April 2026, p 10.

257 Submission 87, Professor John Buchanan, p 18.

258 Evidence, Professor Buchanan, 29 April 2026, p 11.

259 Evidence, Professor Buchanan, 29 April 2026, pp 11 and 13.

260 Evidence, Dr Chen, 29 April 2026, p 14.

261 Submission 9, University of Sydney Association of Professors, p 1.

4.34 The University of Sydney Association of Professors (USAP), which represents senior academics committed to the university's public mission', argued that transparency must extend beyond formal reporting. It should include clear, timely and accessible communication with staff about governance processes and outcomes.[262]

4.35 The USyd submission noted that the Senate has recognised transparency concerns and commissioned a review of its committees and operating arrangements. As part of this process, the Senate requested that university leadership identify opportunities to improve transparency in decision-making, particularly in the communication of decisions to staff, students and the broader public.[263]

4.36 Professor Jagose, on behalf of the university, told the committee that USyd has sought to address these concerns through a range of engagement activities, including an all-staff 'town hall.' According to Professor Jagose, this forum was intended to explain the role of elected Senate fellows, provide insight into their experience, and allow staff to ask questions about university governance.[264]

4.37 Acknowledging these initiatives, participants nonetheless questioned whether existing transparency measures provide sufficient insight into decision-making processes and outcomes.[265]

4.38 The USAP argued that greater transparency requires more systematic disclosure of information. It recommended that the university regularly share the results of internal surveys with all staff and clearly communicate how feedback and recommendations have informed decision-making.[266]

4.39 Dr Fitzsimons similarly submitted that universities should lead the community in open decision-making practices.[267]

4.40 The committee notes that transparency, accountability and effective governance are not matters confined to the Senate or central university leadership. While the Senate bears ultimate responsibility for the university, many decisions with significant implications for staff, students and academic outcomes are made through faculties, schools and other units exercising delegated authority. Evidence gathered during the inquiry suggests that governance concerns may arise at all levels of the institution and that effective oversight requires attention to how authority is exercised throughout the university's organisational structure.[268]

262 Submission 9, University of Sydney Association of Professors, pp 5-6.

263 Submission 50, The University of Sydney, p 15.

264 Evidence, Professor Jagose OAM, 29 April 2026, p 3.

265 Submission 9, University of Sydney Association of Professors, p 4.

266 Submission 9, University of Sydney Association of Professors, p 4.

267 Submission 100, Dr Robin Fitzsimons AM, p 8.

268 Evidence, Professor Buchanan, 29 April 2026, pp 12-13.

Broader governance and accountability concerns

4.41 The committee received evidence that concerns about transparency were not viewed in isolation. Rather, participants linked a lack of transparency to broader concerns regarding managerial practices, accountability and institutional governance.[269]

4.42 Professor Shepherd pointed to 'a culture of impunity, where senior leadership across the university are not held to account for poor management practices and where important decisions about staffing, curriculum design and academic governance are made behind closed doors with limited input from colleagues'.[270] She highlighted that in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (FASS) 'trust and morale are desperately low', citing a series of statistics from the Sydney Listens staff survey in which it scored substantially lower than the university average:

> In the 2025 iteration of this survey, FASS scored lowest across the university in 50 of the 67 surveyed fields, including in response to the following prompts. For "Most people here make a good effort to consult other staff where appropriate", the USYD average was 69 and FASS scored 49. For "There is a high degree of trust shared between people at the University of Sydney", the USYD average was 48 and FASS score 30. For "I have confidence in the university executive", the USYD average was 40 and FASS scored 17. For "The senior leaders in my faculty, university school or portfolio role model trust and accountability", the USYD average was 50 and FASS scored 39.[271]

4.43 Reflecting these broader concerns, the USAP referred to evidence from USAP surveys and submissions that point to 'unchecked managerialism' and 'opaque decision-making', making the case that these 'contravene legislative obligations and undermine the university's public mission'.[272]

4.44 Professor Buchanan also highlighted the ascendancy of managerialism at USyd and across the sector, positioning the restructure of the Business School as emblematic of this approach. Providing a detailed critique of the 'governance-managerial nexus' now entrenched in Australian universities, in respect of USyd he observed:

> At the University of Sydney we labour under a lopsided governance regime committed to 'let the managers manage.' This is a regime that enjoys widespread support in part of the business community. Amongst the workforce at large, and especially amongst workforces like the University (academics and professional staff alike), this regime is tolerated and not

269 Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Shepherd, 27 May 2026, p 2.

270 Evidence, Professor Laura J. Shepherd, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Sydney, 29 April 2016, p 9.

271 Evidence, Professor Shepherd, 29 April 2016, p 9.

272 Submission 9, University of Sydney Association of Professors, p 18.

> celebrated. On the contrary it breeds cynicism and, in our case, open dissent.[273]

Managerialism and rising workloads

4.45 Further regarding this shift, the USAP survey responses describe a dominant culture of managerialism. Staff emphasised that the Senate and Academic Board operated as rubber stamps rather than deliberative bodies. They described the Senate as 'invisible, inaccessible and industry dominated', with decisions made top-down and with limited transparency. Staff linked these governance issues directly to their daily work, including heavier workloads and declining wellbeing.[274]

4.46 Survey evidence also highlighted concerns about workload. Eighty-three per cent of USAP respondents said workloads are unsustainable and harm wellbeing and productivity. Many academics reported working weekends to meet research and performance targets. They also described heavy teaching-related administration, often unevenly distributed.[275]

4.47 Staff also emphasised that the university's administrative systems do not consistently support academic work. Many saw a misalignment, with processes serving management priorities rather than academic needs. Academics reported carrying a disproportionate share of administrative tasks, reducing time for teaching and research and increasing burnout.

4.48 The USAP respondents observed that managerial priorities override academic values and governance processes. They argued that this reduces confidence that decisions receive proper scrutiny and reinforces the link between managerial control and rising workload pressure.[276]

The growth in management positions

4.49 The committee notes that concerns about managerialism were raised alongside evidence of substantial growth in senior and middle management positions at USyd. Annual reporting data indicate that continuing professional staff positions at Higher Education Officer (HEO) 10 and above increased from 338 positions in 2020 to 504 positions in 2025, representing growth of 49 per cent. Over the same period, continuing HEO 9 positions increased from 219 to 387 positions, representing growth of 77 per cent. Fixed-term appointments at these levels also increased, with HEO 10 and above positions rising from 211 to 254 and HEO 9 positions from 155 to 176. Collectively, professional staff positions at HEO 9 and

[273] Submission 87, Professor John Buchanan, p 9.

[274] Submission 9, University of Sydney Association of Professors, p 1.

[275] Submission 9, University of Sydney Association of Professors, pp 8-9.

[276] Submission 9, University of Sydney Association of Professors, p 1.

above increased from 923 positions in 2020 to 1,321 positions in 2025, an increase of 43 per cent.[277]

4.50 The table below illustrates changes in USyd staffing profiles between 2020 and 2025, including growth in professional staff positions at HE0 9 and above.[278]

Professional staff positions 2020–25 by appointment term and gender

	2020			2021				2022				2023				2024				2025			
	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men	Non-binary/ Undisclosed	Total	Women	Men	Non-binary/ Undisclosed	Total	Women	Men	Non-binary/ Undisclosed	Total	Women	Men	Non-binary/ Undisclosed	Total	Women	Men	Non-binary/ Undisclosed	Total
Continuing																							
HEO10 & above	196	142	338	197	142	0	340	209	150	0	360	247	180	0	428	282	193	1	476	297	205	2	504
HEO 9	133	86	219	152	92	0	244	158	111	0	269	185	135	0	321	206	145	1	352	230	155	2	387
HEO 8	210	150	360	217	140	0	360	231	150	0	384	275	181	0	458	313	215	3	531	324	241	4	569
HEO 7	330	192	522	334	201	0	537	365	217	0	584	397	238	0	639	414	241	5	660	459	256	6	721
HEO 6	435	190	625	421	186	0	610	462	181	0	648	512	231	0	747	553	260	4	817	572	269	5	846
HEO 5	246	162	408	273	162	0	435	266	161	0	427	248	139	0	387	268	130	4	402	321	150	10	481
HEO 4	99	55	154	103	53	0	156	120	68	0	191	120	67	0	190	142	73	4	219	133	67	6	206
HEO 3	42	40	82	44	31	0	75	30	30	0	60	35	27	0	62	75	28		103	71	27		98
HEO 2	15	6	21	7	4	0	11	4	5	0	9	15	5	0	20	4	6		10	8	7		15
HEO 1 & below	4	0	4	4	0	0	4	16	1	0	17	7	2	0	9		2		2				
Subtotal	1710	1023	2733	1752	1011	9	2772	1861	1074	14	2949	2041	1205	15	3261	2257	1293	22	3572	2415	1377	35	3827
Fixed term																							
HEO10 & above	132	79	211	127	79	0	206	130	76	0	207	130	85	0	215	155	101	1	257	156	97	1	254
HEO 9	94	61	155	78	47	0	125	109	51	0	160	99	53	0	152	114	56		170	116	59	1	176
HEO 8	186	80	266	156	69	0	225	176	74	0	252	196	85	0	282	211	101	5	317	223	103	2	328
HEO 7	281	124	405	259	97	0	356	252	98	0	350	271	102	0	374	303	126	3	432	290	124	3	417
HEO 6	329	102	431	322	100	0	422	324	111	0	435	370	112	0	484	433	141	5	579	412	131	4	547
HEO 5	304	84	388	281	82	0	364	298	94	0	393	285	98	0	385	349	125	5	479	300	94	6	400
HEO 4	104	29	133	80	24	0	104	73	31	0	104	82	28	0	110	80	29	4	113	63	28	2	93
HEO 3	45	11	56	40	10	0	50	46	7	0	53	33	10	0	43	20	9	1	30	16	9	1	26
HEO 2	3	1	4	2	1	0	3	1	0	0	1	6	2	0	8	7	1		8		1		1
HEO 1 & below	1	5	6	1	3	0	4	3	2	0	5	2		0	2	3	1		4	3			3
Subtotal	1479	576	2055	1346	512	1	1859	1412	544	4	1960	1474	575	6	2055	1675	690	24	2389	1579	646	20	2245
Total	**3189**	**1599**	**4788**	**3098**	**1523**	**10**	**4631**	**3273**	**1618**	**18**	**4909**	**3515**	**1780**	**21**	**5316**	**3932**	**1983**	**46**	**5961**	**3994**	**2023**	**55**	**6072**

Overuse of consultants

4.51 Staff also pointed to heavy reliance on external consultants as another feature of this managerial approach.[279] This issue was raised across submissions and evidence, with particular concern about both the level of expenditure and the role consultants play in institutional decision-making, including the engagement of consultants by individual faculties and schools, as for the Business School.[280] As

277 University of Sydney, *Annual Report 2025*, p 60.

278 University of Sydney, *Annual Report 2025*, p 60.

279 Submission 9, University of Sydney Association of Professors, p 14.

280 Evidence, Professor Buchanan, 29 April 2026, p 10; Submission 9, University of Sydney Association of Professors, p 14; Answers to supplementary questions, Mr Andrew West,

noted in the committee's interim report, USyd spent $18 million on consultants in 2024.[281]

4.52 In its submission, USyd advised that it engages consultants to 'provide professional advice that is outside of the expertise or capacity' of its staff.[282] It identified a range of circumstances where consultants may be used, including:

- strategic projects and ventures
- operating models and organisational design
- technology programs
- forensic accounting
- actuarial modelling
- economic and environmental analysis
- other technical matters.[283]

4.53 The university further advised that the engagement of consultants is governed by its Procurement Policy, which enshrines value for money as a core objective for all supplier sourcing activities. While financial reporting rules do not require detailed disclosure of consultancy expenditure, the university highlighted that it voluntarily reports total consultancy spending in its Annual Financial Statements alongside other professional services expenses, such as cleaning, security and IT services. This reporting is based on the NSW Government definition of a consultant as 'a person or organisation engaged to provide recommendations or professional advice to assist decision-making by management'.[284]

4.54 The committee heard concerns from academic staff regarding the extent of consultant use. The USAP noted that 78 per cent of its respondents expressed concern about what was described as 'extensive consultant engagement,' particularly in the context of high executive salaries. It was suggested that reliance on external advice may indicate a lack of confidence in internal capability and weaknesses in managerial decision-making processes.[285]

4.55 Professor Buchanan made the case that the 'secret' use of Nous Group by the Business School exemplifies the risk [that] 'when universities allow consultants to shape structural and staffing decisions without transparent oversight, accountable governance collapses. In this case, the work was undertaken by

former elected Fellow, University of Sydney, 29 May 2026, p 1; Submission 87, Professor John Buchanan, p 18.

281 Submission 35, Professor Corinne Cortese, p 6.

282 Submission 50, The University of Sydney, p 18.

283 Submission 50, The University of Sydney, p 18.

284 Submission 50, The University of Sydney, p 18.

285 Submission 9, University of Sydney Association of Professors, p 14.

outside consultants who demonstrated little understanding of the nature of academic work or of the institutional processes and procedures carefully established over time. Key strategic and financial decisions were thus displaced into a private, unaccountable domain, undermining the public trust on which universities depend.'[286]

4.56 Challenged by the committee as to why the University of Sydney is only one of two NSW universities that explicitly rely on the New South Wales Treasurer's directive not to disclose information about the scope of consultants – and thus chooses not to disclose its expenditure on consultants and contractors to the extent that other universities do – Professor Jagose responded, 'we are compliant with our requirements and are happy to do that … If there is a changed requirement, then the university will comply with that.'[287]

Committee comment

4.57 Overall, a picture of significant governance concerns emerged from the evidence in respect of the University of Sydney. While unlike other universities, USyd restructuring and governance has not been in the headlines, the strength of the evidence before us, including from numerous confidential and name suppressed submissions, as well as from courageous individuals who spoke on the record, pointed to various problematic aspects of accountability, transparency, and overreach of power in decision making.

4.58 The committee notes participant concerns about the extent to which staff, students and alumni are represented in USyd's governance arrangements. We heard that reductions in elected representation, particularly the removal of alumni-elected positions, have narrowed stakeholder participation in Senate processes and reduced opportunities for direct accountability.

4.59 We were also concerned by the message flowing from the USyd *Senate Fellows Role Statement*, intended or otherwise, which may be promoting a Senate culture in which Fellows' sources of information are limited to the Vice-Chancellor and Senate committees. In our interim report the committee noted the risks for accountability arising from the growing tendency for university boards to become echo chambers for executive decision-making. The committee considers it vital that Senate members do not operate in an 'information bubble' but have access to all the information they require, both internal and external, and especially from staff and student stakeholders, to fulfil their role in holding the university management to account. We take up this issue in our final chapter, referring to the 'genuine inquisitiveness' which the Australian Government's Expert Council on University Governance has called on university councils to demonstrate proactively as a means of rebuilding trust in the sector.

[286] Submission 87, Professor John Buchanan, p 18.

[287] Evidence, Professor Jagose, 29 April 2026, pp 3-4.

4.60 Looking beyond the Senate, the committee also considers that representation and accountability are important not only at Senate level but throughout the university's governance structures, including faculties and schools where many day-to-day decisions affecting staff and students are made.

4.61 Evidence gathered by the committee suggests that some staff and student stakeholders do not regard current consultation arrangements as meaningful or influential. While the university described measures to improve engagement and communication, witnesses expressed concern that consultation can be perceived as fulfilling a procedural requirement, rather than genuinely participatory. As for all universities, the committee underscores the importance of deliberative governance processes in and of themselves, as well as the better institutional outcomes that such processes achieve. Staff, students and alumni are entitled to expect them. We return to this theme in our final chapter. It is clear that more genuine consultation is required.

4.62 Linked to this, the committee considers that transparency is an important component of effective university governance, including for faculty and school-level decision-making processes, where decisions have significant implications for staffing, workloads, course delivery and student experience. The evidence suggests that USyd stakeholders seek greater visibility of decision-making processes, the reasons underpinning decisions, and how feedback from staff and students informs outcomes. The committee emphasises that concerns about governance should not be discounted simply because they have not attracted widespread public attention. The volume, consistency and seriousness of concerns raised privately to the committee warrant careful consideration by the university. We note the university's review of Senate committees and operating arrangements and encourage continued efforts to strengthen transparency and accountability in order to build trust with staff, students and alumni, and to make decisions that reflect their experiences and priorities.

4.63 The committee is concerned by evidence from USyd participants that collegial governance processes are weakened where decision-making becomes concentrated in senior management or where governing bodies are perceived as endorsing rather than scrutinising proposals. Effective governance requires meaningful consultation and confidence that a broad range of institutional perspectives are considered.

4.64 Taken together with the number of confidential and name suppressed submissions received, this evidence points to a level of concern within parts of the USyd community that should not be ignored. Indeed, the significant proportion of USyd submission authors seeking full or partial confidentiality is noteworthy in itself, as it indicates a lack of confidence among some staff, students and alumni that concerns can be raised openly without adverse consequences.

4.65 A key message from the USyd experience, as explored through our evidence, is that governance should not be viewed solely as a matter for university councils,

senates or central executive leadership. Universities exercise authority through a complex system of delegated decision-making, with faculties, schools and other organisational units responsible for many decisions affecting staff, students and academic outcomes. Significantly, there is even less accountability at these levels, in part because of the power concentrated in those managers. Effective governance therefore requires appropriate oversight, transparency and accountability throughout the institution, including at faculty and school levels. Correspondingly, efforts to improve university governance must recognise this cascading structure of authority and ensure that good governance principles are embedded and monitored wherever significant decisions are made.

4.66 Linked with this, while the committee recognises that universities operate in a complex environment, governance arrangements should support, rather than diminish, the capacity of staff to contribute to institutional decision-making. Again, the evidence received by the committee suggests that these impacts are often experienced most directly at faculty and school level, underscoring the importance of ensuring that delegated decision-makers are subject to effective accountability and consultation requirements. The committee also notes evidence from staff linking governance concerns to workplace impacts, including rising workloads, declining trust and reduced staff wellbeing.

4.67 The committee further notes publicly reported workforce data indicating substantial growth in professional staff positions at HEO 9 and above between 2020 and 2025. While the committee does not draw conclusions from these figures alone, changes in workforce composition provide important context for evidence regarding governance, managerial practices, workloads and institutional decision-making.

4.68 Both the School of Business and the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences emerged as very troubling sites of conflict between senior managers and staff. The absence of staff trust was very clear to the committee. In relation to the Business School, the committee notes evidence of a formal vote of no confidence in the Dean by more than 170 NTEU members, with only 18 per cent expressing confidence. The committee considers this to be a significant indicator of the depth of concern among staff about its current leadership, which further highlights the importance of effective accountability mechanisms at the faculty and school levels. Where confidence in local leadership deteriorates to this extent, university governance systems must provide pathways for concerns to be heard, tested and addressed. We urge the university to address both areas quickly and with genuine care and collaboration, to address staff concerns and start to rebuild trust.

4.69 In relation to consultant engagement, the committee acknowledges the university's evidence regarding procurement controls, reporting practices and the need to obtain specialised expertise. However, the committee also notes concerns raised by staff regarding the balance between internal capability and external advisory services. Greater clarity around how consultant engagements

are justified, how internal expertise is assessed, and how value for money is evaluated would assist in building confidence in these processes.

4.70 These concerns about transparency, managerialism and external consultation were not unique to the USyd. Staff at other universities raised similar issues about governance, decision-making and the use of consultants. The next chapter examines these themes at the University of New England.

Chapter 5 University of New England

Over the course of this inquiry, the committee has observed a number of universities in crisis and noted the profound institutional damage that can result from poor governance. Within this context, the University of New England (UNE) serves as an instructive case study from which the broader higher education sector can learn. This chapter explores UNE as an institution emerging from a severe crisis that culminated in 2022, a period characterised by what staff have described as a highly dysfunctional and toxic workplace culture. It examines the impact of the previous Vice-Chancellor's conduct and the controversial 'Time for Change' restructure on the university's community. The chapter then reviews the remedial actions implemented since 2022 to rebuild culture and institutional trust. Finally, it documents the various enhancements to governance that were sought by inquiry participants, including improving representation, strengthening the deliberative 'Convocation' mechanism, and addressing staff workload.

Crisis under the previous Vice-Chancellor

5.1 The committee heard extensive evidence that UNE previously experienced a prolonged period of significant institutional disruption and governance crisis.[288] This period, which occurred primarily during the tenure of the former Vice-Chancellor, Professor Brigid Heywood from 2019 to 2022, was characterised by a profound decline in staff morale and a breakdown in trust between the university executive and the campus community.[289]

Impact of previous Vice-Chancellor's conduct on institutional culture

5.2 At the committee's fifth hearing, inquiry participants described the former Vice-Chancellor's conduct during her tenure and the significant impact it had on the university's organisational culture.

5.3 Associate Professor Elizabeth Temple, of the School of Psychology and National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) UNE Branch Representative, characterised the workplace during this period as highly dysfunctional and toxic, citing a culture in which 'people were living in a state of fear'.[290] She further attested that the administration's top-down, adversarial approach to change management fostered an environment 'where staff were treated appallingly – absolutely abused by the former vice-chancellor'.[291] Similarly, Dr Craig Johnson, Senior Technical

[288] Evidence, Dr Craig Johnson, Senior Technical Officer, School of Environmental and Rural Science and National Tertiary Education Union University of New England Branch President, 29 April 2026, p 43.

[289] Evidence, Dr Johnson, 29 April 2026, p 43.

[290] Evidence, Associate Professor Elizabeth Temple, School of Psychology and National Tertiary Education Union University of New England Branch Representative, 29 April 2026, p 44.

[291] Evidence, Associate Professor Temple, 29 April 2026, p 44.

Officer, School of Environmental and Rural Science and NTEU UNE Branch President, described the former Vice-Chancellor's conduct as having 'amounted to bullying, to say the very least, and individual persecution and mockery', describing her as 'wandering around the campus in a megalomaniacal fashion and picking on individual staff members'.[292] Professor Temple added that during that period of the former Vice-Chancellor's tenure, 'it was like being in an abusive relationship. We couldn't leave because we needed our jobs'.[293]

5.4 The committee heard that the institutional crisis reached a critical point following the suicide of a staff member, an event which many colleagues linked directly to the dysfunctional work environment.[294] This tragedy, alongside mounting evidence of psychosocial risk to university staff, prompted an investigation by SafeWork NSW.[295] In September 2022, the regulator issued an improvement notice identifying potential breaches of the *NSW Work Health and Safety Act 2012,* noting that staff were being asked to meet unrealistic deadlines and perform roles that exceeded their training or capabilities.[296]

5.5 Professor Heywood's tenure concluded with her resignation in August 2022, following a major conduct-related incident that resulted in criminal proceedings.[297] On 8 March 2022, the former Vice-Chancellor attended a local International Women's Day panel event as a guest speaker. Following a verbal and physical interaction with a 15-year-old female attendee, Professor Heywood was formally charged with common assault and behaving in an offensive manner in a public place. Although Professor Heywood entered a plea of not guilty, she subsequently resigned from her position as Vice-Chancellor.[298]

Time for change proposal

5.6 The committee heard that severe operational deficits generated by the previous Vice-Chancellor's *Time for Change* organisational restructure were another key point of criticism. Participants suggested that this change program implemented an aggressive cost-cutting strategy that prioritised fiscal consolidation measures over the university's core educational mission. The execution of these reforms relied heavily on workforce reductions, staff

292 Evidence, Dr Johnson, 29 April 2026, p 43.

293 Evidence, Associate Professor Temple, 29 April 2026, p 44.

294 Evidence, Dr Johnson, 29 April 2026, p 43.

295 Evidence, Dr Johnson, 29 April 2026, p 43.

296 Additional information to answers to questions on notice, Professor Chris Moran, Vice-Chancellor, University of New England, 29 May 2026, Attachment 2, EY, 'UNE Safety Culture and Wellbeing Assessment' (2023), p 8.

297 Lauren Pezet, 'University of New England Vice-Chancellor Brigid Heywood resigns after being charged with assault', *ABC News*, 5 August 2022, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-08-05/une-brigid-heywood-resign-amid-assault-charges/101303666.

298 Lauren Pezet, 'University of New England Vice-Chancellor Brigid Heywood resigns after being charged with assault', *ABC News*, 5 August 2022.

departures and rolling voluntary redundancies, which culminated in the cutting of 200 positions from a baseline institutional workforce of approximately 1,200 staff members.[299] NTEU UNE Branch representatives reported that this severe contraction significantly depleted the university's operational delivery and academic capacity. Many experienced staff possessing critical corporate and institutional knowledge departed the university without the capacity, resourcing or time to provide structured handovers to remaining staff. According to Professor Temple, this loss of corporate memory disrupted administrative continuity and significantly increased the workload demands imposed upon the surviving workforce.[300]

5.7 The committee heard that this hollow-out was further matched by a substantial reduction in course offerings. From 2023, UNE discontinued a total of 28 courses as a direct consequence of the escalating financial pressures and staffing vacancies accumulating from the restructure. Degrees that were cut included the Bachelor of Nursing with Honours, Bachelor of International and Language Studies and Bachelor of Commerce (Financial Planning), alongside various Graduate Certificates and Master's programs.[301] Additionally, since 2022 six specialised qualifications with on-campus course components were transitioned to fully online delivery.[302]

Actions since 2022

5.8 Following the resignation of Professor Heywood in August 2022, Professor Simon Evans served as the Acting Vice-Chancellor.[303] During his interim tenure, Professor Evans was notably receptive to collaborative efforts by the university's professoriate and the NTEU to revive 'Convocation' – a body codified in the UNE establishing Act that had previously functioned largely as an alumni association.[304] According to Associate Professor Eric Ghosh, School of Law and NTEU UNE Branch Representative, by supporting the staff petition to activate Convocation, Professor Evans helped re-establish a critical democratic space for the university community to submit formal governance proposals to the University Council, marking an early and significant step toward institutional

299 Evidence, Associate Professor Temple, 29 April 2026, p 43.

300 Evidence, Associate Professor Temple, 29 April 2026, p 43.

301 Additional information to answers to supplementary questions, Professor Chris Moran, Vice-Chancellor, University of New England, 29 May 2026, Attachment 7, 'List of discontinued courses since 2023', p 1.

302 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Chris Moran, Vice-Chancellor, University of New England, 29 May 2026, p 12.

303 Evidence, Associate Professor Eric Ghosh, School of Law and National Tertiary Education Union University of New England Branch Representative, 29 April 2026, p 44.

304 Evidence, Associate Professor Ghosh, 29 April 2026, p 44.

repair.[305] Staff views on the desirability of further strengthening this forum are discussed later in this chapter.

5.9 Professor Chris Moran was appointed as Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer in mid-2023.[306] Professor Moran told the committee that upon assuming office, he identified a lack of acknowledgement by the university's leadership of the experiences of staff and the broader university community as a significant issue, describing:

> I walked the corridors, I spoke to people, I listened to the experiences people had gone through, and then I gave a public acknowledgement of what I had heard, as a way of making a statement that the leadership of the university had heard and acknowledged the situation that the people of the university were in.[307]

Rebuilding trust

5.10 Professor Moran advised the committee that restoring trust between the university executive and the broader campus community has been a central focus for the new leadership. He described that upon his arrival, the trust level of staff was 'very low', prompting him to undertake extensive consultations and publicly acknowledge the 'hurt and trauma' of staff. This was assisted by the capturing of an empirical baseline of institutional health to inform subsequent remediation.[308]

Xref survey

5.11 To capture this baseline assessment, the university utilised the 'Xref' employee engagement survey. Initial data captured a positive shift of over ten percent regarding staff perspectives of the senior executive and their long-term future with the institution. However, Professor Moran noted that staff wellness metrics remained critically low, with fewer than 50 percent of respondents reporting positive personal wellbeing. He thus conceded that the university still has 'a long, long way to go'.[309] He advised that he had committed to conducting a follow-up comprehensive Xref survey within a two-year period from the last baseline to track ongoing cultural recovery.[310]

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305 Evidence, Associate Professor Ghosh, 29 April 2026, p 45.

306 Evidence, Professor Chris Moran, Vice-Chancellor, University of New England, 29 April 2026, p 33.

307 Evidence, Professor Moran, 29 April 2026, p 35.

308 Evidence, Professor Moran, 29 April 2026, p 41.

309 Evidence, Professor Moran, 29 April 2026, p 41.

310 Evidence, Professor Moran, 29 April 2026, p 41.

Safety, Culture and Wellbeing Assessment

5.12 Professor Moran also advised that he had engaged support to analyse the state of the university's organisational culture in the wake of Professor Heywood's departure. The 2023 Ernst & Young (EY) Safety Culture and Wellbeing Assessment also gathered empirical data via comprehensive staff surveys, qualitative interviews and focus groups. Analysis of the data identified 'fractured relationships and counterproductive behaviours' as a prominent theme adversely impacting health, safety and wellbeing (HSW) culture across the university. Psychological safety was rated adversely by participants, with quantitative data from the review demonstrating severe deficits in organisational trust and psychological safety, revealing an environment profoundly compromised by fear and intimidation. Sixty-eight percent of survey respondents explicitly disagreed with the statement 'At UNE, everyone is treated with respect', while an identical 68 percent of participants agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement that 'fear of repercussion stops people from reporting issues that impact on HSW'.[311] The EY assessment further summarised that 'there was a broadly acknowledged legacy of low trust in appointed leaders at the level of the Executive and Council by the remainder of the University workforce'.[312]

5.13 Professor Moran further detailed how the university now ensures that staff wellbeing matters are escalated to the university council. This includes a safety and risk item comprising staff and student wellbeing on the agenda of each Council meeting, two quarterly reports titled 'Staff and student safety and wellbeing – WHS Performance' and 'Staff and student conduct report' provided to the Audit and Risk Committee and escalated to the Council as part of the Audit and Risk Committee's report including 'detailed consideration of risks and trends, including any required action', an annual report on staff wellbeing and complaints data provided directly to the Council, and 'staff wellbeing' representing one of only four institutional priorities that form the Annual Business Plan, with relevant KPI monitoring data 'presented to Council several times a year for discussion and consequent actions'.[313]

Cultural repair

5.14 To further facilitate cultural repair and rebuild trust, the university initiated a Values and Behaviours Cultural Transformation Project in 2024, aimed at building a 'bridge from the past to the future' and 'embedding meaningful values

311 Additional information to answers to questions on notice, Professor Moran, 29 May 2026, Attachment 2, EY, 'UNE Safety Culture and Wellbeing Assessment' (2023), p 16.

312 Additional information to answers to questions on notice, Professor Moran, 29 May 2026, Attachment 2, EY, 'UNE Safety Culture and Wellbeing Assessment' (2023), p 24.

313 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Moran, 29 May 2026, p 2.

and signature behaviours across the institution'.[314] Additionally, UNE created a new role, the Principal Lead – Student and Staff Safety and Wellbeing, to work closely with the Vice-Chancellor and university management to champion a culture that prioritises psychological safety, inclusivity and mental health.[315]

5.15 Professor Moran highlighted that these cultural repair initiatives have been a central focus for the new leadership, describing:

> The process I talked about of going through a setting of the values and signature behaviours and starting with an acknowledgement of harm and then working through into a new strategy for the institution, that really has been the dominant work of the executive and council that sits above the day-to-day governance and process work of the university.[316]

New strategic plan

5.16 In February 2026, the university published its *2026-2035 Strategic Plan: Connecting Individual Aspirations to Community Outcomes*.[317] The plan, developed with consultation with stakeholders across the region, explicitly identifies institutional and systemic adjustments needed within the higher education sector, acknowledging 'a significant erosion of public trust, partly due to perceived gaps between institutional priorities and community needs'.[318] It also addresses public concerns regarding the rising cost of degrees, taxpayer expenditure and a perceived deficit in student-centric outcomes, noting 'We acknowledge our shortcomings and have responded with ongoing reform programs'.[319]

5.17 The plan addresses structural and operational vulnerabilities, acknowledging that only approximately 10 percent of surveyed staff rated the university's historical operational efficiency as 'good'.[320] The plan states that UNE 'must transition to a new Operating Model to achieve a step change. Our physical infrastructure requires an overarching plan and adequate resourcing'.[321] To facilitate this transition, the university allocated specific operational funding

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314 Additional information to answers to supplementary questions, Professor Moran, 29 May 2026, Attachment 4, 'UNE Lessons Learned Safe Workplace Actions and Initiatives 2023 – 2024 and Beyond', p 12.

315 Additional information to answers to supplementary questions, Professor Moran, 29 May 2026, Attachment 4, 'UNE Lessons Learned Safe Workplace Actions and Initiatives 2023 – 2024 and Beyond', p 13.

316 Evidence, Professor Moran, 29 April 2026, p 41.

317 University of New England, *UNE Strategic Plan* (17 February 2026), https://www.une.edu.au/about-une/our-university/strategic-plan.

318 University of New England, *UNE Strategic Plan 2026-2035*, p 6.

319 University of New England, *UNE Strategic Plan 2026-2035*, p 6.

320 University of New England, *UNE Strategic Plan 2026-2035*, p 15.

321 University of New England, *UNE Strategic Plan 2026-2035,* p 15.

within its 2026 budget.[322] This funding was structurally separated from the ongoing initiatives tied directly a Financial Rectification Plan aimed at stabilising the finances of the institution. Key operational priorities for the Vice-Chancellor in 2026 include managing transition frameworks via the appointment of a temporary 'Assistant Vice-Chancellor – Transition' to oversee the design, delivery and implementation of the updated Operating Model.[323]

Reduced use of consultants

5.18 The committee heard that the previous systemic reductions in internal frontline staff capacity occurred concurrently with a significant and escalating financial reliance on corporate advisory firms.[324] Professor Moran noted that upon taking office, he 'found a significant quantity of consulting reports on various aspects of the university's business', which he described as 'voluminous'.[325] Financial procurement data provided by UNE details an extensive reliance on private consultants and external advisors to formulate corporate strategies, design restructures, analyse finances, execute core IT research and administrative reviews between 2019 and 2023.[326]

5.19 This heavy reliance on private consultants represented an inherited management culture that Professor Moran has since sought to address. Reflecting on this operational pivot, he confirmed that the executive team had 'essentially came to a conclusion to stop asking for support from the large consulting companies'.[327] He maintained that a small university should possess the intrinsic capability to manage its own work programs, describing that institutions should leverage internal academic expertise before outsourcing professional services:

> I didn't feel the university should follow the pathway of significant consulting company assistance … universities should use the academic capabilities more if we can … if you do have skill inside the institution, at least get the advice of that skill, if not deploy that skill.[328]

322 Additional information to answers to supplementary questions, Professor Moran, 29 May 2026, Attachment 6, Professor Chris Moran, Vice-Chancellor, University of New England, 'UNE's 2026-2035 Strategic Plan' (2026), p 2.

323 Additional information to answers to supplementary questions, Professor Moran, 29 May 2026, Attachment 6, Professor Moran, 'UNE's 2026-2035 Strategic Plan' (2026), p 2.

324 Evidence, Associate Professor Ghosh, 29 April 2026, p 47.

325 Evidence, Professor Moran, 29 April 2026, p 37.

326 Additional information to answers to supplementary questions, Professor Moran, 29 May 2026, Attachment 1, 'Consultant reports – 2019-2023', p 1.

327 Evidence, Professor Moran, 29 April 2026, p 33.

328 Evidence, Professor Moran, 29 April 2026, p 33.

Staff perspectives

5.20 Turning now to staff perspectives on the steps that have been taken to address the crisis, Professor Temple noted that the damage caused by the previous Vice-Chancellor continues to affect the university, with staff experiencing ongoing difficulties:

> While it's been a few years now since that person left, there are repercussions from that, because the people who were put in some positions under her leadership are still in those positions. We still have pockets of toxicity around the university, as has been acknowledged to me at meetings by people from People and Culture—they know. We're still in a situation where it's still not taken seriously enough.[329]

5.21 While acknowledging that the active executive leadership under Professor Chris Moran has established a less adversarial working environment, she pointed to an ongoing governance deficit by suggesting the views of staff are not being acted on:

> Consultation—yes, we get heard at some level. … Now I'd say we're in a passive aggressive relationship, where we get told we're being listened to, we get told we've been consulted with and we get told that things are of concern and are being agreed to, but then nothing happens. … It's definitely a better environment than what it was, but it's still not great in some ways. I think the problem is how do we as staff—and also our students—get the message through to the people who can actually change? We do everything we can, but it's just extraordinarily difficult.[330]

5.22 To address these systemic frustrations, NTEU UNE Branch representatives proposed several solutions to the governance framework of UNE, and New South Wales universities more broadly. Associate Professor Ghosh called for the re-establishment of an external, independent ombudsman or conflict-resolution office separate from the management-controlled 'People and Culture' division, restoring an independent grievance model that operated successfully at UNE from 1976 until 2015. He further proposed the implementation of mandatory, annual, anonymous surveys evaluating management tiers to assess their performance against core institutional values.[331] Specific governance improvements that are being sought by staff, including regarding Convocation, are discussed in a later section.

[329] Evidence, Associate Professor Temple, 29 April 2026, p 44.

[330] Evidence, Associate Professor Temple, 29 April 2026, p 44.

[331] Evidence, Associate Professor Ghosh, 29 April 2026, p 46.

The enabling legislation

5.23 The concerns raised during the restructure about consultation, transparency, decision-making authority and the role of the university council direct the committee to the statutory framework governing UNE.

Objectives

5.24 The objectives of the University, as stated in the *University of New England Act 1993* (the Act), are the promotion, within the limits of the University's resources, of scholarship, research, free inquiry, the interaction of research and teaching, and academic excellence.[332]

Functions

5.25 To fulfil its objectives, UNE's principal functions, as prescribed by the Act, include:

- provision of facilities for education and research of university standard
- encouragement of the dissemination, advancement, development and application of knowledge informed by free inquiry
- provision of courses and research across fields to meet community needs
- participation in public discourse
- conferral of degrees and other awards
- provision of teaching and learning that engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry
- development of governance, procedural rules, admission policies, financial arrangements and quality assurance processes sufficient to ensure academic integrity.[333]

5.26 Consistent with the broader New South Wales university governance framework, the Act also authorises UNE to undertake commercial activities to support its objects and principal functions.[334] The meaning of 'university commercial activity' is defined in section 21A of the Act.[335]

5.27 Section 21B of the Act provides the statutory basis for university commercial activities, including activities undertaken in the exercise of the university's commercial functions and participation in partnerships, trusts, companies,

[332] *University of New England Act 1993*, s 6(1).

[333] *University of New England Act 1993*, s 6(2).

[334] *University of New England Act 1993*, s 6(3).

[335] *University of New England Act 1993*, s 21A.

other incorporated bodies, or joint ventures that are declared by the guidelines to be university commercial activities.[336]

Composition of the University Council

5.28 Section 8B of the Act prescribes that the UNE Council must have a minimum of 11 and a maximum of 22 members, with the total number determined from time to time by a two-thirds majority of Council.[337] The Council must include official members, elected members, council-appointed members and ministerially appointed members.[338] A majority of the total number must be external persons, and no single category may constitute a majority.[339] The Council must notify the Minister within seven days of any resolution under s 8B.[340]

5.29 Public information as at mid-May 2026 states that the UNE university council comprises:

- four official members (Chancellor, Deputy Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and CEO, Chair of Academic Board)
- seven appointed members (two ministerially appointed, five council-appointed)
- three elected members (one academic staff, one professional staff, and one undergraduate student).[341]

Governance concerns

5.30 Three key areas for action emerged from the evidence heard by the committee. NTEU UNE Branch representatives highlighted the need to strengthen staff representation and the power of Convocation within UNE's governance framework, while also identifying staff workload challenges as a significant consequence of previous management decisions.

Representation

5.31 Participants expressed to the committee that a lack of adequate staff representation on the university council contributed to the governance failures of the past. Professor Ghosh noted that during the previous Vice-Chancellor's tenure, the limited number of elected staff on the council – comprising just one

336 *University of New England Act 1993*, s 21B.

337 *University of New England Act 1993*, s 8B.

338 *University of New England Act 1993*, s 8B(3).

339 *University of New England Act 1993*, s 8B(6) and (7).

340 *University of New England Act 1993*, s 8B(8).

341 University of New England, *Council Members*, https://www.une.edu.au/about-une/governance/une-council/council-members.

elected academic representative and one professional staff representative on a 13 member body – left them feeling 'marginalised and muzzled'.[342] In his view, this dynamic contributed that the council was a 'compliant' institution disconnected from the realities faced by the workforce.[343]

5.32 Questioned by the committee, Vice-Chancellor Professor Chris Moran acknowledged that the council size had previously dwindled to 11 members but noted that the university has since increased the number of council appointees to ensure a broader mix of skills and community ties.[344] While the number of staff representatives on the Council has not grown, Professor Moran advised that the university has recently lifted historical restrictions that previously prevented elected staff members from participating in council subcommittees such as the remuneration committee. The university has since established a new principle that all elected members are full members of the council and may now participate in subcommittees on a 'skills basis'.[345]

5.33 Professor Moran emphasised the importance of community representation on the council's composition, aligning governance with UNE's regional identity, and informed the committee that three current council members had 'very strong ties to the community'.[346]

5.34 Consistent with standard governance structures across the New South Wales university sector, Professor Moran confirmed that student representation is structurally embedded within the Council. Currently, one peer-elected student member sits on the Council and maintains a standing item on each regular meeting agenda, while elected student representatives also participate across the Academic Board and its specialised subcommittees.[347]

Strengthening the role of Convocation

5.35 The committee heard that while 'Convocation' bodies are a statutory feature within the enabling Acts of several New South Wales universities, UNE is unique in its active use of this democratic mechanism.[348] Comprising current or former academic and professional staff, alumni, and current and former members of the University Council, Convocation serves as a formal 'voice' for the broader university community, with a prescribed function to submit proposals to the

342 Evidence, Associate Professor Ghosh, 29 April 2026, p 44.

343 Evidence, Associate Professor Ghosh, 29 April 2026, p 44.

344 Evidence, Professor Moran, 29 April 2026, pp 37-38. It is noted that because this expansion was achieved entirely by increasing the number of external council appointees, it did not result in any increase in elected staff representation.

345 Evidence, Professor Moran, 29 April 2026, p 39.

346 Evidence, Professor Moran, 29 April 2026, p 38.

347 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Moran, 29 May 2026, p 14.

348 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Moran, 29 May 2026, p 3.

Council regarding the interests of the institution.[349] Associate Professor Ghosh gave evidence that while similar bodies exist at other universities, they often function primarily as alumni associations. However, at UNE, Convocation was revived by staff in late 2022 as a critical participatory forum following the departure of the former Vice-Chancellor.[350]

5.36 Meeting twice a year,[351] the body has submitted 35 proposals to the council since December 2022.[352] These proposals have covered significant accountability and cultural matters, including the implementation of annual anonymous surveys of managers and the re-establishment of an independent UNE ombudsman to investigate complaints.[353]

5.37 As discussed earlier, unique to UNE is its use of Convocation.[354] While staff view Convocation as a vital mechanism for collegial input, inquiry participants expressed concern that its existence relies too heavily on 'managerial prerogative', rather than strong legislative protection.[355] Staff suggested that the *University of New England Act 1993* should be amended to explicitly define Convocation's functions and outline mechanisms that oblige management to call meetings.[356]

5.38 Furthermore, staff expressed frustration that the Chancellor does not attend Convocation to explain council decisions or directly answer questions from the community.[357] In response to this, Professor Moran advised that the Chancellor intentionally remained separate from the Convocation process to maintain 'appropriate governance independence', though other nominated council members do attend the meetings.[358]

5.39 Professor Moran reported that the University Council actively considers Convocation submissions – noting that out of 35 proposals recommended to date, nine were accepted or supported, ten were noted, nine were referred to management, three were rejected and four were awaiting a response.[359] On the other hand, Professor Temple expressed frustration that staff proposals passed with '90 per cent – or 99 per cent – of Convocation' sometimes received minimal explanation, such as just a single paragraph, when rejected by the Council.[360]

349 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Moran, 29 May 2026, p 3.
350 Evidence, Associate Professor Ghosh, 29 April 2026, p 12.
351 Evidence, Associate Professor Ghosh, 29 April 2026, p 44.
352 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Moran, 29 May 2026, p 3.
353 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Moran, 29 May 2026, pp 4-5.
354 Evidence, Associate Professor Ghosh, 29 April 2026, p 44.
355 Evidence, Associate Professor Ghosh, 29 April 2026, pp 44-45.
356 Evidence, Associate Professor Ghosh, 29 April 2026, p 45.
357 Evidence, Associate Professor Temple, 29 April 2026, p 47.
358 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Moran, 29 May 2026, p 4.
359 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Moran, 29 May 2026, p 3.
360 Evidence, Associate Professor Temple, 29 April 2026, p 47.

Professor Ghosh similarly described management's current attitude towards Convocation as one of 'tolerance rather than enthusiastic support'.[361]

Staff workload

5.40 While not strictly a governance issue, the committee head evidence that the significant workload challenges experienced across the institution were a direct consequence of the previous management's restructure.[362] New leadership has begun to address this issue, with Professor Moran noting that addressing these unsustainable workloads became a key aspect of rebuilding institutional trust.[363] Staff representatives attested that recent steps towards a data-based, transparent model of work allocation are showing positive impacts.[364]

5.41 Following the 2022 staff departures and redundancies, remaining academic and professional staff previously faced severe workload pressures while attempting to maintain operational output. Associate Professor Temple gave evidence that as a result of the reduction in staff despite persisting workloads, UNE academic staff were working an estimated average of 14 hours of uncompensated overtime per week, while professional staff averaged an additional 7 hours per week beyond their contractual obligations.[365]

5.42 Associate Professor Temple advised that a subsequent consultative data collection process was undertaken involving the collection of actual operational data from UNE staff. This data was used by the Academic Workload Committee – a collaborative body comprising three management representatives, three union staff representatives, three staff-elected representatives and the Deputy-Vice Chancellor for Research – to develop an evidence-based, hours-based Academic Workload Model as mandated by the enterprise bargaining agreement. Despite initial resistance from the former Vice-Chancellor, which led to a dispute before the Fair Work Commission, the committee's data-driven model was ultimately approved and implemented following the change in university leadership.[366] Highlighting the positive impact of this collaboratively agreed model, Associate Professor Temple described:

> We've got really good feedback coming back from a number of people that they're finally getting relief, because we can show in numbers what we're doing. We can say, "I'm overloaded." We can say, "Well if you want me to

[361] Evidence, Associate Professor Ghosh, 29 April 2026, p 45.

[362] Evidence, Associate Professor Temple, 29 April 2026, pp 45-46.

[363] Evidence, Professor Moran, 29 April 2026, p 35.

[364] Evidence, Associate Professor Temple, 29 April 2026, p 45.

[365] Evidence, Associate Professor Temple, 29 April 2026, p 46.

[366] Evidence, Associate Professor Temple, 29 April 2026, pp 45-46; Answers to questions on notice, Associate Professor Elizabeth Temple, School of Psychology and National Tertiary Education Union University of New England Branch Representative, 22 May 2026, p 1.

> take that on, then take something else off." Now, it's not working perfectly. There are some bumps along the road. Hopefully this year the evaluation will lead to that being improved.[367]

5.43 However, she noted that while the updated model advocated for structural protections for academic staff, professional staff remain excluded from equivalent workload protections and called for a similar protective model for that group.[368] In doing so, Associate Professor Temple emphasised that universities must act as 'model employers', which would 'mean they have to really abide by work health and safety, not just tick boxes'. She further elaborated on the need for a staff workload model to accurately estimate the amount of time required for staff to complete a task, to ensure they are not structurally overloaded.[369]

Committee comment

5.44 In the committee's view, UNE provides a unique case study of an institution emerging from a severe crisis in 2022 and 2023, a period defined by what inquiry participants described as a dreadful and toxic workplace experience, that can offer valuable learning for other universities.

5.45 The committee notes that as the largest employer in the New England North West region, the damage at UNE caused by past governance failures had profound economic and social repercussions that rippled outward into the local Armidale community and beyond. Specifically, the loss of some 200 jobs during the poorly managed 'Time for Change' restructure dealt a significant blow to the regional workforce of that area. Furthermore, the discontinuation of 28 courses since 2023, alongside the transition of several on-campus offerings to online-only delivery, has tangibly impacted the educational opportunities available to regional students.

5.46 The committee commends the significant governance improvements and cultural repair initiatives implemented under the leadership of the current Vice-Chancellor and his interim predecessor. Explicit acknowledgement of harm, matched with visible, active work to rebuild trust have been absolutely essential to this process. At the same time, the evidence makes clear that the depth of the institutional trauma experienced by staff makes it incredibly difficult for the campus community to easily move forward.

5.47 While recognising the progress that has been made, the committee notes that staff strongly desire to see more done to improve governance. In particular, there is a clear expectation that university management and the University Council must become more genuinely responsive to staff proposals and concerns.

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367 Evidence, Associate Professor Temple, 29 April 2026, p 45.

368 Evidence, Associate Professor Temple, 29 April 2026, pp 46

369 Evidence, Associate Professor Temple, 29 April 2026, p 46.

5.48 Within this context, the committee views UNE's 'Convocation' as a novel and highly positive model of collegial governance that other universities can learn from. Bringing together staff, alumni and council members to debate and submit formal proposals has created a valuable democratic forum. However, the committee observes that this model can be made more democratic still. By strengthening the legislative and structural protections for mechanisms like Convocation, UNE and other universities can ensure that academic, professional and community voices are genuinely heard and deeply valued in the decision-making process. Staff, students and alumni all rightly believe that they have crucial perspectives to share that should be listened to and acted upon. We return to this opportunity to improve governance across all universities in our final chapter.

5.49 Although the evidence concerning UNE has pointed to previous significant cultural and structural damage across the university, the strategic interventions initiated by new leaders to rebuild institutional trust and stabilise operations signal a positive and restorative trajectory for the institution. The following chapter shifts its focus to the University of Newcastle to evaluate the recent experience there.

Chapter 6 The University of Newcastle

This chapter examines governance issues at the University of Newcastle (UON) during a period of significant organisational change. The committee held a public hearing in Newcastle on 30 April 2026, providing an opportunity to hear directly from UON executives, staff, students and representative organisations. The chapter considers the university's Business Improvement Program and academic calendar reforms, as well as concerns raised by staff, students and representative bodies about consultation, workplace culture, transparency and decision-making processes. Evidence received by the inquiry highlighted tensions between the UON's efforts to improve financial sustainability and concerns about the impact of these reforms on staff wellbeing, workloads and the student experience. The committee also examined competing assessments of the university's financial position, including evidence regarding the use of adjusted financial measures and the extent to which the university's audited financial statements supported the rationale advanced for organisational reform.

Reforms 2024–2026

6.1 The concerns raised about the Business Improvement Program, academic calendar reforms and broader organisational change extended beyond the merits of individual decisions. Evidence to the inquiry raised broader questions about consultation, transparency, accountability, decision-making authority and the operation of governance structures at the UON. Accordingly, the committee examined the statutory and governance framework within which these decisions were made.

Business Improvement Program

6.2 In 2024, the UON commenced a Business Improvement Program (BIP), which the university described as a university-wide reform and savings program aimed at improving financial sustainability and supporting the university's long term strategic priorities. According to the university, the program aimed to deliver ongoing savings through process and system improvements, workforce redesign and greater operational efficiency.[370]

6.3 Vice-Chancellor and President Professor Alex Zelinsky AO told the committee that the university had identified a target of $26.6 million in ongoing annual savings and had initially prioritised non-salary savings and natural attrition. He advised that the program was developed in response to funding pressures associated with the Commonwealth's Job-ready Graduates Package, rising operating costs

[370] University of Newcastle, *Community Update* (4 December 2025), https://www.newcastle.edu.au/news/business-improvement-program-update.

and the need to maintain the university's financial viability within a budget of approximately $1 billion.[371]

6.4 The committee heard that the BIP formed part of the university's broader response to sector-wide financial and operational challenges, including the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and changes to the higher education funding environment.[372]

6.5 Professor Zelinsky told the committee that the program delivered approximately $10 million in annual non-salary savings, including through procurement and supplier contract reforms, which reduced the need for workforce reductions and supported the university's long-term financial sustainability objectives. The university noted that staffing accounted for around 60 per cent of its total expenditure and that workforce changes were focused on natural attrition, not filling vacancies, organisational redesign and the creation of new roles aligned with strategic priorities.[373]

6.6 In relation to the workforce impacts of the program, intended to reduce inefficiencies, Professor Zelinsky pointed to an overall reduction of seven jobs:

> We remapped jobs. New jobs were created and some were disestablished. When we look at the number of jobs that were created versus the number that were disestablished, there was only a net reduction of seven jobs.[374]

6.7 Information published by the university indicated that the BIP reforms encompassed staffing savings across the following areas:

- College of Health, Medicine and Wellbeing
- College of Human and Social Futures.
- College of Engineering, Science and Environment
- Academic Division
- Library
- Digital Technology Solutions
- Pathways and Academic Learning Support

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371 Evidence, Professor Alex Zelinksy AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Newcastle, 30 April 2026, pp 3-6; University of Newcastle, *Community Update* (4 December 2025), https://www.newcastle.edu.au/news/business-improvement-program-update.

372 Evidence, Professor Zelinksy, 30 April 2026, pp 5-6; Evidence, Mr Paul McCubbin, Chief Financial Officer, University of Newcastle, 30 April 2026, p 12; University of Newcastle, *Community Update* (4 December 2025), https://www.newcastle.edu.au/news/business-improvement-program-update.

373 Evidence, Professor Zelinksy, 30 April 2026, p 3.

374 Evidence, Professor Zelinksy, 30 April 2026, p 3.

- Office of Alumni and Philanthropy.[375]

6.8 The UON reported that over time, the net reduction in occupied ongoing positions associated with these change processes reduced from 35.21 full-time equivalent (FTE) in September 2025 to 6.21 FTE by December 2025, following the establishment of new roles and the finalisation of change proposals. The university noted that these figures reflected both disestablished and newly established ongoing positions across affected areas and were updated as consultation processes progressed.[376]

6.9 The university has stated publicly that more than 1,000 staff submissions were received during consultation processes associated with organisational change proposals. Consultation also occurred via a Staff Consultative Committee that included staff and union representatives.[377]

Academic calendar

6.10 Alongside the BIP, the university introduced significant changes to its academic calendar. From 2026, the UON moved to a new calendar with 'two existing semesters of teaching, with a longer, flexible mid-year term'.[378] The reforms formed part of UON's broader transformation agenda and were presented as a measure to improve both the student experience and operational efficiency.[379]

6.11 The university stated that the revised model would increase flexibility for students, simplify the teaching calendar, streamline business processes and improve timetabling. It also indicated that the mid-year term could be used for placements, overseas study opportunities, additional study or leave periods.[380]

6.12 In announcing the new calendar, the university stated that the reforms were finalised following a co-design process involving more than 11,500 students and 2,000 staff, as well as industry and community stakeholders. In addition, the university highlighted that the new model would maintain semester-based

375 University of Newcastle, *Community Update* (4 December 2025).

376 University of Newcastle, *Community Update* (4 December 2025).

377 University of Newcastle, *Community Update* (4 December 2025).

378 University of Newcastle, *University to implement new streamlined academic calendar* (4 December 2024), https://www.newcastle.edu.au/news/2024/12/university-to-implement-new-streamlined-academic-calendar.

379 University of Newcastle, *University to implement new streamlined academic calendar* (4 December 2024).

380 University of Newcastle, *University to implement new streamlined academic calendar* (4 December 2024).

learning for most undergraduate students while preserving trimester arrangements preferred by many postgraduate students.[381]

6.13 The committee heard that the changes generated concern among some staff and students, who questioned both the rationale for the reforms and their potential impact on teaching workloads, course delivery and academic outcomes.[382]

New strategic plan – *Looking Ahead 2030*

6.14 In March 2026, the university launched its new strategic plan, *Looking Ahead 2030*. The plan is anchored by three core priorities: Life Ready Graduates, Research with Impact and Engagement that Connects. The plan also introduces a "Flagships Model", a framework designed to support large-scale initiatives that deliver long-term benefits for regional communities, with additional consideration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.[383]

6.15 Professor Zelinksy advised that the plan was developed through extensive consultation with staff, students, external stakeholders and the community. He told the committee that the university undertook more than 7,000 interactions with these groups during the development of the strategic plan.[384]

6.16 The university described *Looking Ahead 2030* as a strategic plan that sets the university's direction for the next five years and reinforces its commitment to being a world-leading institution for its regions. It emphasised the university's long-standing mission to serve regional communities and its commitment to equity, engagement and sustainability.[385]

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381 University of Newcastle, *University to implement new streamlined academic calendar* (4 December 2024).

382 Evidence, Dr Tim Connor, Senior Lecturer, School of Law and Justice, University of Newcastle, 30 April 2026, p 21; Evidence, Mx Jennifer Lowe, Former President, University of Newcastle Students' Association, 30 April 2026, p 33; Evidence, Ms Imogen Reid, Chair and President, University of Newcastle Students' Association, 30 April 2026, p 34.

383 University of Newcastle, *University of Newcastle launches new Strategic Plan: Looking Ahead 2030* (31 March 2026), https://www.newcastle.edu.au/news/2026/03/university-of-newcastle-launches-new-strategic-plan-looking-ahead-2030.

384 Evidence, Professor Zelinksy, 30 April 2026, p 2; University of Newcastle, *University of Newcastle launches new Strategic Plan: Looking Ahead 2030* (31 March 2026), https://www.newcastle.edu.au/news/2026/03/university-of-newcastle-launches-new-strategic-plan-looking-ahead-2030.

385 University of Newcastle, *University of Newcastle launches new Strategic Plan: Looking Ahead 2030* (31 March 2026).

Stakeholder concerns

6.17 Evidence from staff, students, unions and representative bodies identified recurring concerns about consultation, governance and the pace and scale of organisational change. Participants also raised concerns about the impact of reform initiatives on staff and students.[386]

6.18 While the university emphasised consultation and engagement in developing the strategic plan and implementing organisational reforms,[387] some stakeholders questioned the adequacy and genuineness of those processes.[388] Several inquiry participants questioned whether consultation processes provided genuine opportunities to influence decision-making. While acknowledging that consultation occurred, they argued that key decisions appeared largely settled before staff and students were invited to provide feedback. Participants contended that consultation focused on implementation rather than the merits of the proposed reforms.[389]

6.19 The BIP and academic calendar changes attracted criticism from staff, students and representative bodies. Inquiry participants argued that the cumulative effect of multiple reform processes created uncertainty across the university community.[390]

6.20 Participants also raised concerns about the impact of reform initiatives on workloads, workplace culture and psychosocial safety. Staff submissions described increasing pressure associated with organisational change, while student representatives raised concerns regarding the cumulative effect of reforms on student experience.[391]

6.21 Student representatives criticised the academic calendar reforms, arguing that the changes reduced contact hours, increased stress and workload pressures,

386 Submission 127, University of Newcastle Students' Association, p 3; Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, p 21; Evidence, Mx Lowe, 30 April 2026, p 33; Evidence, Ms Reid, 30 April 2026, p 34.

387 Evidence, Professor Zelinksy, 30 April 2026, p 2; University of Newcastle, *Community Update* (4 December 2025), https://www.newcastle.edu.au/news/business-improvement-program-update.

388 Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, p 21; Evidence, Mx Lowe, 30 April 2026, p 33; Evidence, Ms Reid, 30 April 2026, p 34.

389 Evidence, Ms Reid, 30 April 2026, p 35; Evidence, Mr Liam Brenner, Vice-President, Welfare and Wellbeing, University of Newcastle Students' Association, 30 April 2026, p 37.

390 Evidence, Associate Professor Terrence Summers, National Tertiary Education Union University of Newcastle Branch President, 30 April 2026, pp 20-22; Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, pp 21-22.

391 Evidence, Associate Professor Summers, 30 April 2026, pp 20-21; Evidence, Dr Elena Aydos, Senior Lecturer, School of Law and Justice, University of Newcastle, 30 April 2026, p 19; Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, p 19.

and limited opportunities for students to rest, recuperate and catch up on study. These concerns are discussed further in a later section of this chapter.[392]

Financial rationale for the Business Improvement Plan

6.22 Some inquiry participants questioned the fundamental basis for the BIP. They argued that the university's focus on financial sustainability risked overshadowing its core functions of teaching, research and community engagement. Associate Professor Terrence Summers, Branch President, National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), UON Branch, acknowledged the importance of financial sustainability but argued that it should not become the overriding driver of institutional decision-making, lest it risk the university's core mission:

> You can have financial sustainability as a huge priority, but you have to make sure that you do that in a way which is balanced and doesn't affect the main purpose of the university—which is, of course, the outcomes … with respect to graduates, with respect to research and with respect to its engagement in the community and the benefits that it provides there. If you've got sustainable finances without those three things, it might as well shut down. There is no point having a financially viable university without those three things.[393]

6.23 Committee members examined the stated financial rationale for the BIP. Questioned as to the university's reliance on a 'core operations result' as a measure of financial performance, Professor Zelinksy explained that this measure compared the revenue generated from the university's core activities of teaching and research with the costs of delivering those activities.[394]

6.24 The committee also questioned whether the university's financial position, as measured by this indicator, justified the savings program. UON's Chief Financial Officer, Mr Paul McCubbin, advised that the university had recorded underlying core operating deficits in all but one year between 2019 and 2024. He explained that the measure relates to the university's core activities, namely teaching and internally funded research. He further explained that restricted funding was reported separately because it was not available for day-to-day operating activities and that investment returns were excluded because the UON did not regard those investments as part of its core activities.[395]

6.25 The committee challenged the methodology underpinning the university's core operations result, including the exclusion of restricted funds and investment

[392] Submission 127, University of Newcastle Students' Association, p 9; Evidence, Ms Reid and Mr Brenner, 30 April 2026, pp 34 and 36-37.

[393] Evidence, Associate Professor Summers, 30 April 2026, p 21.

[394] Evidence, Professor Zelinksy, 30 April 2026, p 3; Evidence, Mr McCubbin, 30 April 2026, pp 12-16.

[395] Evidence, Professor Zelinksy, 30 April 2026, p 3; Evidence, Mr McCubbin, 30 April 2026, pp 12-16.

returns. Mr McCubbin acknowledged that the methodology was not prescribed by Australian Accounting Standards and that no sector-wide framework currently exists. While he stated that other universities reported similar 'underlying' results, he advised that he was not aware of the precise methodologies used by those institutions.[396]

6.26 Mr McCubbin further advised that the core operations result reflects UON's fundamental mission-driven activities, including teaching and education delivery, internally funded research, academic and professional staff costs, central and divisional support costs required to operate the institution, such as utilities, repairs and maintenance, information systems, insurance, compliance and governance functions, as well as expenditure on approved projects and strategic initiatives.[397]

Evidence challenging the university's financial rationale

6.27 The committee also heard evidence challenging the proposition that the university's financial position justified the BIP. Dr Richard Denniss, Co-Chief Executive Officer of The Australia Institute, told the committee that his analysis of the university's audited financial statements did not support claims that the UON was facing a financial crisis:

> According to the audited accounts of the University of Newcastle, it is not having a financial crisis … The audited accounts make clear that it is not having a financial crisis, that its net assets have been growing, and that indeed it has been generating a surplus.[398]

6.28 Dr Denniss argued that the university's reliance on adjusted financial measures rather than its audited financial statements obscured its overall financial position. He expressed concern that revenue from investment and commercial activities was excluded from measures relied upon by the university to assess financial performance and that these adjusted measures were being relied upon instead of the audited financial statements when presenting the university's financial position.[399]

6.29 Referring to the university's published financial statements, Dr Denniss noted that the university's total equity had increased from approximately $1.3 billion in 2015 to $1.8 billion in 2024, while retained earnings had increased from approximately $700 million to $1.1 billion over the same period. He argued that

396 Evidence, Mr McCubbin, 30 April 2026, pp 14-15.

397 Additional information, Mr Paul McCubbin, Chief Financial Officer, University of Newcastle, 27 May 2026, p 3.

398 Evidence, Dr Richard Denniss, Co-Chief Executive Officer, The Australia Institute, 30 April 2026, p 28.

399 Evidence, Dr Denniss, 30 April 2026, pp 28-29.

these trends were inconsistent with claims that the university was experiencing a financial crisis requiring substantial cost-cutting measures.[400]

6.30 Dr Denniss argued that where non-statutory or adjusted financial measures are relied upon to justify major organisational reforms, the burden of proof should rest with the university to explain why those measures should be preferred to audited financial statements. He emphasised that governing councils and senates should require a strong justification for departing from audited accounts.[401]

6.31 Dr Denniss further advised that audited financial statements prepared in accordance with accounting standards provide 'transparent, interpretable and non-manipulable metrics of financial health.' He also argued that universities apply different methodologies when calculating adjusted or underlying results, making comparisons across institutions difficult.[402]

6.32 The committee notes that Dr Denniss' evidence contrasted significantly with the financial assessment advanced by university management. The committee therefore examined the broader explanations provided by the university for pursuing the BIP.

6.33 Pointing to the broader context of the university's financial challenges, Professor Zelinksy highlighted COVID and the Jobs-Ready Graduates Package as very challenging for the institution. He underscored that the latter is not adequate to fund the university for the cost of delivering courses, particularly as a regional university, and defended the challenging choices the council has made:

> I can tell you it's different in regional areas compared to capital cities. We have greater costs. We're under greater pressure. As a result of that, we have tried to minimise the impact of job reductions. One of the big buildings we had planned just before COVID was a STEM building—a $200 million investment. We cancelled that. We did not proceed with that investment, and we put it towards offsetting our increased costs—including staff costs, by the way. That's been the backdrop to this situation. Now, in the invariable situation, we still have to make some savings, so we proceeded with the business improvement program in 2024.[403]

Use of external consultants

6.34 The committee also examined the role of external consultants in developing the BIP. Professor Zelinsky confirmed that consultants were engaged during the early

[400] Evidence, Dr Denniss, 30 April 2026, pp 29-30.

[401] Evidence, Dr Denniss, 30 April 2026, pp 28, 30.

[402] Answers to questions on notice, Dr Richard Denniss, Co-Chief Executive Officer, The Australia Institute, 29 May 2026, pp 1-2.

[403] Evidence, Professor Zelinsky, 30 April 2026, p 6.

stages of the program. In response to questions on notice, the university advised that Nous Group was engaged to 'conduct extensive benchmarking analysis of the scale and focus of all operations at the University, at times using proprietary data to which the University would not otherwise have access'. UON stated that this information was used in the early stages of the BIP but that it did not inform academic workload changes or its assessment of financial sustainability.[404]

The enabling legislation

6.35 The committee examined the statutory framework governing UON, including its legislative objectives, functions and governance arrangements.

Objectives

6.36 The objectives of the university, as stated in the *University of Newcastle Act 1989* (the Act), are the promotion, within the limits of the university's resources, of scholarship, research, free inquiry, the interaction of research and teaching, and academic excellence.[405]

Functions

6.37 In order to fulfil its objectives, UON's principal functions, as prescribed by the Act, are the:

- provision of facilities for education and research of university standard, **having particular regard to the needs of the Hunter region, the Central Coast and surrounding areas**
- encouragement of the dissemination, advancement, development and application of knowledge informed by free inquiry
- provision of courses and research across fields to meet community needs
- participation in public discourse
- conferral of degrees and other awards
- provision of teaching and learning that engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry
- development of governance, rules, admission policies, financial arrangements and quality assurance processes sufficient to ensure academic integrity.[406]

[404] Evidence, Professor Zelinksy, 30 April 2026, p 3; Answers to questions on notice, Professor Alex Zelinsky AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Newcastle, received 29 May 2026, pp 1, 28.

[405] *University of Newcastle Act 1989*, s 6(1).

[406] *University of Newcastle Act 1989*, s 6(2).

6.38 Consistent with the broader NSW university governance framework, the Act also authorises UON to undertake commercial activities to support its objects and principal functions.[407]

Composition of the University Council

6.39 Section 8B of the Act prescribes that the UON Council must have a minimum of 11 and a maximum of 22 members, with the total number determined from time to time by a two-thirds majority of the Council.[408] The Council must include official members, elected members, council-appointed members, and ministerially appointed members.[409] A majority of the total number must be external persons, and no single category may constitute a majority.[410] The Council must notify the Minister within seven days of any resolution under s 8B.[411]

6.40 As at mid-July 2026, publicly available information states that the UON Council comprises 16 members:

- three official members (the Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor and President, and the President of Academic Senate)
- eight external members (six council-appointed and two ministerially appointed)
- five elected members (two academic staff, one professional staff, one undergraduate student and one postgraduate student).[412]

Governance concerns

6.41 In addition to the governance-related concerns attached to the BIP, academic calendar reforms and *Looking Ahead 2030* strategic plan noted in the first section of this chapter, evidence to the inquiry identified several recurring governance themes at UON, including concerns regarding representation, transparency, collegial governance, psychosocial risks, staff morale, reprisals and student participation in decision-making.

Council composition and representation

6.42 Some inquiry participants questioned whether the composition of the University Council offers staff and students sufficient influence over decisions affecting the

407 *University of Newcastle Act 1989*, s 6(3).

408 *University of Newcastle Act 1989*, s 8B.

409 *University of Newcastle Act 1989*, s 8B(3).

410 *University of Newcastle Act 1989*, s 8B(6) and (7).

411 *University of Newcastle Act 1989*, s 8B(8).

412 University of Newcastle, *Council members* (December 2025), https://www.newcastle.edu.au/current-staff/our-organisation/governance/council/council-members.

university. Concerns focused on the predominance of appointed members and the limited proportion of elected representatives.[413]

6.43 Dr Tim Connor, Senior Lecturer in the School of Law and Justice, argued that the university's governance arrangements concentrate decision-making authority amongst externally appointed members. He noted that nine of the 17 council members are appointed by council itself and expressed concern that many appointed members have limited experience working within higher education.[414] Linked to this, he expressed specific concern about the composition of the Chancellor's Committee, the sub-committee of council responsible for setting performance targets for the Vice-Chancellor role and assessing that performance. He noted that aside from the Vice-Chancellor himself, only one member of the committee has significant experience in the university sector, with the other five having been appointed on the basis of their business and management experience. He expressed the view that, 'while those skills are of course important, this imbalance has led the committee to hyper-focus on the university's financial position while inflicting deeply flawed performance indicators for educational outcomes'.[415]

6.44 Dr Connor further argued that, unlike corporate boards, university councils lack clear accountability mechanisms where confidence in governance is lost. He noted that a majority of council members are appointed rather than elected and questioned to whom those members are ultimately accountable.[416]

6.45 Accordingly, Dr Connor recommended legislative reform to strengthen elected representation on all university councils to 50 per cent, arguing, 'we are passionately committed to providing high-quality education and doing high-impact research, and we need more representation at the decision-making table'.[417]

6.46 Ms Evelyn Stagg, a professional staff member at UON, also advocated for reforms to university council composition. While supporting increased elected representation, Ms Stagg proposed a model under which elected staff, student and community representatives would collectively hold a majority of voting positions on university councils more broadly. She argued that elected community representatives would enhance accountability to the communities that universities serve and noted that such representation is particularly important for regional institutions such as the UON, given their regional mission and responsibilities to their respective communities.[418]

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413 Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, p 19; Evidence, Ms Reid, 30 April 2026, p 33; Submission 129, Ms Evelyn Stagg, p 7; Submission 73, Mr Hugh Bright, p 2.

414 Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, p 20.

415 Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, pp 19-20.

416 Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, p 24.

417 Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, p 20.

418 Submission 129, Ms Evelyn Stagg, p 7.

Transparency and accountability

6.47 Concerns regarding the transparency of governance processes were raised by a number of UON participants. They argued that staff and students had limited visibility of the University Council deliberations and decision-making processes.

6.48 Associate Professor Summers identified transparency as a significant governance concern. He noted that Council minutes are not publicly available and argued that confidentiality requirements prevent elected members from discussing Council proceedings with their constituencies, making it impossible to obtain feedback from those they represent:

> None of the elected members can say one thing about what goes on at Council, so getting any feedback whatsoever from those elected members' constituencies is impossible. They are terrified of saying anything which might trigger a violation of their non-disclosure agreements … for fear of losing their jobs.[419]

6.49 Associate Professor Summers contended that the combination of limited representation on council and a lack of transparency means that poor decisions can be made without accountability. He further argued that, where poor decisions are made, this may affect the university's ability to fulfil its purpose of providing top-quality graduates, undertaking high-quality research and serving the broader community.[420]

6.50 During the hearing, the committee explored the transparency of University Council proceedings with Professor Zelinksky. He confirmed that all council members are bound by the confidentiality requirements in respect of proceedings, that council minutes are not publicly available and that the university instead publishes a communiqué after council meetings. He stated, 'I don't feel we've had a sense that our elected members would say that they have been constrained from speaking about any items,' but suggested that part of the challenge for members in reporting back to their constituents may be to stick to the details of the communique.[421] He acknowledged that 'there's more we can do to improve that', and advised that, while council minutes were not currently published, 'it's one of the recommendations that has come out of the expert governance committee … and we support that—to have those minutes published.'[422]

Collegial governance and Academic Senate

6.51 Beyond the composition of Council itself, inquiry participants raised concerns regarding the operation of collegial governance structures at the university,

419 Evidence, Associate Professor Summers, 30 April 2026, p 20.

420 Evidence, Associate Professor Summers, 30 April 2026, p 20.

421 Evidence, Professor Zelinksy, 30 April 2026, p 8.

422 Evidence, Professor Zelinksy, 30 April 2026, pp 7-8.

particularly the role of the Academic Senate. The Academic Senate is the university's primary forum for debate on academic matters and the principal advisory committee to Council on academic issues. It has responsibility for academic oversight, including the development, approval and monitoring of academic programs, courses and policies.[423]

6.52 Given the Academic Senate's significant role in academic governance and quality assurance, some inquiry participants expressed concern that its capacity to influence key decisions had diminished.

6.53 Dr Connor told the committee that the Academic Senate was frequently perceived as a 'rubber stamp' and that major academic decisions were increasingly made through executive processes rather than collegiate deliberation.[424] He cited the academic calendar reforms as a prominent example. According to Dr Connor, significant concerns were raised regarding the educational implications of the new calendar. However, the Academic Senate was prevented from voting on the proposal despite its responsibility for safeguarding academic standards.[425]

6.54 Dr Connor contrasted the university's previous governance culture with its current 'top-down' approach:

> Over the 16 years I've been here, we've moved from a more collegial model, where staff at school level could work together to address some of the challenges, to a very top-down model. Like, our heads of school now are on fixed-term contracts, they are completely answerable to people above them in the hierarchy and they pass down decisions from above.[426]

6.55 He argued that engaging with staff as genuine partners in responding to the university's challenges would be much more effective for all:

> Staff recognise that there are big economic challenges and we should be made partners in addressing that. If we were told what our budget would be for the school, told in the context of this challenge how we're going to provide the best we can for our students and how we're going to do the best research we can, it would be a much more productive relationship than this very top-down kind of hierarchical model.[427]

Academic leadership, trust and institutional performance

6.56 Professor Paul Dastoor, School of Science (Physics), UON, expressed concern regarding the university's declining performance across a number of areas, and

423 University of Newcastle, *Academic Senate*, https://www.newcastle.edu.au/current-staff/our-organisation/governance/academic-senate.

424 Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, p 22.

425 Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, p 22.

426 Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, p 21.

427 Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, p 21.

linked those outcomes to governance arrangements. He stated that the university had experienced a 'catastrophic decrease' across a range of metrics, including research performance, income, and student and staff wellbeing.[428]

6.57 Professor Dastoor advised the committee that members of the university's professoriate had taken the highly unusual step of collectively raising concerns directly with council. He described this action as unprecedented during his 30 years at UON and explained:

> The professoriate has come together in meetings and has raised its serious concerns regarding governance at the University of Newcastle around trust, transparency and academic leadership in decision-making.[429]

6.58 Professor Dastoor also told the committee that many senior academics were reluctant to raise concerns publicly due to a 'real fear of reprisal for speaking out against decision-making', which he suggested reflected broader issues of trust and institutional culture.[430]

6.59 Similar concerns were raised by other witnesses, who argued that academic governance mechanisms had been weakened, questioned the extent to which academic perspectives were informing institutional decision-making, and expressed concerns regarding transparency, accountability and the impact of governance arrangements on teaching, research and staff wellbeing.[431]

Workloads, psychosocial risks and staff wellbeing

6.60 Concerns regarding governance and transparency were frequently linked by inquiry participants to the day-to-day experience of staff at UON. A recurring theme was the relationship between governance decisions, workload management and psychosocial safety, with witnesses arguing that decision-making processes had direct consequences for workloads, workplace culture and wellbeing.[432]

6.61 Several submissions documented concerns that staffing reductions, organisational redesign and efficiency measures had significantly increased workloads for remaining staff. Contributors argued that these pressures

[428] Evidence, Professor Paul Dastoor, School of Science (Physics), University of Newcastle, 30 April 2026, p 20.

[429] Evidence, Professor Dastoor, 30 April 2026, p 20.

[430] Evidence, Professor Dastoor, 30 April 2026, p 27.

[431] Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, pp 21-23; Evidence, Associate Professor Summers, 30 April 2026, pp 20-22.

[432] Evidence, Dr Aydos, 30 April 2026, p 19; Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, p 19; Evidence, Associate Professor Summers, 30 April 2026, pp 24-25; Evidence, Mx Lowe, 30 April 2026, p 39; Evidence, Ms Reid, 30 April 2026, p 39; Evidence, Associate Professor Patricia Pender, 30 April 2026, p 45.

adversely affected staff wellbeing and undermined the university's teaching and research functions.[433] The university's Academic Work Allocation Policy emerged as a specific issue.

Academic Work Allocation Model

6.62 The committee heard that the university's AWAM, introduced approximately five years ago, provides a framework for the planning, allocation and reporting of academic work across research and innovation, teaching and learning, and leadership and engagement. While the policy itself determines the ratios of work allocation, it is the Head of School and Pro-Vice-Chancellor who approve the actual allocation to individual staff.[434] As noted in chapter 4 regarding the University of Sydney, many of the day to day decisions that have implications for operations and good governance are taken at the faculty or school level. Local leadership is delegated very significant authority over staffing and other matters without corresponding mechanisms for meaningful collaboration or accountability.[435]

6.63 Associate Professor Summers argued that the university's AWAM underestimated the time required to undertake teaching and related responsibilities. He told the committee that, 'The actual time it took to do those activities was far greater. People have been telling me that it takes 100 per cent of their time to undertake the teaching activities. They are then expected, of course, to produce high-quality, world-class research.' He went on to suggest that because people are not able to meet all these expectations, their performance may be scrutinised, 'so they work harder and they work harder … Eventually, they break. When they break, they break catastrophically. They become unable to do anything'.[436]

6.64 Additionally, Dr Connor pointed to equity concerns attached to the model, stating:

> Because the current workload model is almost completely flexible, you can allocate someone something they've never taught before and give them the same allocation as something they've taught for 16 years. If that happened to me, if I was asked to teach a compulsory course I'd never taught before at fifth-year law level, that would potentially break me.[437]

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433 Submission 69, Dr Jessica Harris, Dr Kathleen Smithers and Dr Sarah Gurr, p 1-2; Submission 108, Name suppressed, p 3; Submission 109, Associate Professor Patricia Pender, pp 1-3; Submission 129, Ms Evelyn Stagg, pp 3-5; Submission 127, University of Newcastle Students' Association, p 9.

434 The University of Newcastle, *Academic Work Allocation Policy*, University of Newcastle Policy Library, s 2(2)a., https://policies.newcastle.edu.au/document/view-current.Php?id=341.

435 Evidence, Professor John Buchanan, University of Sydney Business School, 29 April 2026, pp 10, 12, 13 and 15.

436 Evidence, Associate Professor Summers, 30 April 2026, p 24.

437 Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, p 27.

6.65 Associate Professor Patricia Pender, a long-term staff member on medical leave arising from psychosocial safety risk, argued that the AWAM had contributed to declining collegiality and increased workload pressures. She contended that the model pitted academics against one another, burdened professional staff, and left staff too exhausted to effectively participate in workplace advocacy activities. Associate Professor Pender also stated that workload recognition for activities such as union representation had been removed and that, in her School of English and Writing, workload recognition for community engagement activities had been removed unless specifically approved by the Head of School. She argued that these responsibilities were consequently undertaken in addition to existing workload requirements. Associate Professor Pender further argued that the teaching workload was being used as a "weapon" and that the AWAM had been used to 'wreak havoc on collegiality'.[438]

6.66 Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Belinda Tynan acknowledged that staff had identified the AWAM model as an issue requiring further consideration and advised that the UON had commenced a review of the AWAM policy in response to those concerns.[439]

6.67 During questioning, Professor Tynan stated that she did not believe a specific risk assessment of the AWAM had been undertaken. The committee raised concerns that, given allegations that the model contributed to psychosocial risks, the university may not have formally assessed those risks. Professor Tynan emphasised that the university was actively engaging with staff regarding workload concerns and investigating issues as they were raised.[440]

Psychosocial safety complaints

6.68 Dr Elena Aydos, Senior Lecturer, School of Law and Justice, described her personal experience of raising psychosocial safety concerns following serious medical treatment and alleged that the university's processes failed to adequately manage workplace risks. She argued that her experience reflected broader systemic shortcomings in psychosocial risk management. Dr Aydos stated that reasonable and available control measures could have been implemented at an early stage to ensure a safe workplace but were not.[441]

6.69 Dr Aydos made the case that organisational responses to complaints prioritised procedural compliance over substantive risk management. She argued that opportunities to intervene and address workplace safety concerns were repeatedly missed. Dr Aydos further contended that no substantive investigation was undertaken into the concerns she raised, that workplace risk assessments failed to reflect the seriousness of her situation, and that responsibility was

438 Evidence, Associate Professor Pender, 30 April 2026, p 45.

439 Evidence, Professor Belinda Tynan, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Newcastle, 30 April 2026, p 17.

440 Evidence, Professor Tynan, 30 April 2026, p 17.

441 Evidence, Dr Aydos, 30 April 2026, pp 19-20.

effectively shifted onto her to manage the consequences of an unsafe work environment.[442]

Workplace culture and fear of reprisals

6.70 Some inquiry participants argued that the cumulative effect of organisational change, increasing workloads and limited opportunities for staff input had contributed to declining morale across the university.[443]

6.71 Associate Professor Summers described morale at the university in stark terms:

> Of course there's the elephant in the room, which is that morale at the university is lower than any place that I have ever worked. It is absolutely in the toilet … I've never worked in a place where morale is so low and there are so many people who just don't want to be there.[444]

6.72 Associate Professor Summers advised that staff turnover had increased, including at very senior levels, further suggesting that many employees would leave the university if alternative opportunities were available. He indicated that difficulties attracting and retaining staff represented a growing challenge for the institution.[445]

6.73 Beyond concerns regarding governance and workloads, several witnesses told the committee that a culture of fear had developed within parts of the university. Inquiry participants described reluctance among staff to publicly challenge decisions or raise concerns because they feared adverse consequences. Professor Dastoor emphasised, for example, 'We have many, many staff who are frightened to speak out'.[446]

6.74 Inquiry participants linked this fear to the concentration of managerial discretion over workloads, employment opportunities and career progression. Dr Connor, for example, observed that, 'There's a huge amount of decision-making power centralised in the role of head of school', which prevents many staff from speaking up.[447] Dr Aydos similarly emphasised that 'The power concentration is real … our career can be completely manipulated; our career can be suspended in time if you raise a concern to someone who is willing to take those steps'.[448]

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442 Evidence, Dr Aydos, 30 April 2026, pp 19-20 and 25-26.

443 Evidence, Associate Professor Summers, 30 April 2026, pp 21-22; Evidence, Ms Reid, 30 April 2026, p 35.

444 Evidence, Associate Professor Summers, 30 April 2026, pp 21-22.

445 Evidence, Associate Professor Summers, 30 April 2026, pp 22 and 27.

446 Evidence, Professor Dastoor, 30 April 2026, p 27.

447 Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, p 27.

448 Evidence, Dr Aydos, 30 April 2026, p 27.

Student participation and consultation

6.75 Concerns regarding consultation and transparency extended beyond staff. Student representatives told the committee that students were often informed of significant decisions after they had effectively been made and therefore had limited opportunities to influence outcomes.[449]

6.76 Ms Reid, Chair and President, UON Students' Association argued that consultation often occurred too late in the decision-making process:

> A lot of the times when we do see consultation, even if it is presented as if it's open to feedback, the decision has already been made, mostly. The plan they want to put in place is already there.[450]

6.77 Mr Liam Brenner, Vice President Welfare and Wellbeing, UON Students' Association argued that consultation was sometimes used to validate predetermined decisions rather than shape outcomes:

> It feels as though there is a predetermined decision that has been made, and then consultation is designed or engineered in a way to essentially confirm that decision so they can check that box.[451]

6.78 Ms Reid told the committee that, right now, trust between students and the university sector is 'profoundly damaged', which she said was particularly evident at UON, where students often learned of significant decisions through staff or media reports rather than directly from the university. She also argued that consultation processes were inconsistent and did not always provide meaningful opportunities for students to influence decisions.[452]

6.79 Student representatives further questioned governance arrangements that enabled significant academic matters to proceed without scrutiny by the Academic Senate. Ms Reid described the Academic Senate as 'meant to be a peak academic governance body' and expressed concern that executive delegations could be used to bypass established governance processes. She cited changes to the academic calendar, which she said were approved under delegated authority without a vote of the Academic Senate, as an example of a significant academic matter proceeding without senate scrutiny.[453]

6.80 By contrast, the university emphasised the importance of student participation in governance processes. Professor Tynan advised that students were represented on the Academic Senate and a range of academic governance committees, including research and learning and teaching committees. She also

[449] Evidence, Ms Reid, 30 April 2026, pp 33-35; Submission 127, University of Newcastle Students' Association, p 3.

[450] Evidence, Ms Reid, 30 April 2026, p 35.

[451] Evidence, Mr Brenner, 30 April 2026, p 37.

[452] Evidence, Ms Reid, 30 April 2026, pp 33-35.

[453] Evidence, Ms Reid, 30 April 2026, pp 33 and 36.

described a student advisory group and other engagement mechanisms through which students, including First Nations students, students with disability and students from low socio-economic backgrounds, provided advice to the university.[454]

Committee comment

6.81 The evidence before the committee regarding the University of Newcastle revealed a clear divergence between the university's rationale for organisational reform and the experiences reported by some staff and students affected by those changes. The committee also heard markedly different assessments of the university's financial position and the extent to which that position necessitated the Business Improvement Program (BIP). The committee therefore considered both the stated objectives of the reforms and the governance, consultation and workplace concerns raised by UON participants.

6.82 The committee acknowledges the evidence from the UON that the BIP, academic calendar reforms and *Looking Ahead 2030* strategy were intended to improve the university's long-term sustainability, strengthen institutional performance and enhance student experience.

6.83 At the same time, the committee notes the significant concerns raised by staff, students and representative organisations regarding consultation, transparency, governance, workloads and workplace culture. Evidence gathered during the inquiry indicated that many UON stakeholders experienced organisational change as rapid, cumulative and, insufficiently collaborative. The volume and consistency of this evidence was notable.

6.84 The committee was troubled by the strength and consistency of concerns regarding consultation, governance, workloads and psychosocial safety across academic staff, student representatives, union representatives and members of the professoriate. In addition, we observed a divergence between the UON's characterisation of its reform processes and the experiences described by a number of staff and students. While the university pointed to extensive consultation activities, many inquiry participants expressed the view that consultation occurred after key decisions had effectively been made and that opportunities to influence outcomes were limited.

6.85 The committee considers that meaningful consultation requires more than opportunities to comment on substantially developed proposals. Effective consultation should occur early, provide genuine opportunities to influence decisions and demonstrate how stakeholder feedback has informed outcomes.

6.86 The committee is particularly concerned by the consistency of evidence at UON regarding declining morale, fear of reprisal, psychosocial risks and perceptions

[454] Evidence, Professor Tynan, 30 April 2026, p 17.

that staff and student voices were increasingly marginalised in institutional decision-making. These concerns were raised by academic staff, professional staff, student representatives, union representatives and members of the professoriate.

6.87 The committee understands that financial sustainability is an important objective for universities. However, it should not be pursued in isolation from a university's core functions of teaching, research and community engagement. Nor should it come at the expense of effective consultation, collegial governance or staff and student wellbeing. Organisational reform can and should be undertaken in a manner that preserves quality of teaching and research, supports staff and students, and maintains confidence in institutional governance.

6.88 Regarding the financial assumptions underpinning the university's reforms, the committee notes the extensive discussion during the UON hearing about the use of a 'core operations result' and other non-statutory financial measures to assess university financial performance. The committee considers that where such measures are relied upon to justify organisational change initiatives, universities must clearly disclose the methodologies employed and the rationale for the inclusion or exclusion of significant revenue and expenditure items. Moreover, we remain unconvinced by the university's position that its investment income should not be used to offset operational costs. The committee notes that evidence before the inquiry supported materially different assessments of the university's financial position depending on whether audited financial statements or adjusted financial measures were relied upon.

6.89 In this regard, the committee notes the evidence of Dr Richard Denniss, who challenged the proposition that the university's audited financial statements demonstrated a financial position requiring significant cost-cutting measures. The evidence highlighted the importance of transparency when non-statutory or adjusted financial measures are relied upon to justify major organisational reforms. Where there is a material divergence between an institution's audited financial results and the adjusted measures used for internal decision-making, universities should clearly explain that divergence and demonstrate why the alternative measures provide a more appropriate basis for assessing financial sustainability and organisational change proposals.

6.90 In addition to this, we note that the dominance of managerialist perspectives among university council members and university executives may well lead councils to adopt a particular interpretation of financial matters. This appears to be a pattern across universities to which we will return in our final chapter. In the meantime, we remain unconvinced that UON experienced the financial crisis it has purported.

6.91 The committee further considers that psychosocial safety and staff wellbeing should be central considerations in organisational change processes. Universities depend on the expertise, commitment and goodwill of their staff and

students, and governance arrangements should recognise and support those contributions.

6.92 Linked to this, the committee was also concerned by evidence that the UON was reviewing its academic work allocation policy following concerns raised by staff while, at the same time, uncertainty remained regarding whether a formal risk assessment of the model had been undertaken. The committee welcomes the university's review of the policy but notes that, had a comprehensive risk assessment been undertaken at an earlier stage, a significant degree of psychosocial harm, workplace conflict, loss of morale and uncertainty may have been avoided. The committee considers that universities should proactively identify and assess psychosocial hazards associated with workload allocation models, not least during periods of organisational change. In our view, this is particularly important where workload allocation models are alleged to contribute to psychosocial harm, workplace conflict or excessive workload pressures. The committee further considers that the current review presents an important opportunity for the university to begin rebuilding trust with staff, which the evidence received suggests has been significantly affected.

6.93 The evidence received from UON reinforces broader themes identified throughout this inquiry regarding governance, transparency, managerialism, psychosocial risk and stakeholder participation across the New South Wales university sector. In the committee's view, the evidence received from UON demonstrates the importance of maintaining strong collegial governance arrangements, meaningful consultation processes and effective mechanisms through which staff and students can participate in decisions affecting their university community. These features are essential to maintaining trust, transparency and confidence in university governance.

6.94 The committee now turns to evidence received in relation to Charles Sturt University, where a number of similar issues concerning governance, consultation, decision-making and organisational change were raised during the inquiry.

Chapter 7 Charles Sturt University

This chapter focuses on Charles Sturt University (CSU), Australia's largest regional university. In response to significant financial pressures in recent years, CSU has embarked on a large-scale organisational change program. This chapter provides an overview of the university's reported deficit and resulting change proposals. It then outlines the statutory framework established under the *Charles Sturt University Act 1989*, including the composition and operation of the University Council. Finally, the chapter examines evidence heard by the committee regarding key governance concerns, including amendments to the Academic Senate's membership and governing framework, the transition of various courses to online-only delivery, the transparency of Council meeting records, the use of consultants, wage theft remediation and executive remuneration.

Operating deficit and change proposals

7.1 CSU is Australia's largest regional university, operating across multiple regional and remote campuses including Albury-Wodonga, Bathurst, Dubbo, Goulburn, Orange, Port Macquarie, and Wagga Wagga.[455] The university has a legislated principal function to provide educational and research facilities that specifically meet the needs and aspirations of residents in western and south-western New South Wales.[456] At the committee's sixth hearing, Professor Renée Leon, Vice-Chancellor and President, advised that over 80 per cent of the university's regional students go on to live and work in regional Australia after graduating.[457] This foundational public mission sets the context for examining the university's recent change proposals, financial pressures and governance practices.

Structural operating deficit and drivers of financial stress

7.2 Appearing before the committee in June 2026, Professor Leon advised the committee that the university is currently operating in a highly challenging financial environment, carrying a structural operating deficit of $30.4 million for 2025.[458]

7.3 Professor Leon attributed the university's financial stress to a combination of inadequate Commonwealth funding for regional higher education and a severe decline in international student enrolments.[459] Until 2019, CSU enrolled approximately 8,500 international students, which delivered a net benefit of $35

455 Submission 66, Charles Sturt University, p 3.

456 *Charles Sturt University Act 1989*, s 7(2)A.

457 Evidence, Professor Renée Leon, Vice-Chancellor and President, Charles Sturt University, 12 June 2026, p 2.

458 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Leon, 3 July 2026, p 1.

459 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 2.

million for the institution. However, the university now retains only approximately 10 per cent of that cohort.[460]

7.4 Professor Leon argued that recent Commonwealth migration and visa policy changes have disproportionately disadvantaged regional universities. She explained that delivering education in regional areas is inherently more expensive, and because the university operates in 'thin markets', it is very difficult to achieve the student numbers required to remain financially viable under current Commonwealth funding models. She noted that while the Group of Eight universities attract students from the Chinese market, which was less affected by the changes, the markets that regional universities rely on have been hit hardest by the new policies.[461]

7.5 Professor Leon further informed the committee that while the university's 2025 annual report published a deficit of $12.4 million, she argued this official figure masked a much deeper financial shortfall of $30.4 million. In respect of this difference, Professor Leon explained that management had applied an alternative calculation that excluded '$18 million of one-off payments and revenue counted received in the year'.[462] The $18 million figure consisted of a substantial one-off spend of $14 million from the Commonwealth 'for equity places that had been received in prior years and that were subject to reconciliation and clawback', alongside $4 million resulting from an accounting adjustment to how research revenue was recognised on the balance sheet. This left, according to the university's calculation, an 'actual structural deficit' of $30.4 million.[463]

2025-2026 change proposals

7.6 To address what the university had determined as the structural deficit and return the budget to a sustainable position, Professor Leon told the committee that the university had initiated a change program which commenced in June 2025.[464] The program's target is to identify $35 million in ongoing efficiencies, savings or additional revenue by the end of 2027, with savings needing to have been 'largely developed' by the end of 2026 'for inclusion in the 2027 Budget'.[465]

7.7 Describing the development of the program, Professor Leon told the committee 'we consulted extensively with staff to get their ideas on ways that we could achieve the savings without reducing salaries and we've got a range of further ideas suggested by staff – including leasing out buildings and consolidating

460 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 3.

461 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, pp 3 and 5.

462 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Renée Leon, Vice-Chancellor and President, Charles Sturt University, 3 July 2026, p 1.

463 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, pp 3-4.

464 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 3.

465 Anwers to questions on notice, Professor Leon, 3 July 2026, p 9.

buildings into smaller space – that are going to achieve some of this year's save. We certainly are trying to minimise the impact on staff'.[466]

7.8 Professor Leon further highlighted that 50 per cent of the proposed changes in the first phase of the program were amended in response to staff consultation.[467] She advised that management opted for a phased approach rather than a single large cut in order to avoid reducing staff without reducing work, and to protect performance of mission, noting 'We are doing this in a careful way by examining how we can reduce the actual activity of the university in ways that won't harm the performance of our mission and that will reduce workload commensurate with the reduction in staff numbers.'[468]

7.9 Professor Leon informed the committee that the initial phases of the change program delivered $7.5 million in savings in 2025.[469] $2.5 million of this figure was attributed to non-salary measures such as consolidating campus buildings to save on utilities, actively leasing vacant spaces, and deferring non-essential maintenance and infrastructure work.[470] Additionally, the university reduced its top-heavy structure by removing approximately 16 senior executive roles to free up funding for frontline academic and support services.[471]

7.10 Moving forward, Professor Leon advised that the next tranches of change proposals will primarily impact professional and general staff.[472] She advised 'we are trying as much as possible to avoid cuts to courses and cuts to academic staff' and that the university management is 'seeking to do the change program in a way that provides services more efficiently and effectively, rather than reducing those services objectively'.[473] While draft change proposals regarding specific professional staff functions had not yet been finalised as at July 2026, the university maintained that these upcoming changes are intended to 'develop more efficient and streamlined work functions, to improve both staff work requirements and student experience, and then ensure appropriate staffing levels to meet that workload'.[474]

7.11 When questioned as to how many change proposals were expected in August and over the remainder of the year, the Vice-Chancellor advised in her written response to supplementary questions that outcomes from its 'Phase 2 design reviews' would be rolled out across three distinct stages in July/August, September/October and February/March 2027. However, the response did not

466 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 4.

467 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Leon, 3 July 2026, p 11.

468 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 4.

469 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 4.

470 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Leon, 3 July 2026, p 10.

471 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 5.

472 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 5.

473 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 5.

474 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Leon, 3 July 2026, p 11.

provide a definitive number of upcoming tranches, stating that while one change proposal was scheduled for early August, 'The number of change proposals in September/October is not yet known'.[475]

7.12 The committee challenged Professor Leon regarding the veracity of the university's assumptions, noting that the university's recently published 2025 annual report showed an increase in revenue from both international students and domestic students. The Vice-Chancellor acknowledged, 'We had an increase in international student revenue off what was a very low base the previous year' but suggested, 'Sadly, it was not enough to close the revenue gap of the university'.[476] Asked how this accorded with the Auditor General's observations of a sustained increase over time in revenue from international students across almost all universities, Professor Leon responded, '[I]in relation to Charles Sturt I'm sad to say there has not been a sustained increase.'[477]

Council oversight of change proposals

7.13 The committee asked Professor Leon about Council oversight of the change proposals. She advised that the University Council has maintained close, strategic oversight throughout the development and implementation of the change program.[478] Prior to its commencement, the Council was closely involved in setting and formally approving the $35 million savings target.[479] Professor Leon emphasised that the Council was already well-informed about the university's financial position through regular reporting, had established views on the necessary actions required to address these budget pressures, and continues to receive updates on the program's progress and next steps at every meeting.[480]

7.14 Professor Leon also advised that pursuant to its statutory mandate to manage material risks rather than routine operational matters, the Council maintains a delegation threshold of $10 million and does not authorise individual contracts below this amount.[481] Instead, it 'oversights the university's financial management throughout the year and approves the university's financial statements which disclose consultancy spend'.[482]

7.15 In answers to questions on notice regarding the Council's oversight of staff welfare and regional impacts, the Vice Chancellor responded that the Council also

475 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Leon, 3 July 2026, p 9.
476 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 2.
477 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 3.
478 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Leon, 3 July 2026, pp 19-20.
479 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Leon, 3 July 2026, p 19.
480 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 9.
481 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Leon, 3 July 2026, p 20.
482 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Leon, 3 July 2026, p 20.

received 'thorough information' on the planning and implementation of the Change program, including 'potential staff impacts, psychosocial risk and regional impact, and the steps University management and the Division of People and Culture are implementing to address and mitigate these risks'.[483]

Staff perspectives

7.16 The committee heard that the rollout of the university's large scale organisational reforms has been a source of significant apprehension among the university community. This section outlines the concerns raised by staff and National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) CSU Branch representatives regarding the change program, specifically focusing on the impact of target staff cuts on psychosocial health, alongside the profound uncertainty surrounding the financial rationale and transparency of the restructures.

Staff cuts and psychosocial health

7.17 The NTEU CSU Branch expressed deep concerns regarding the impact of the 2026 change proposals, reporting that they have created significant uncertainty for staff and students.[484] Dr Anna Corbo-Crehan, Senior Lecturer, Australian Graduate School of Policing and Security and NTEU CSU Branch President, noted that the proposals 'will focus solely on the jobs of professional staff', adding that this 'will be devastating for those individuals who have built their lives and careers at CSU'.[485]

7.18 Elaborating on the widespread apprehension felt by professional and general staff navigating the ongoing change program, Dr Emma Rush, Senior Lecturer for the School of Social Work and Arts, and NTEU CSU Branch Vice-President, described:

> So it's just not all that plausible for professional and general staff, who are feeling, on the one hand, "I might lose my job" and, on the other hand, "I might keep my job, but it'll be completely unmanageable because staff will have been cut and systems actually won't be what they're promised to be". There's a lot of stress.[486]

7.19 Furthermore, Dr Corbo-Crehan drew attention to the severe psychosocial risks associated with the change proposals, citing the recent Australian University

[483] Answers to questions on notice, Professor Leon, 3 July 2026, p 20.

[484] Evidence, Dr Anna Corbo-Crehan, Senior Lecturer, Australian Graduate School of Policing and Security and National Tertiary Education Union Charles Sturt University Branch President, 30 April 2026, p 40.

[485] Evidence, Dr Corbo-Crehan, 30 April 2026, p 40.

[486] Evidence, Dr Emma Rush, Senior Lecturer, School of Social Work and Arts and National Tertiary Education Union Charles Sturt University Branch Vice President, 30 April 2026, p 41.

Census on Staff Wellbeing, which identified 82 per cent of CSU respondents or approximately 116 individuals as experiencing significant psychosocial risks relating to their work at CSU.[487]

Poor transparency and staff uncertainty

7.20 CSU staff representatives pointed to a significant lack of transparency surrounding the university's $35 million change proposals. Appearing before the committee in April 2026, Dr Corbo-Crehan advised that it was unclear how the target of $35 million was established by university leadership.[488] Dr Rush added 'what I have heard them say is that it's to do with a reduction in international student numbers, or not so much a reduction but that international student numbers are not going up in the way that management projected they would go up'.[489]

7.21 While noting that the university was consulting with staff and had achieved $7 million in initial savings, Dr Corbo-Crehan described the profound uncertainty regarding where the remaining savings will be found, stating 'we're still waiting for that—the rest of the $28 million worth of axe—to fall.'[490] When questioned in June 2026 regarding the likely source of the remaining $28 million saving, Dr Corbo-Crehan confirmed 'it's still to be determined'.[491]

7.22 Highlighting the challenges of uncertainty during both 2025 and 2026, Dr Corbo-Crehan stated, 'Following 11 change proposals last year, we were recently told that the 2026 change proposals won't be released until August. CSU staff and students will clearly have to endure a marked degree of change over the final five months of the year.'[492]

7.23 The committee heard that uncertainty experienced by staff was not limited to job security, but extended to the university's academic offerings, such that staff were navigating changes to courses without clear information. In this regard, Dr Rush commented that at the Wagga Wagga campus 'there have been huge numbers of course cuts' and further, 'I wondered, in preparation for this inquiry, whether there was any list of all the courses that have been cut on campus, but I've never been aware of one at the university if there is one. It's not very transparent.'[493] Staff representatives noted that the cuts to staff are also attached to significant shifts towards online learning, discussed in a later section.

487 Evidence, Dr Corbo-Crehan, 30 April 2026, p 40.
488 Evidence, Dr Corbo-Crehan, 30 April 2026, p 40.
489 Evidence, Dr Rush, 30 April 2026, p 40.
490 Evidence, Dr Corbo-Crehan, 30 April 2026, p 43.
491 Evidence, Dr Corbo-Crehan, 30 April 2026, p 43.
492 Evidence, Dr Corbo-Crehan, 30 April 2026, p 40.
493 Evidence, Dr Rush, 30 April 2026, p 42.

The enabling legislation

7.24 To provide context for these governance concerns, this section outlines the statutory framework that governs CSU. It describes the university's core objectives, the role and functions of the university council, and its current membership composition.

Objectives

7.25 The objectives of the university, as stated in the *Charles Sturt University Act 1989* (the Act), are the promotion, within the limits of the university's resources, of scholarship, research, free inquiry, the interaction of research and teaching, and academic excellence.[494]

Functions

7.26 In order to fulfil its objectives, CSU's principal functions, as prescribed by the Act, include:

- provision of facilities for education and research of university standard, **having particular regard to the needs and aspirations of the residents of western and south-western New South Wales**
- encouragement of the dissemination, advancement, development and application of knowledge informed by free inquiry
- provision of courses and research across fields to meet community needs
- participation in public discourse
- conferral of degrees and other awards
- provision of teaching and learning that engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry
- development of governance, procedural rules, admission policies, financial arrangements and quality assurance processes sufficient to ensure academic integrity.[495]

7.27 Consistent with the broader New South Wales university governance framework, the Act also authorises CSU to undertake commercial activities to support its objects and principal functions.[496] The meaning of 'university commercial activity' is defined in section 24A of the Act.[497]

494 *Charles Sturt University Act 1989*, s 7(1).

495 *Charles Sturt University Act 1989*, s 7(2).

496 *Charles Sturt University Act 1989*, s 7(3).

497 *Charles Sturt University Act 1989*, s 24A.

7.28 Section 24B of the Act provides the statutory basis for university commercial activities, including activities undertaken in the exercise of the university's commercial functions and participation in partnerships, trusts, companies, other incorporated bodies, or joint ventures that are declared by the guidelines to be university commercial activities.[498]

Composition of the University Council

7.29 Section 8C of the Act prescribes that the CSU Council must have a minimum of 11 and a maximum of 22 members, with the total number determined from time to time by a two-thirds majority of Council.[499] The Council must include official members, elected members, council-appointed members and ministerially appointed members.[500] A majority of the total number must be external persons, and no single category may constitute a majority.[501] The Council must notify the Minister within seven days of any resolution under s 8B.[502]

7.30 Public information as at mid-June 2026 states that the current university council comprises of 15 members:

- three official members (Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Chair of Academic Senate)
- nine appointed members (two ministerially appointed, seven council-appointed)
- three elected members (one academic staff, one professional staff, and one student).[503]

Governance concerns

7.31 Evidence presented to the committee highlighted several areas of concern to CSU stakeholders relating to governance, including changes to the rules governing the academic senate, the transparency and availability of Council meeting minutes, the transition of numerous courses to online-only delivery, use of external consultants, historical wage underpayments to university staff and subsequent wage remediation, and the appropriateness of executive remuneration.

498 *Charles Sturt University Act 1989*, s 24B.

499 *Charles Sturt University Act 1989*, s 8C.

500 *Charles Sturt University Act 1989*, s 8C(3).

501 *Charles Sturt University Act 1989*, s 8C(6) and (7).

502 *Charles Sturt University Act 1989*, s 8C(8).

503 Office of Governance and Corporate Administration, *University Council,* Charles Sturt University, https://www.csu.edu.au/division/vcoffice/ogca/governance/university-council.

Academic governance and the Academic Senate

7.32 The NTEU CSU Branch heavily criticised the 2024 changes to the Governance (Academic Senate) Rule. The union argued that these changes removed the requirement for a strict majority of elected academic positions and eliminated key functions regarding scrutiny and evaluation of courses, with the effect of centralising power within executive management and weakening academic oversight.[504]

7.33 Reinforcing these concerns regarding academic representation, the committee heard evidence from NTEU CSU Branch inquiry participants regarding a poor institutional culture and a hostile attitude towards academics at the governance level. Dr Emma Rush recounted a striking conversation with a colleague who had previously served on the university council, sharing:

> … the conversation really made an impression on me because the person said, "When I went on university council, it was the worst thing I have ever done. They hate academics", and that is a direct quote. I felt quite shocked, partly because academics are—we're pretty mild-mannered people, generally, and just trying to do our job and do our research and teach, so I feel like to hate us as a group is pretty nasty. But also, we are the centre of the university. That's what the university is there for: to teach and to research. So if you hate academics, what are you doing on a university council? I found it a very upsetting conversation.[505]

7.34 Conversely, Professor Leon defended the changes, advising that they were not initiated by university management but were the result of an independent academic external review of the governance rules of the Senate, 'which identified that a number of things that were in the Senate's functions were actually functions that Senate by itself cannot and does not perform' and that 'some of those functions are actually performed by other parts of the university'.[506] She noted that the revised rules accurately reflect the practical functions of the Senate, and that a majority of elected academic members is still maintained on the body.[507] She also emphasised that the changes 'actually went through Senate for their adoption with a majority of academic members present' and 'were voted on by the academics of the university'.[508]

7.35 However, written answers to questions on notice from the NTEU CSU Branch highlighted that elected academic experts who research and teach 'on the ground' are underrepresented on the Senate and the Council. They described that although other members of the Senate 'may have engaged in university teaching

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504 Answers to supplementary questions, National Tertiary Education Union Charles Sturt University Branch, 5 June 2026, p 2.

505 Evidence, Dr Rush, 30 April 2026, p 42.

506 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 5.

507 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 5.

508 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 5.

and research at some point', they are now 'focused solely on undertaking management roles', and 'while these people may call on and refer to their previous academic experience and knowledge in their management roles, they do not have the confidence of those currently engaged in academic roles'.[509] The NTEU CSU Branch warned that 'the centralisation of decision-making powers on academic activities in the hands of non-academic (including non-currently-academic), non-elected members' ultimately had 'negative flow-on effects for teaching learning and research'.[510]

Access to minutes and change program information

7.36 Linked to the perceived lack of transparency about the change program decisions is the difficulty reported by NTEU CSU Branch inquiry participants in accessing basic information about the change proposals and the university's broader governance.

7.37 Dr Corbo-Crehan advised that staff are able to access information regarding change proposals through two locations – a 'generic change site' hosted within the Division of People and Culture section of the university website and the 'change hub' providing 'a more focused set of information'. However, she described this hub as being 'very difficult to find' and that once accessed, 'the information is quite general'.[511]

7.38 Dr Corbo-Crehan shared her view that 'some years ago, you used to be able to find council minutes very easily' and that 'they don't seem to be recorded now'.[512] She added that minutes are sometimes referred to by the Vice-Chancellor in reference to savings cuts, but that she 'wouldn't have a clue who was on council, how often they meet – nothing at all'.[513] Mr Dionigi further expressed his view that, 'From my perspective, it seems fairly opaque. I certainly don't hear about anything going on in Council. The decisions made are opaque. Everything's opaque about it.'[514]

7.39 According to the NTEU CSU Branch, the university experienced prolonged periods where the publication of Council minute summaries ceased entirely. In 2020, the then University Secretary acknowledged that for at least two years the university had not been publishing minute summaries of Council meetings, stating 'it

509 Answers to supplementary questions, National Tertiary Education Union Charles Sturt University Branch, 5 June 2026, p 2.

510 Answers to supplementary questions, National Tertiary Education Union Charles Sturt University Branch, 5 June 2026, p 2.

511 Evidence, Dr Corbo-Crehan, 30 April 2026, p 43.

512 Evidence, Dr Corbo-Crehan, 30 April 2026, p 43.

513 Evidence, Dr Rush, 30 April 2026, p 43.

514 Evidence, Mr Claudio Dionigi, Faculty Librarian, Charles Sturt University, 30 April 2026, p 42.

appears that this practice ceased in early 2018'.[515] Additionally, the union suggested that as at 17 October 2025 there were significant gaps where summaries for completed meetings remained entirely inaccessible to university staff, noting 'the most recent minute summary available as at 17 October 2025 appears to be from the Council meeting of 8 August 2024 – the subsequent two meetings in 2024 are not accessible to CSU staff with a valid login, and no hyperlinks are available at all for any of the meetings conducted in 2025 to date'.[516]

7.40 When queried whether meeting minutes are made available to staff and the public, Professor Leon outlined active steps taken by the university to improve public access to council records. She explained that while University Council meetings are closed to the public and much of its business is deemed confidential due to sensitive commercial matters, the university has historically published summaries of Council deliberations on its website.[517]

7.41 Professor Leon advised the committee that to address criticisms regarding the transparency of these records, she had recently undertaken a process with the University Secretary, formally approved by the Council, to significantly increase the level of detail provided in these public disclosures. Under this reformed process, only information that is strictly commercial in confidence is to be removed, ensuring that much more detailed minute summaries are made available to the university community moving forward.[518] The committee understands that while links are available for the 15 April 2026 and 18 June 2026 meetings, no link has yet been provided for the 13 August 2026 meeting, and a restrictive CSU credentials login remains required to access any of the documents.

Online learning

7.42 Professor Leon advised that in addition, the university has discontinued various on-campus courses that fell below financially viable student numbers, either shifting them to an online-only delivery mode or cutting them completely.[519] She told the committee:

> We have such a commitment to our regional communities, and it pains us to our souls to have to cut courses that we know would be valuable in regional Australia. … Because we are in such a difficult financial position—due to mainly the loss of international student revenue—we can't afford to

[515] Submission 46, National Tertiary Education Union Charles Sturt University Branch, p 11.

[516] Submission 46, National Tertiary Education Union Charles Sturt University Branch, p 3.

[517] Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 7.

[518] Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 7.

[519] Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 5.

> keep offering in-person all of the courses on all of our campuses that we would like to offer. We only reduce them when they fall below a level that's financially viable and we absolutely wish we didn't have to.[520]

7.43 The NTEU CSU Branch gave evidence that various courses which were previously offered both on-campus and online are now to be offered only online, such as the Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Social Science (Psychology). They added that the Bachelor of Psychology on-campus offerings in locations such as Bathurst, Port Macquarie and Wagga Wagga were either already withdrawn or proposed to be discontinued by 2027. Other courses such as the Bachelor of Horticulture were completely discontinued.[521] While Professor Leon highlighted that approximately two-thirds of CSU students choose online study because the flexibility suits their lifestyle,[522] the NTEU cautioned that cutting face-to-face teaching limits access for regional school-leavers who may not thrive in an online environment and cannot easily relocate to another campus, stating 'this is not consistent with addressing their needs and aspirations as residents of western and south-western NSW'.[523] Mr Claudio Dionigi, Faculty Librarian, CSU shared this sentiment, describing 'we seem to have a fairly good campus culture, but shifting classes online is certainly not going to help that'.[524]

Use of consultants

7.44 When asked to justify the $15 million noted in annual reports as spent on consultants and marketing, Professor Leon clarified that in 2025, CSU's consultant spend was 'just over $10 million' and that 'Hardly any of that is for the management advisory consulting'.[525] Subsequent answers to questions on notice confirmed the actual management consulting spend was $1.4 million for the year.[526] She informed the committee that 'a substantial proportion' of the $10 million was allocated for necessary technical services enabling researchers to 'undertake the research that they do, where they have to outsource certain technical parts of the work to external firms', in addition to architectural heritage advice.[527]

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520 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 5.

521 Submission 46, National Tertiary Education Union Charles Sturt University Branch, p 2.

522 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 6.

523 Answers to supplementary questions, National Tertiary Education Union Charles Sturt University Branch, 5 June 2026, p 4.

524 Evidence, Mr Dionigi, 30 April 2026, p 42.

525 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 3. The 2025 Annual report identifies $10.552 million spent on consultants in 2025 and $14.508 million in 2024. See: Charles Sturt University Council, *Charles Sturt University Annual Report 2025*, p 82, https://archives.csu.edu.au/index.php/3466-13.

526 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Leon, 3 July 2026, p 17.

527 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 3.

7.45 In 2025 CSU spent $4.4 million on advertising, marketing and promotional expenses.[528] Asked about this expenditure in the hearing, Professor Leon stated that CSU has 'one of the lowest marketing spends per student in New South Wales and in the sector', commenting the university is 'very efficient about how we spend on marketing' and that 'if you don't market yourself at all, you won't have any students'.[529]

7.46 Regarding consultant services in respect of the change program, Professor Leon confirmed the university uses external benchmarking data, such as UniForum 'to identify areas that would be worth looking at for efficiencies', but maintained that 'all of the looking at those areas is being done by the university itself, not by Nous'.[530]

Wage theft remediation

7.47 The NTEU highlighted the university's historical compliance failures, including a Fair Work Ombudsman finding that 'CSU has admitted it breached its relevant Enterprise Agreements when it underpaid 2,526 casuals a total of $3,237,390 between 2015 and 2022' due to a lack of institutional controls.[531] In response, the university undertook wage remediation programs in 2024 and has indicated in its annual reports that it is actively addressing potential further underpayments.[532] However, the NTEU challenged this response, noting 'this reporting is not always provided or clear, so it is unclear whether CSU anticipates that any further salary and wage compliance issues may be identified'.[533]

Executive remuneration

7.48 Within the context of discussions of the $35 million savings program, the committee questioned the Vice-Chancellor regarding the appropriateness of executive salaries at CSU. Professor Leon disclosed that her annual cash salary was $797,000, with superannuation of $95,000, and a vehicle allowance of $20,000 'which is fully expended on the cost of work-required travel in regional New South Wales, particularly between CSU's regional campuses'.[534] Evidence provided to the committee indicated that executive remuneration is set by the

528 Charles Sturt University Council, *Charles Sturt University Annual Report 2025*, p 82.

529 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 10.

530 Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 4.

531 Submission 46, National Tertiary Education Union Charles Sturt University Branch, p 3.

532 Submission 46, National Tertiary Education Union Charles Sturt University Branch, p 4.

533 Submission 46, National Tertiary Education Union Charles Sturt University Branch, p 4.

534 Answers to questions on notice, Professor Leon, 3 July 2026, p 2.

Council based on independent benchmarking against comparable public and not-for-profit sector roles.[535]

7.49 In response to a committee suggestion that reducing the high remuneration of senior executives could serve as a meaningful gesture of solidarity with staff facing job insecurity, Professor Leon advised that senior management had elected a reduced pay increase of 1 per cent last year, compared to the 3 per cent increase provided to all staff under the enterprise agreement.[536]

Committee comment

7.50 CSU plays a vital role as Australia's largest regional university, providing essential education and research in the communities of western and south-western New South Wales.

7.51 As with a number of universities addressed in this report, the committee remains unconvinced by the financial assumptions underpinning CSU's reforms. The university has not made any detailed disclosure of its financial rationale, either to staff or to the committee. While the university's 2025 annual report published a deficit of $12.4 million, staff and the public more broadly have since been told to accept the existence of 'an actual structural deficit' of $30.4 million, taking account of a one-off $14 million Commonwealth government payment and a $4 million accounting adjustment in respect of research revenue. The university has highlighted to the committee substantial falls in international students as a key imperative for reform, and staff told us that all they had received by way of rationale were general statements about a fall in international students. Yet at the same time, the university has reported an increase in revenue from domestic and international students.

7.52 This picture clearly points to the need for more detailed and robust disclosure of the financial rationale for the present CSU reforms. As with other universities, the committee considers that where financial measures are relied upon to justify organisational change initiatives, universities must clearly disclose the methodologies employed and the rationale for the inclusion or exclusion of significant revenue and expenditure items. We discuss at length in chapter 11 how staff and the public are entitled to greater transparency in regard to the very significant decisions that affect each institution.

7.53 The committee has observed how very stressful the reform process has been for both academic and professional staff at CSU. While the university has said that it is trying to avoid cuts to academic staff, professional and general staff are understandably highly apprehensive about bearing the brunt of these restructures, facing dual uncertainties over potential redundancies and future workloads. While the university has pointed to the phased rollout of these

[535] Submission 66, Charles Sturt University, p 8.

[536] Evidence, Professor Leon, 12 June 2026, p 4.

changes as a careful approach, the committee heard compelling evidence that with multiple rounds of proposals and prolonged uncertainty over where cuts will be made, both academic and non-academic staff are feeling as though a 'guillotine' is hanging over their heads and anticipate having to 'endure' significant change in the coming months. In addition to improving transparency, and ensuring genuine consultation, the committee expects university management to exercise a rigorous duty of care to staff as the reforms are finalised and implemented. Evidence in the context of SCU and other universities highlighted the very real risks to staff wellbeing that accompany restructuring.

7.54 Distinct from the change proposals, the committee is also concerned by the progressive shift of many courses towards online-only delivery and is particularly concerned by the potential impact on CSU's legislated regional mission. The reduction of face-to-face teaching on regional campuses risks leaving behind the very students the university was established to serve. While online flexibility is valuable for many, the committee notes that for school-leavers and disadvantaged groups, the reduction in on-campus engagement presents a significant barrier to accessing higher education.

7.55 In terms of broader governance, the committee notes that transparency and collegial input appear to have been significantly compromised in recent years. The systemic gaps in publishing Council minute summaries – including prolonged periods where publication lapsed entirely and a historical lack of substantive detail in public disclosures – is unacceptable for a publicly funded institution and naturally breeds mistrust among staff and students. The committee welcomes the Vice-Chancellor's recent commitment to improving the detail of published minutes as an important step towards improved transparency, and we return to this issue across the entire sector in our final chapter.

7.56 The committee shares staff concerns regarding the 2024 changes to the Academic Senate. Even if initiated by an external review, the removal of key academic oversight functions, and the removal of the requirement for a strict majority of elected academic positions, concentrates the power of executive management and weakens the fundamental collegial voice that protects educational quality. We were troubled by accounts that at CSU elected academics are under-represented on both the Academic Senate and Council. Linked to this, we fundamentally consider that an academic who moves into a management role cannot be assumed to represent academic staff perspectives, that a majority of academic members (some of whom may serve in an ex-officio capacity) is not the same as a majority of academic members elected to the Senate, and that a lack of academic oversight has broader risks for teaching, learning and research.

7.57 Finally, the committee has applied scrutiny to both CSU's use of external consultants and its executive remuneration. The Vice-Chancellor's clarification that the vast majority of the $10 million consultant spend in 2025 was for technical and architectural services rather than management advice, illustrates the value of the committee's interim report recommendation for mandatory

detailed disclosures on consultant spending in annual reports. Regarding remuneration, like our Senate counterparts, we have significant questions about executive salaries across the sector and in chapter 11 express our support for greater transparency of the processes used to determine executive packages. Further, we question the value for money arising from CSU's spending of $4.4 million on marketing in 2024. Linked to this, the fact that the Council maintains a delegation threshold of $10 million and does not authorise individual contracts below this amount suggests that very substantial procurement is able to proceed without oversight by the Council.

7.58 The committee's examination of CSU has highlighted the dangers when the financial and managerial decisions of the university's executive and Council overtake the institution's regional mission, enabled by reduced staff representation on governing bodies and diminished collegial oversight. Sadly, this is a picture we have seen across many institutions. The evidence has raised critical concerns regarding the impact of rolling change programs on staff wellbeing, the preservation of face-to-face teaching on regional campuses, and the erosion of transparency and academic governance across the sector. Having explored these dynamics in a rural and regional multi-campus context, the following chapter turns its attention to Western Sydney University to examine how a public university serving a rapidly growing and culturally diverse outer-metropolitan region navigates its own distinct statutory obligations and operational realities under comparable sector-wide pressures.

Chapter 8 Western Sydney University

This chapter examines governance concerns specific to Western Sydney University (WSU). The first half of the chapter focuses on the university's recent large-scale cost-saving project, Reset Western, examining the financial context and rationale for the project, processes of consultation and staff engagement, and staffing decisions. It then examines the various concerns that stakeholders raised with the committee including the financial rationale for the project, its planning, transparency and oversight, workforce impacts, and use of consultants. Many of these issues reflected broader challenges in respect of governance. After documenting the provisions of WSU's enabling legislation, the chapter turns to an analysis of stakeholders' broader views beyond Reset, including issues such as academic governance and collegial decision-making, transparency, representation of the diverse Western Sydney community, consultant spending and Board members' ties to consulting firms, the future of the Nirimba campus, and wage theft remediation.

Reset Western project

8.1 Much of the evidence gathered by the committee in relation to WSU focused on the Reset Western project, commonly referred to as Reset, announced in April 2025. This section documents the stated financial context and rationale for this substantial cost-saving project, including initial measures and proposed workforce reductions. It then documents consultation and staff engagement processes, and key staffing decisions and outcomes. This section primarily draws on the evidence of the Vice-Chancellor and other executives. It sets the scene for the following section, which illuminates various stakeholder concerns about the purpose and process of Reset.

Financial context and rationale

8.2 Reset Western commenced in 2025 with announcements regarding WSU's financial position and organisational structure. On 22 April 2025, the Vice-Chancellor, Distinguished Professor George Williams AO, held a town hall meeting and issued a statement outlining a significant organisational reset in response to WSU's 'worsening budget position'. He noted that WSU was facing 'fresh budget impacts for 2026 and beyond' due to a substantial decline in student load, driven by the impact of international student caps, increased competition for students in Western Sydney, and changing enrolment patterns as students increasingly undertook fewer courses.[537]

[537] Western Sydney University, *Western Sydney University statement on budget position* (22 April 2025), Western Sydney University News Centre, https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/news-centre/stories/2025/western-sydney-university-statement-on-budget-position.

8.3 The Vice-Chancellor's statement pointed to an expected deficit of $79 million in 2026, compared with earlier forecasts of a $6.5 million deficit. It asserted that without intervention, WSU would have insufficient revenue to meet its salary and operating costs in 2026.[538]

8.4 The statement characterised the proposed measures as necessary to stabilise WSU's finances and to position the university to respond to and benefit from the projected growth of the Western Sydney region. The reforms were intended not only to address immediate budget challenges but also to strengthen WSU's long-term resilience and capacity to deliver on its strategic objectives, including 'student success, impactful research and stronger Western Sydney communities'.[539]

8.5 Reset was further intended to create an organisational structure better aligned with the university's public mission and strategic priorities, while ensuring it remained financially sustainable and capable of responding to future growth opportunities in Western Sydney.[540]

8.6 WSU subsequently stated that Reset was guided by three priorities:

- ensuring WSU was appropriately structured and resourced to serve Western Sydney and deliver its WESTERN 2030 strategic plan
- responding to staff concerns regarding duplication, fragmentation and legacy systems that impeded effective work practices
- addressing significant financial challenges to ensure WSU's long-term sustainability, including projected losses of approximately $250 million over five years in its core ongoing operations.[541]

8.7 The university emphasised that the initiative sought to align its operating model, workforce and resources with its strategic priorities while improving organisational effectiveness. The changes were intended to position teams and resources to better support students, staff and the Western Sydney community, while removing organisational barriers identified by staff.[542]

8.8 In evidence to the committee, Mr Bill Parasiris, Chief Operating Officer, emphasised that Reset was designed to ensure WSU was 'fit for purpose' to deliver efficient services to students, staff and the broader Western Sydney community, while ensuring that its ongoing cost base was sustainable and

538 Western Sydney University, *Western Sydney University statement on budget position* (22 April 2025).

539 Western Sydney University, *Western Sydney University statement on budget position* (22 April 2025).

540 Western Sydney University, *Western Sydney University statement on budget position* (22 April 2025).

541 Answers to questions on notice, Western Sydney University, 3 July 2026, p 2.

542 Answers to questions on notice, Western Sydney University, 3 July 2026, p 2.

appropriate for the future. He advised that these objectives remained consistent throughout the project.[543]

Initial cost-saving measures

8.9 Professor Williams told the committee that, as an initial response, WSU reduced its senior executive leadership team by 25 per cent, decreasing positions from eight to six. It also restricted recruitment, reduced travel and catering expenditure, and limited the engagement of external consultants. Earlier, in October 2024, the Vice-Chancellor imposed an 18-month pay freeze on all senior staff including himself, and subsequent salary increases for senior staff were lower than those provided to other staff members. Professor Williams advised that, as a consequence of these measures, the average salary of senior staff had decreased by approximately $90,000 since 2022.[544]

8.10 WSU later confirmed that it had achieved approximately $23 million in non-salary savings in this early phase including:

- $4.3 million in procurement contract efficiencies
- $3 million in contractors and consultants
- $2.6 million in IT software licencing
- $3.3 million in travel, corporate overheads, and consumables
- $3.3 million in strategic projects realignment
- $3.5 million in internal recruitment process efficiencies and leave management
- $3 million in internal research.[545]

Proposed workforce reductions

8.11 Despite the university's early efforts, the Vice-Chancellor announced that further action was required to address its projected deficits. The Vice-Chancellor's April 2025 announcement included that WSU 'ha[d] no choice but to reduce our workforce by 300–400 positions.' He stated that the university's priority was to preserve as many jobs as possible and that it would seek to minimise the impact on staff by pursuing non-salary savings and by first disestablishing approximately 120 vacant positions.[546]

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543 Evidence, Mr Bill Parasiris, Chief Operating Officer, Western Sydney University, 12 June 2026, p 12.

544 Evidence, Distinguished Professor George Williams AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, Western Sydney University, 12 June 2026, p 43; Western Sydney University, *Western Sydney University statement on budget position* (22 April 2025); Answers to questions on notice, Western Sydney University, 3 July 2026, p 2.

545 Answers to questions on notice, Western Sydney University, 3 July 2026, p 2.

546 Western Sydney University, *Western Sydney University statement on budget position* (22 April 2025).

8.12 Later, the university committed to no forced redundancies.[547] Additionally, a key focus was to maximise opportunities for staff who wished to remain employed at WSU to obtain roles within the revised organisational structure.[548] In evidence, Professor Williams credited the joint partnership with the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) and Community and Public Sector Union as enabling these outcomes to be achieved:

> When it comes to Reset, with the unions, I credit that partnership for enabling us to get through that period where the only people who left the university did so voluntarily, and there were no forced redundancies of people under enterprise agreements. Again, I credit the union for the jobs guarantee I gave that every person who wanted a job at the university would be found a job, in accordance with the EA, and that's something we obviously stuck to throughout that process.[549]

Consultation and staff engagement

8.13 WSU advised that extensive consultation activities were undertaken as part of Reset and that feedback received through these processes helped inform the project's final outcomes. The consultation process included:

- 1,970 pieces of feedback submitted on the change papers
- 27 all-staff emails providing updates on Reset
- 300 consultation sessions on the change papers
- 'lunch and learn' sessions attended by approximately 250 people
- five all-staff webinars, attended by an average of approximately 1,300 people per webinar
- eight in-person town hall meetings attended by 1,100 people in total.[550]

8.14 Additionally, Professor Williams emphasised that he engaged with staff from the commencement of his tenure, seeking their feedback on what was not working and needed to be fixed, with this forming a large basis for the non-staffing cost savings.[551]

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547 Western Sydney University, *Western Sydney University statement on budget position* (22 April 2025); Evidence, Distinguished Professor Williams AO, 12 June 2026, p 42.

548 Evidence, Mr Parasiris, 12 June 2026, pp 12-13; Answers to questions on notice, Western Sydney University, 3 July 2026, p 5.

549 Western Sydney University, *Western Sydney University statement on budget position* (22 April 2025); Evidence, Distinguished Professor Williams AO, 12 June 2026, p 42.

550 Answers to questions on notice, Western Sydney University, 3 July 2026, p 5.

551 Evidence, Distinguished Professor Williams AO, 12 June 2026, p 45.

Decisions about staffing

8.15 WSU subsequently reported that Reset resulted in 187 staff accepting voluntary redundancies and 491 staff being appointed to new roles within the revised organisational structure.[552] As noted above, no forced redundancies were made.

8.16 Mr Parasiris highlighted that an important aspect of Reset was the review and redefinition of roles with the aim of optimising capacity for teaching and learning:

> We talk about these redundancies, but we should also talk about the fact that we recreated nearly 500 new roles where people within the organisation either applied or were placed in those roles where we saw transferable skills that they undertook. We committed to development and training in those new roles to our people so that they could perform those duties in those new roles. There was a significant shift over and above what we were focused on here today … ensuring that the workforce was ready for the changes that we were making to ensure we delivered teaching and learning in the way that our students and community were asking for.[553]

8.17 Following the June 2026 hearing the university confirmed:

- Before Reset, 39 per cent of WSU's workforce was academic; as of June 2026, it was almost 43 per cent, and the university has established a target of 45 per cent by 2030.
- Senior staff have reduced from 6 per cent to just over 4 per cent and there are now more women than men in executive level 3, 4 and 5 roles.
- Professional staff now comprise 53 per cent of the workforce with more women than men in all categories.
- The university has created a number of Indigenous roles and now has almost 100 Indigenous staff members, comprising 3.4 per cent of its workforce.[554]

Stakeholder concerns

8.18 Other inquiry participants provided a very different perspective on the rollout of Reset and expressed concerns regarding its purpose and process. These concerns included: the validity of the financial and organisational rationale of the project; the planning, transparency and oversight that characterised its implementation; the workforce impacts; and use of consultants and contractors.

552 Answers to questions on notice, Western Sydney University, 3 July 2026, p 2.

553 Evidence, Mr Parasiris, 12 June 2026, p 14.

554 Answers to questions on notice, Western Sydney University, 3 July 2026, p 3.

8.19 Some stakeholders questioned the financial justification for the restructure, arguing that the scale and speed of implementation contributed to workforce uncertainty, diminished trust in leadership, disrupted academic and student services, and reduced confidence in WSU's governance processes. In addition, some inquiry participants expressed concern that Reset reflected broader trends of managerialism and corporatisation within the university sector, with insufficient safeguards to ensure effective academic oversight and accountability.[555] These views are explored below.

Reset's rationale

8.20 A recurring theme in the evidence was that stakeholders questioned the financial and organisational rationale for Reset. While WSU executives described Reset as a broad organisational review intended to improve service delivery, workforce capability and long-term sustainability, staff questioned both the diagnosis underpinning the program and the consistency of the explanations subsequently provided.[556]

8.21 Some inquiry participants highlighted that the WSU community was not provided with sufficient information to assess the need for a restructure of the scale that was announced. Dr David Burchell PhD, Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Communication Arts and President, NTEU WSU Branch, told the committee that Reset was 'never clearly, or perhaps even honestly, explained', and contended that staff were not provided with a credible, serious account of why major organisational change was required.[557] Staff representatives described changing explanations regarding the financial position of the university, enrolment forecasts and the necessity for extensive workforce reductions.[558]

8.22 Dr Burchell went so far as to question whether there had actually been a financial crisis at all, suggesting that the figures provided to staff 'didn't make sense' and reporting that they had led to lasting confusion. He insisted that while staff were told the university had an operating deficit of close to $80 million for 2025, in fact the deficit was only $10 million. Additionally, he told the committee that the falling student numbers cited as a key reason for Reset were in fact observed by

555 Evidence, Professor Robert Mailhammer, Professor of Linguistics and Chair of Academic Senate, Western Sydney University, 12 June 2026, pp 22-25; Evidence, Associate Professor Mourad Tayebi, Biomedical Sciences (Neuroscience) and Member of Academic Senate, Western Sydney University, 12 June 2026, p 23; Evidence, Dr David Burchell PhD, Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Communication Arts and President, National Tertiary Education Union Western Sydney University Branch, 12 June 2026, p 28; Evidence, Mr David Maurice, Data Platforms Manager, Division of Operations and Member, National Tertiary Education Union Western Sydney University Branch, 12 June 2026, p 33.

556 Evidence, Mr Parasiris, 12 June 2026, pp 11-16.

557 Evidence, Dr Burchell, 12 June 2026, p 28.

558 Evidence, Dr Burchell, 12 June 2026, pp 28 and 33-35.

many in real time not to be falling.[559] With regard to evolving rationale, he suggested:

> To be honest with you, it was a mixture of confusion and negative wishful thinking—"There's these things we want to do. We want a crisis. Look, there's a crisis." Then you cling onto the crisis narrative even when it no longer serves. Then eventually, when an annual report comes out, you maybe have to walk the crisis narrative back.[560]

8.23 Dr Burchell reflected on how the narrative attached to Reset changed over time. In doing so, he first highlighted the shock and apprehension the Reset announcement created for staff. The initial announcement of 300-400 jobs having to be lost raised the sudden spectre of forced redundancies and was followed by a change process in which 600 people's jobs were disestablished. While he noted that this did not necessarily mean people would lose their jobs, he reported that the process of change felt chaotic and was stressful for many. In his view, the 'sanity moment' came when the university agreed to the NTEU's call that anyone in those disestablished roles who wanted to maintain their employment at the university would be found a role in the new structure.[561]

8.24 The immediate impact on staff wellbeing is discussed further in a later section.

Planning, transparency and accountability

8.25 Linked to the rationale, participants suggested that key decisions in the Reset project were developed and implemented through processes that some staff perceived as opaque.[562] They described uncertainty regarding how decisions were made, who made them, and what evidence informed them.

8.26 Professor Robert Mailhammer, Chair of the Academic Senate, told the committee that in addition to a lack of clarity in why decisions were taken, it was also not clear who would be accountable for outcomes, or how academic advice had informed decision-making. He observed that these deficiencies contributed to a significant loss of trust within the university community:

> There were significant side effects of the restructure that affected the academic core business … It wasn't clear to members of the community, in particular, why decisions were taken and who would be accountable if things weren't going in the right direction; the way decisions were made; how they were then communicated, which led to significant erosion of trust and patience within the community.[563]

559 Evidence, Dr Burchell, 12 June 2026, pp 33-34.

560 Evidence, Dr Burchell, 12 June 2026, p 34.

561 Evidence, Dr Burchell, 12 June 2026, p 30.

562 Evidence, Dr Burchell, 12 June 2026, p 32.

563 Evidence, Professor Mailhammer, 12 June 2026, pp 22-23.

8.27 Pointing to a need for more planning, he articulated a concern shared by several witnesses regarding the implementation:

> I was clearly told, "We're going to work this out as we go." That's one of those things where I saw the problems. We had a lack of planning in all of this, and then we rushed into it with not enough resources. You can see how this is a recipe for a suboptimal outcome.[564]

8.28 Professor Mailhammer highlighted what he saw as inadequate involvement of the Academic Senate, and correspondingly, of academic monitoring and oversight. He spoke of 'significant side effects of the restructure that affected the academic core business', for example some decisions to discontinue courses were not well informed by advice from academics, leading to some 'strange outcomes' such as colleagues left without workload or courses to teach. In addition, parts of programs were deleted or discontinued while other parts were not. He suggested that staff felt that implementation proceeded with great speed, and without adequate resourcing.[565]

8.29 Asked about transparency and clarity with respect to the project, Professor Williams acknowledged problems and mistakes, but defended the decision to conduct Reset, stating, '[I]t needed to be done. I wish it wasn't. It wasn't what I expected in coming into the job and, to be frank, a lot of my job is what's the least worst outcome in a broken system.'[566] He defended the university's efforts to keep staff informed:

> In terms of the transparency, I feel as if we communicated assiduously. If I look at what we did, I had 27 Reset emails explaining. If you think about that over six months, we're talking about almost one a week saying "This is where we are." We had the finances. What went to the board, went to our union and went to our staff— same finances all the way through. We were very clear in making all of it transparent, pretty much every week. I had four or five all-staff webinars averaging 1,300 people—five for the whole community, average 1,300. I had eight in-person town halls across all of our key campuses during that period. That was attended by, in total, over 1,100 people.[567]

Revised forecasts

8.30 In light of the evidence from participants questioning the financial rationale for Reset, and the change in figures over time, the committee challenged WSU executives as to the veracity of their forecasts. While the initial forecast identified a need to find around $74.5 million in savings for 2026 (based on the identified $250 million shortfall over five years), the final operating deficit for 2025 was $10

564 Evidence, Professor Mailhammer, 12 June 2026, p 27.

565 Evidence, Professor Mailhammer, 12 June 2026, p 22.

566 Evidence, Distinguished Professor Williams AO, 12 June 20256, p 46.

567 Evidence, Distinguished Professor Williams AO, 12 June 20256, p 46.

million. Additionally, as of June, the university anticipated a surplus of close to $2 million for 2026, not including an operating deficit of $10 million.[568]

8.31 In defending the revised forecasts, Mr Parasiris and his colleague, Mr Mario Milanovic, Interim Chief Finance Officer, pointed to the broader policy and financial context feeding into the forecasting process, along with the savings achieved via redundancies and the substantial non-salary savings.[569] In doing so, Mr Milanovic underscored that, 'We obviously did a lot of planning and so forth around Reset. It wasn't just simply a cost-cutting exercise, as you would expect. It was a reconfiguration, if you like, of our business and what was needed. That was on the back of the fact that we run forecasts and budgets over rolling periods'.[570]

8.32 Noting that the 2025 deficit figure was later reduced substantially, while the 2026 deficit figure remained close to the original claim, the committee asked what assumptions kept the 2026 figure so high after the 2025 student-load position improved. The university responded:

> The 2025 core projected operating deficit presented in April was $25 million deficit. The actual 2025 core operating deficit was $10 million. The improved result in 2025 reflects an increase in investment return and lower costs in 2025 due to staffing vacancies held during the year due to the organisational restructure and the non-salary savings perused by the university under the Reset program.
>
> While the total student revenue generating load for 2025 improved marginally compared to the April 2025 estimates, the 2026 load was expected to remain relatively flat at 1 per cent growth compared to 2025 April estimates. At the same, costs were expected to grow substantially due to expected enterprise agreement increases, inflationary cost pressures for non-salary items and lower expected investment returns.[571]

8.33 With regard to the impact of termination payments on the savings that were achieved, the university advised that without the $73.1 million paid out in termination payments, the 2025 statutory reported net result from continuing operations would have been a $60.3 million deficit.[572] The committee notes that the university distinguished between its core operating result and its statutory audited result. The university reported an actual 2025 core operating deficit of $10 million, compared with the $25 million deficit forecast in April 2025. However, the final audited statutory reported net result was a deficit of $133.4 million after accounting for items outside the operating result, including termination benefits, pay confidence, cybersecurity costs and other non-core activities.

568 Evidence, Mr Parasiris, 12 June 2026, pp 15.

569 Evidence, Mr Parasiris, 12 June 2026, pp 15-16; Evidence, Mr Mario Milanovic, Interim Chief Financial Officer, Western Sydney University, 12 June 2026, pp 15-16.

570 Evidence, Mr Milanovic, 12 June 2026, p 15.

571 Answers to questions on notice, Western Sydney University, 3 July 2026, p 39.

572 Answers to questions on notice, Western Sydney University, 3 July 2026, p 39.

According to the university, termination benefits associated with Reset accounted for $73.1 million of the statutory deficit.[573]

8.34 Responding to a question as to the choice that the university initially made in how it accounted for and framed its narrative of financial sustainability, Professor Williams confirmed to the committee that, '[O]ur accounts do include philanthropy, investment income and the like because I completely accept [the] point that it's a holistic picture that we have to present, and we have a public obligation to use our finances in accordance with our Act. But what I would refer to are the audited accounts of the university. That's what I rely upon'.[574]

8.35 Asked to explain the basis for his claims of a financial crisis, Professor Williams responded:

> Let me also start with—I was very careful not to describe it as a crisis. What I said was, we had to live within our means. We've actually gone back and checked my communications as well, and what I said on that occasion—but on many other occasions—was that, when I came into the university, we'd already had two years of deficit before I arrived. If we looked at where things were heading, we expected there'd be a combined deficit of about $250 million over five years. I said that we had to live within our means because, otherwise, we're loading the university up with debt over a longer period of time. A lot of one-off things we exclude from that but, essentially, our core operations needed to operate within a reasonable margin or just debt, debt, debt was where we were heading. So that's what we needed to fix.[575]

Workforce impacts

8.36 An important theme from the evidence gathered by the committee related to how Reset's implementation impacted on staff confidence, organisational culture and service delivery.

8.37 As noted earlier, staff representatives described significant anxiety arising from initial projections that 400 positions could be lost. Evidence suggested that many staff experienced shock and significant uncertainty regarding the status of their positions and future employment. Staff witnesses described the psychological impact of this uncertainty on employees. Reflecting on the announcement of proposed workforce reductions, Associate Professor Mourad Tayebi, Biomedical Sciences (Neuroscience) and member of the Academic Senate, spoke of the Reset announcement being delivered under 'extreme psychological constraint', sharing with the committee:

> I remember clearly three or four days before Easter there was a webinar announcement that 400 people were going to lose their jobs. Whatever

[573] Answers to questions on notice, Western Sydney University, 3 July 2026, pp 38-40.

[574] Evidence, Distinguished Professor Williams AO, 12 June 2026, p 46.

[575] Evidence, Distinguished Professor Williams AO, 12 June 2026, p 46.

> happened after that, people were not psychologically able to think about courses and plan ahead. In fact, a lot of us didn't know whether we would be staying at the university at the end of that year.[576]

8.38 While staff representatives acknowledged that WSU ultimately avoided forced redundancies, they argued that the process nevertheless disrupted workplace relationships and imposed substantial psychological strain on staff. Evidence provided to the committee suggested that the uncertainty affected workforce morale and confidence across the university, reinforcing concerns about consultation and change-management processes during implementation.[577]

8.39 Consistent with the earlier observation of rushed process, several inquiry participants further questioned whether workforce planning and operational mapping were sufficiently rigorous prior to implementation. Concerns were raised regarding disruptions to student services, advisory functions and operational areas following workforce changes. Some participants argued that these outcomes reflected shortcomings in planning, consultation and risk assessment, while others questioned whether the anticipated benefits of the restructure justified the disruption experienced by staff and students.[578]

8.40 Mr David Maurice, Data Platforms Manager and member of the NTEU, raised concerns regarding the loss of institutional capability following workforce reductions. He told the committee that a significant proportion of staff who accepted voluntary redundancies possessed extensive organisational experience and that deficiencies in knowledge transfer and process documentation created operational challenges following implementation. Reflecting on these concerns, Mr Maurice noted:

> The staff who were offered voluntary redundancies were all staff who had over 10 years experience. This and the lack of documentation of processes led to mass confusion, where data feeds, processes and knowledge were lost with executive not concerned about loss of institutional knowledge.[579]

8.41 Dr Burchell observed that ultimately, some staff did well out of Reset, suggesting, 'Some people effectively got promoted, some people got away from supervisory relationships where the two people didn't like each other, and other people found niches for themselves. But that was a happy accident; that wasn't part of planning'.[580]

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576 Evidence, Associate Professor Tayebi, 12 June 2026, p 23.

577 Evidence, Associate Professor Tayebi, 12 June 2026, pp 23-24; Evidence, Dr Burchell, 12 June 2026, pp 30-31.

578 Evidence, Professor Mailhammer, 12 June 2026, pp 22-23; Evidence, Mr Maurice, 12 June 2026, pp 32-33; Answers to questions on notice, Mr David Maurice, 19 June 2026, p 1.

579 Answers to questions on notice, Mr Maurice, 19 June 2026, p 1.

580 Evidence, Dr Burchell, 12 June 2026, pp 30-31.

8.42 The committee asked WSU executives about workforce planning. In response to a question from the committee about the impact of the redundancies on the remaining work to be done, Mr Parasiris explained that the university undertook a mapping process in which the duties performed by employees in redundant positions were assessed in terms of "Was it sitting somewhere else? Was it going to continue? Did it stop and could it be managed?" That was then reviewed at arm's length by an internal audit and risk office, with ongoing monthly monitoring. He indicated that as of June 2026, the university was about to undertake a post-implementation review to see if requirements had been met and any changes were needed to be made. He acknowledged that one area where the need for additional staff was identified early was in relation to frontline, student facing services.[581]

Use of consultants and implementation support

8.43 NTEU representatives further highlighted the use of consultants during the Reset process. Their concerns included that the consultants performed key roles within the Reset team, and that some lacked apparent expertise in the role they were performing.[582] Reflecting these concerns, Dr Burchell noted:

> There was a team of consultants installed within the chancellery itself who appeared, to people in human resources and elsewhere, to be running the restructure … who didn't seem to have any competence or expertise, and this was mysterious. It was also mysterious … why those people had been hired.[583]

8.44 Dr Burchell described the creation of a Reset team comprising WSU staff and external consultants working within the chancellery. He expressed concern that some consultants appeared to exercise substantial influence over the process despite possessing limited experience in higher education restructuring or university administration.[584]

8.45 Evidence from professional staff similarly raised concerns regarding consultant involvement in workforce redesign and organisational restructuring. Mr David Maurice, Data Platforms Manager in the Division of Operations and Member of the NTEU WSU Branch, described situations where consultants were engaged to oversee organisational redesign in areas where they possessed limited knowledge of university operations. He argued that this contributed to decisions that underestimated future workload requirements and organisational complexity.[585]

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581 Evidence, Mr Parasiris, 12 June 2026, pp 14-15.

582 Evidence, Dr Burchell, 12 June 2026, p 29.

583 Evidence, Dr Burchell, 12 June 2026, p 28.

584 Evidence, Dr Burchell, 12 June 2026, pp 28-30.

585 Evidence, Mr Maurice, 12 June 2026, pp 32-33; Answers to questions on notice, Mr Maurice, 19 June 2026, p 1.

8.46 The committee sought information from WSU executives on the use of consultants during Reset. They advised that consultants and contingent labour were engaged to provide specialist capability and additional capacity, at a cost of approximately $1.3 million.[586]

8.47 Professor Williams advised that WSU's default position is not to use consultants and that its priority is to build internal capability. He stated that Reset was led by an internal team comprising staff who 'know and love the university', but that additional consultant support was engaged because of the scale and intensity of the work. Consistent with this, the $1.3 million spent on consultants and other temporary support associated with Reset, was used to complement existing staff rather than replace them.[587] Professor Williams defended his decision:

> I don't regret that because it didn't displace any one; it complemented them, and they all left at the end of it. But we needed that help because the work was so large. We didn't go to a big firm, but our people just couldn't get through the workload without that assistance.[588]

8.48 The committee asked Professor Williams about reports in the media that a group of consultants were employed on day rates of between $1,300 and $2,800 per day in the university chancellery. He advised that in mid-2025, 'in the middle of the Reset process' the Chief People Officer resigned. As the university considered that at that critical time it could not wait some months for the role to be filled, it appointed a contractor already involved in the Reset process to fill the role on a temporary basis. The role has since been filled following a full recruitment process.[589]

8.49 Asked about how, in light of the comparable appointment at the University of Wollongong discussed in Chapter 2, any potential conflict of interest was managed, Professor Williams explained that the person had not been engaged as a consultant, but on an interim basis on the clear understanding 'they were dedicating their time to us for this period of time.' In addition, he advised that the university's conflicts of interest policy had been applied.[590]

8.50 Following the hearing, Professor Williams advised that the Interim Chief People Officer was contracted to the University through Bluefin Resources on a full-time contract basis, and not through their own consultancy firm. That person 'provided specialist, high intensity transformation capability — particularly in leading large, complex restructures under time pressure — making them a pragmatic

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586 Evidence, Mr Parasiris, 12 June 2026, pp 11-13 and 16-17; Tabled document, Mr Bill Parasiris, Chief Operating Officer, Western Sydney University, *Western Sydney University 2025 Top 30 Consultants*, 12 June 2026, p 1.

587 Evidence, Distinguished Professor Williams AO, 12 June 2026, p 43.

588 Evidence, Distinguished Professor Williams AO, 12 June 2026, p 43.

589 Evidence, Distinguished Professor Williams AO, 12 June 2026, p 44; Answers to questions on notice, Western Sydney University, 3 July 2026, p 11.

590 Evidence, Distinguished Professor Williams AO, 12 June 2026, p 45.

choice for an interim role.' Following a rigorous recruitment process the new Chief People Officer was selected and will start in the role in August 2026. The interim officer will depart in September.[591]

8.51 Beyond the Reset Western project, WSU use of contractors and Board members' ties to consultancies are discussed in the final section of this chapter.

8.52 Many of the concerns raised with the committee regarding the Reset Western project ultimately related to broader questions of governance, accountability and oversight. These are examined in the following sections.

The enabling legislation

8.53 The concerns raised during Reset regarding consultation, transparency, decision-making authority and the role of the Board of Trustees led the committee to consider the statutory framework governing WSU.

Objectives

8.54 The objectives of the university, as stated in the *Western Sydney University Act 1997* (the Act), are the promotion, within the limits of the University's resources, of scholarship, research, free inquiry, the interaction of research and teaching, and academic excellence.[592]

Functions

8.55 To fulfil its objectives, WSU's principal functions, as prescribed by the Act, include the following:

- provision of facilities for education and research of university standard, **having particular regard to the needs and aspirations of residents of Greater Western Sydney**
- encouragement of the dissemination, advancement, development and application of knowledge informed by free inquiry
- provision of courses of study or instruction across a range of fields, and the carrying out of research, to meet the needs of the community, **beginning in Greater Western Sydney**
- participation in public discourse
- conferral of degrees and other awards
- provision of teaching and learning that engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry

[591] Answers to questions on notice, Western Sydney University, 3 July 2026, p 11.

[592] *Western Sydney University Act 1997*, s 8(1).

- development of governance, rules, admission policies, financial arrangements and quality assurance processes sufficient to ensure academic integrity.[593]

8.56 Consistent with the broader NSW university governance framework, the Act also authorises WSU to undertake commercial activities to support its objects and principal functions.[594]

Composition of the Board of Trustees

8.57 Section 8B of the Act prescribes that the WSU Board of Trustees must have a minimum of 11 and a maximum of 22 members, with a total number determined from time to time by a resolution passed by at least two-thirds of the members of the Board of Trustees.[595] A majority of the total number must be external persons, and no single category may constitute a majority.[596] The Board of Trustees must notify the Minister within 7 days of any resolution passed under s 8B.[597]

8.58 Public information as at mid-August 2026 indicates that the WSU Board of Trustees comprises 17 members, including:

- three official members (Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and President and Chair of Academic Senate)
- 10 appointed members (eight appointed by the Board, two ministerially appointed)
- four elected members (one academic staff, one professional staff, one postgraduate student and one undergraduate student).[598]

Governance concerns

8.59 Beyond the Reset Western project, evidence gathered by the committee converged on the following themes at WSU: academic governance and collegial decision making; concerns about governance oversight, representation and managerialism; Board members' ties to consultancies; the future of the Nirimba campus; and wage theft remediation. Each of these is examined in turn below.

593 *Western Sydney University Act 1997*, s 8(2).

594 *Western Sydney University Act 1997*, s 8(3).

595 *Western Sydney University Act 1997*, s 10B(1) and (2).

596 *Western Sydney University Act 1997*, s 10B(6) and (7).

597 *Western Sydney University Act 1997*, s 10B(8).

598 Western Sydney University, *Board of Trustees Membership*, https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/leadership/board-of-trustees/board-of-trustees-membership.

8.60 The committee notes that it did not receive oral or written evidence from elected student representatives or student representative bodies at WSU. As a result, the committee is unable to draw conclusions regarding student perspectives on the issues examined in this chapter, including the impact of Reset and the effectiveness of student representation in university governance.

Academic governance and collegial decision-making

8.61 The committee heard concerns that major organisational and academic decisions have proceeded with insufficient involvement of the Academic Senate, notwithstanding its statutory and institutional role as WSU's principal academic governance body, responsible for academic integrity and accreditation. Inquiry participants acknowledged that the Senate retained formal responsibilities for academic policies, standards and course accreditation, but questioned whether it was sufficiently engaged in decisions with significant academic consequences.[599]

8.62 Professor Mailhammer told the committee that information about restructures, program reviews and course discontinuations was provided only intermittently and that rather than being proactively consulted, academic governance bodies were often required to seek out information. While Senate members may submit questions on notice to the executive, he indicated that the resulting responses do not always provide the information necessary to assess academic impacts.[600]

8.63 Some inquiry participants made the case that the Senate lacks meaningful influence over decisions affecting the academic mission of WSU. In particular, evidence highlighted that the Senate approves new academic programs but until recently has not approved decisions to discontinue programs, despite the significant academic consequences of such decisions. As noted above in respect of the Reset Western project, witnesses expressed concern that academic expertise was not consistently incorporated into major organisational decisions and that academic advice was, at times, overlooked.[601]

8.64 The committee also heard concerns regarding the effectiveness of governance scrutiny. Professor Mailhammer noted that elected representatives and academic leaders have limited structural capacity to ensure that academic concerns receive formal consideration. He further observed that academic governance bodies are frequently the least powerful participants within the governance framework despite bearing primary responsibility for academic quality assurance and oversight.[602]

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599 Evidence, Professor Mailhammer, 12 June 2026, pp 20-21.

600 Evidence, Professor Mailhammer, 12 June 2026, p 21.

601 Evidence, Professor Mailhammer, 12 June 2026, pp 20-22; Correspondence from Professor Robert Mailhammer, Professor of Linguistics and Chair of Academic Senate, Western Sydney University, to secretariat, 15 July 2026, p 1.

602 Evidence, Professor Mailhammer, 12 June 2026, pp 25-26.

8.65 More broadly, witnesses characterised these issues as part of a wider trend towards managerialism within university governance. Professor Mailhammer argued that academic governance structures increasingly depend on the cooperation of management rather than possessing sufficient institutional authority to discharge their responsibilities independently. A recurring concern was that academic governance bodies lack the authority and visibility necessary to effectively oversee decisions affecting WSU's academic mission.[603] Reflecting this concern, Professor Mailhammer noted:

> The main problem is there is nothing in the system that safeguards the academic governance part that's doing the quality control, that's doing the monitoring of what the university does. There is nothing that safeguards us … If quality reports don't come through to the academic board and the academic board has no visibility of things, they can't do their job properly. Then the whole academic enterprise is in danger.[604]

Transparency and consultation

8.66 Linked to this, the committee also heard concerns regarding transparency in organisational structures and decision-making processes. Some inquiry participants referred to committees and governance arrangements whose membership, role and decision-making authority were not readily visible to the wider WSU community. Professor Mailhammer pointed to a greater need for transparency and accountability. He cautioned that effective oversight depends on transparency, observing that 'We can't monitor what we don't see'.[605]

8.67 The committee notes that minutes of meetings of the Board of Trustees are not readily available to staff members nor publicly available, being available only to staff members who request them.[606]

8.68 Consistent with evidence received elsewhere in the inquiry, participants raised concerns regarding the concentration of decision-making authority within senior management. Several witnesses described a governance culture in which major decisions appeared to be developed centrally before consultation occurred, contributing to perceptions that consultation processes were designed to inform implementation rather than decision-making itself.[607] Similar concerns

603 Evidence, Professor Mailhammer, 12 June 2026, pp 25-26; Submission 128, Associate Professor Mourad Tayebi, p 1.

604 Evidence, Professor Mailhammer, 12 June 2026, p 25.

605 Evidence, Professor Mailhammer, 12 June 2026, p 27.

606 Submission 56, School of Law, Western Sydney University, p 2.

607 Evidence, Professor Mailhammer, 12 June 2026, pp 22-25; Evidence, Dr Burchell, 12 June 2026, pp 29-32.

regarding transparency, accountability and stakeholder engagement were also raised by community representatives.[608]

Representation of the cultural diversity of Western Sydney

8.69 There was some discussion in the evidence regarding the extent to which the cultural diversity of the Western Sydney community is reflected on the university's Board. Several participants highlighted the importance of ensuring that governing bodies reflect the communities served by the university and possess an appropriate balance of expertise and stakeholder representation.[609]

8.70 Associate Professor Tayebi made the case that governance arrangements would benefit from leadership and decision-making bodies that more closely reflect the diverse communities served by WSU. While emphasising that this was not a criticism of the capability or commitment of individual leaders, he argued that stronger representation would promote institutional accountability, staff confidence and the university's capacity to respond effectively to the needs and aspirations of the Western Sydney community.[610] In doing so, he suggested that the relevant consideration is not simply whether individual leaders have lived or worked in Western Sydney, but whether the university's governing and executive leadership collectively reflects the diversity, experiences and aspirations of the region and very importantly, those of its students.[611]

8.71 Professor Williams acknowledged that, notwithstanding the strong connections many Board members have with Western Sydney, the university's leadership could better reflect the cultural diversity of the region. Professor Williams also confirmed that he does not live in Western Sydney himself, explaining that he travels to the area in his capacity as Vice-Chancellor, while continuing to reside elsewhere due to family commitments. He noted:

> Many of our board have deep connections in Western Sydney … Where I think it does resonate and I think there's a strong argument is that our leadership does not fully reflect the cultural diversity of Western Sydney. I think that is true. We have 170 different nationalities and backgrounds in Western Sydney. I think there is a job to do there.[612]

608 Evidence, Mr Stephen Bali MP, State Member for Blacktown, 12 June 2016, p 36; Submission 126, Mr Stephen Bali MP, pp 1 and 9.

609 Evidence, Associate Professor Tayebi, 12 June 2026, p 24; Evidence, Mr Stephen Bali MP, 12 June 2026, p 40.

610 Submission 128, Associate Professor Mourad Tayebi, pp 2-3.

611 Submission 128, Associate Professor Mourad Tayebi, p 2.

612 Evidence, Distinguished Professor Williams AO, 12 June 2026, pp 49-50.

Consultant spending and board members' ties to consultancies

8.72 With regard to the university's use of consultants beyond the Reset process, witnesses questioned whether WSU's reliance on consultants reflected an underutilisation of internal expertise. Staff participants suggested that WSU employees frequently possessed deeper institutional knowledge and a stronger understanding of operational requirements than external advisers. They argued that governance processes should place greater weight on internal expertise, particularly during major organisational change.[613]

8.73 The university advised the committee that the total amount spent on consultants and professional services in 2025 was $34.7 million, of which $30.5 million was spent on consultants. University representatives gave the committee a list of the top 30 consultants engaged in 2025, listed in order of spend. The top six were as follows:

- KPMG – $2,670, 491
- Altis Consulting Sydney – $1,560,338
- Org Advisory and Managed Solutions – $1,168,006
- Scyne Advisory Pty Ltd – $1,062,984
- PriceWaterhouseCoopers – $912,681
- Deloitte Touche Tohmmatsu – $872,018.[614]

8.74 Professor Williams told the committee that he has sought 'an arms-length probity review of all recent major consultancy engagements' and stated that he has put in place an extra check for any consultants over a threshold level. He emphasised that he proactively manages the university adopts a proactive approach to managing the potential conflict and affirmed his confidence in the board's processes.[615]

8.75 The committee asked Professor Williams how any potential conflicts of interest arising from the WSU Chancellor, Dr Jennifer Westacott AC's role as an advisor to KPMG, whose services the university engaged at a cost of $2.67 million in 2025.[616] Professor Williams advised that Dr Westacott declared and registered her involvement with KPMG before it was formally announced; any decisions about the firm are kept away from Dr Westacott; there is a formal protocol that clarifies limits and processes in order to protect her, the university and public confidence.[617]

613 Evidence, Dr Burchell, 12 June 2026, pp 29-30 and 32.

614 Tabled document, Mr Parasiris, *Western Sydney University 2025 Top 30 Consultants*, 12 June 2026.

615 Evidence, Distinguished Professor Williams AO, 12 June 2026, p 45.

616 Tabled document, Mr Parasiris, *Western Sydney University 2025 Top 30 Consultants*, 12 June 2026, p 1.

617 Evidence, Distinguished Professor Williams AO, 12 June 2026, p 45.

8.76 At the request of the committee, the university provided the following table of information on WSU Board members' professional links to consulting firms.[618]

Member	Board or Committee	Professional Connection – Top 30 Consultant List	Comments/Role at consultant
Corin Moffatt	Finance and Investment Committee member	Accenture Consulting Pty Ltd	The University is not aware of any current professional connections however Corin did have a recent role at Accenture (employee)
Elizabeth (also known as Liz) Brown	Audit and Risk Committee member	Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu	Partner, Audit & Assurance
Karen Lonergan	People and Culture Committee member	PricewaterhouseCoopers	Chief People Officer, Partner
Marcus McArdle	Audit and Risk Committee member	KPMG	Risk Management Partner
Matt Graham	Board of Trustees member, Chair of Audit and Risk Committee and Remuneration and Nominations Committee member	PricewaterhouseCoopers	The University is not aware of any current professional connections however Matt was a former Senior Partner at PwC (ended January 2023)
Professor Jennifer Westacott AC	Chair of Board of Trustees and Chair of Remuneration and Nominations Committee	KPMG	Special Advisor Previously worked at KPMG as a Senior Partner (2005 - 2011)

The future of the Nirimba campus

8.77 In addition to concerns raised by staff and academic representatives, the committee heard evidence from Mr Stephen Bali MP, Member for Blacktown, regarding broader questions of public accountability, community representation and transparency at WSU. Mr Bali argued that universities occupy a unique position as publicly funded institutions that are not directly accountable to shareholders or electors and called for stronger mechanisms for parliamentary scrutiny and public oversight to be considered. He suggested that regular parliamentary examinations of universities could strengthen transparency and accountability in relation to major institutional decisions.[619]

8.78 Mr Bali's evidence focused particularly on the closure of WSU's Nirimba campus – located in the Quakers Hill in the Blacktown local government area – and the future of the site. He expressed concern that WSU had not provided sufficient

[618] Answers to questions on notice, Western Sydney University, 3 July 2026, p 14.

[619] Evidence, Mr Bali MP, 12 June 2026, p 36-40; Submission 126, Mr Stephen Bali MP, p 1.

clarity regarding its long-term intentions for the campus and questioned whether adequate consultation had occurred in relation to decisions affecting the campus and its future. Mr Bali disputed assertions that declining student demand, inadequate facilities and transport constraints justified the closure, arguing that the campus remained a valuable educational asset capable of serving the growing Blacktown and broader Western Sydney communities.[620]

8.79 In outlining his proposed approach to the future of the campus, Mr Bali advocated:

> At the moment, it's SP2 zoning. That should be maintained. Its future should be as an educational or open space. But, to provide that openness that we've seen, as far as governance and the future of Nirimba, I think there should be a local chamber of stakeholders, which is MPs, the mayor, leaders of the community and business with the WSU leadership to actually talk about the future of that campus.[621]

Wage theft remediation

8.80 The committee also heard evidence regarding WSU's wage underpayment remediation program. Mr Parasiris advised that the university increased its provision for historical underpayments to approximately $29 million following a detailed payroll review. He stated that WSU had undertaken the review to ensure affected staff were fully remediated and had elected to extend remediation beyond the minimum six-year period, back to the commencement of the relevant enterprise agreement. Mr Parasiris further advised that WSU established a dedicated internal team to identify affected staff, calculate outstanding entitlements and oversee remediation.[622]

8.81 Committee members questioned the pace of remediation and the resources devoted to the process. Mr Parasiris acknowledged the seriousness of the underpayments and apologised to affected staff. He advised that WSU had prioritised ensuring calculations were accurate before undertaking broader remediation payments and stated that the university had commenced remediation where calculations had been completed.[623]

8.82 Professor Williams similarly acknowledged that WSU had failed to meet one of its most basic responsibilities and stated that the university had undertaken a comprehensive diagnostic review, which identified a larger liability than previously understood, and was working to repay staff as quickly as possible

620 Evidence, Mr Bali MP, 12 June 2026, pp 36-40; Submission 126, Mr Stephen Bali MP, pp 1, 3-6 and 9-12.

621 Evidence, Mr Bali MP, 12 June 2026, p 36.

622 Evidence, Mr Parasiris, 12 June 2026, pp 17-18.

623 Evidence, Mr Parasiris, 12 June 2026, p 18.

while ensuring the calculations were accurate and compliant with regulatory requirements.[624]

Committee comment

8.83 Taken together, the evidence before the committee raised concerns regarding the transparency, accountability and oversight of decision-making at WSU during a period of significant organisational change. The evidence highlighted questions regarding academic governance arrangements, stakeholder engagement, Board oversight, consultant use and the management of workforce impacts. While the committee notes the university's stated objectives of improving sustainability and service delivery, the evidence underscores the importance of governance frameworks that support meaningful consultation, transparency and effective scrutiny of decisions that have significant academic and operational consequences.

8.84 We appreciate that the Reset Western restructure was not simply about cutting positions but had the dual goal of aligning the operational model, workforce and resources with strategic priorities, and improving effectiveness – and further, that substantial work was undertaken to develop and train staff in readiness for new roles. The committee acknowledges the decision – not seen at any other university we met with – to cut executive salaries and reduce executive roles. We acknowledge the explicit efforts to reduce non-salary expenses and the substantial savings of $23 million that were quickly achieved via procurement contract efficiencies, cuts to consultants and contractors, strategic project realignment and more.

8.85 At the same time, we see validity in participants' concerns regarding the rationale for Reset, its planning and implementation, and the regrettable messaging to staff.

8.86 Like participants, the committee remains unconvinced by the stated financial rationale for Reset. Staff told us they felt that they were never given a credible reason why such dramatic reforms were required. We understand that the financial forecasts are by nature uncertain, however the very significant difference in revised forecasts understandably reinforced staff disbelief in the rationale. The quick turnaround in financial position further highlighted the ill-judged statement when Reset was announced that the university 'had no choice but to cut 300-400 positions'. Staff were understandably blindsided and distressed by this announcement.

8.87 The later commitment to no forced redundancies, the jobs guarantee for all staff in disestablished positions who wanted to stay, and the partnership approach with the unions – each of which set the WSU restructure apart from the combative, destructive approach of other universities such as UTS, UOW, UON and

[624] Evidence, Distinguished Professor Williams AO, 12 June 2026, pp 47-48.

CSU – was a very welcome reorientation. Nevertheless, it is clear to the committee that there has been a loss of staff trust that may be difficult to repair.

8.88 The committee was also concerned by participants' reports that Reset was characterised by shortcomings in planning, risk assessment and consultation, and rushed implementation, with insufficient academic governance input and oversight. While the university emphasised the scale of its consultation activities, a significant number of staff, academic representatives and other stakeholders, did not consider that they were provided with sufficient information to understand, test or meaningfully influence decisions that carried major organisational and academic consequences. We are particularly concerned by evidence suggesting that key decisions were perceived as having been made prior to consultation processes commencing, contributing to diminished trust and confidence in institutional leadership. In addition, the 170 staff departures, while all voluntary, had the effect that WSU lost substantial institutional knowledge and capability, such that the implementation period was very challenging indeed in academic, operational and human terms. The committee considers the post-implementation review of Reset that is now underway will be a crucial process to augmenting capability, re-setting academic input into governance and rebuilding trust.

8.89 While the committee does not have direct insight into the governance processes that informed these decisions, the concerns raised throughout this inquiry suggest a need for the Board of Trustees to reflect on whether existing arrangements provide sufficient oversight, transparency, academic input and stakeholder confidence during Reset, and to strengthen its approach where necessary.

8.90 As we have stated in previous chapters, the committee considers that where major organisational change is justified on financial grounds, universities must provide sufficient information to allow staff, governance bodies and other stakeholders to understand the basis for the decisions being made. A key message from this inquiry – arising from the evidence from WSU as well as multiple other universities – is that for stakeholders to have confidence in major decisions, they rightly require the rationale for change to have been clearly articulated and supported by evidence available to them. Very importantly, this includes a sound and transparent financial rationale. A further key message is that effective consultation depends not only on opportunities to provide feedback, but also on processes ensuring that such feedback is genuinely considered and actually influences decision-making, rather than being sought merely to satisfy procedural requirements.

8.91 While the committee did not receive direct evidence from students in this case, the consistency and seriousness of the concerns raised by staff suggest that governance practices have had material consequences. Looking more broadly than Reset, the committee was concerned by evidence regarding the limited role of academic governance bodies in decisions with significant academic implications. The Academic Senate is the university's principal academic

governance body and exists to provide oversight of academic quality, standards and risk. It is rightly seeking a greater role in the decisions for which it is ultimately responsible, and the committee supports this call across all universities. The committee is concerned that an academic governance body may be required to seek critical information through questions on notice to the executive and considers that information relevant to academic oversight should instead be provided proactively to support effective scrutiny and informed decision-making. We return to this issue in the final chapter of the report.

8.92 As was the case for other universities, the committee is troubled by the scale of WSU's wage underpayment liability and the time required to remediate affected staff. Paying staff correctly and on time is among any employer's most fundamental responsibilities. While the committee acknowledges the university's commitment to ensuring remediation is accurate, a provision of approximately $29 million raises serious questions regarding payroll governance, internal controls, compliance monitoring and executive accountability.

8.93 The committee is also of the view that the governance arrangements of WSU should continue to evolve to better reflect the communities the university was established to serve. Given WSU's statutory obligation to have particular regard to the needs and aspirations of Greater Western Sydney, the committee considers that the composition of the Board of Trustees and senior leadership should, over time, better reflect the diversity of the communities the university serves, including their cultural diversity. The committee also notes concerns raised about the future of the Nirimba campus and considers that significant decisions affecting major university assets should be informed by meaningful engagement with local stakeholders, including community leaders, local government representatives and other interested parties. We agree with participants that by better reflecting these communities, the university's leaders will enhance institutional accountability, staff confidence and responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of Western Sydney.

8.94 The committee notes WSU's very substantial spending of $30.5 million on consultants in 2025, which is among the highest of all universities. We also note the confronting prevalence of ties to large consulting firms among the Board and committee members captured in the table in the earlier section on consultants, and further, that these same firms – KPMG, Deloitte and PWC – are among the top consultants by spend engaged by the university. Specifically, regarding KPMG, as reflected in our concluding comments in chapter 2, in light of the scandal that has engulfed that firm following its inability to manage conflicts of interest, the committee considers that universities should follow the lead of the NSW Government by suspending any further engagement with the firm, and establishing heightened reporting for current engagements.

8.95 More broadly, the evidence received in relation to WSU reflects a recurring theme encountered in this inquiry: the tension between managerial decision-making and collegial governance within New South Wales universities. We consider that

universities operate most effectively when financial sustainability, academic expertise, staff engagement and community accountability are treated as complementary rather than competing objectives. As a university established to serve the diverse and rapidly growing communities of Greater Western Sydney, WSU's governance arrangements must continue to evolve to ensure that decision-making is transparent, accountable, representative and informed by meaningful academic and stakeholder participation. The committee now turns to governance issues arising at the University of New South Wales.

Chapter 9 The University of New South Wales

This chapter explores the views of inquiry participants regarding the University of New South Wales (UNSW), currently Australia's highest placed university on international rankings. After outlining the statutory framework established by the *University of New South Wales Act 1989,* the chapter examines a number of specific concerns identified by staff and students: representation on University Council, structural constraints to student voices, the change from semesters to trimesters and back again, the practice of recruiting 'world class' researchers at very significant cost, the university's recent Enforceable Undertaking with the Fair Work Ombudsman for wage theft remediation, and other matters.

The enabling legislation

9.1 The evidence gathered by the committee in respect of the governance of UNSW direct the committee to consider the statutory framework underpinning the institution.

Objectives

9.2 The objectives of the university, as stated in the *University of New South Wales Act 1989*, are the promotion, within the limits of the University's resources, of scholarship, research, free inquiry, the interaction of research and teaching, and academic excellence.[625]

Functions

9.3 To fulfill its objectives, UNSW's principal functions, as prescribed by the Act, include:

- provision of facilities for education and research of university standard
- encouragement of the dissemination, advancement, development and application of knowledge informed by free inquiry
- provision of courses of study or instruction across a range of fields, and the carrying out of research, to meet the needs of the community,
- participation in public discourse
- conferring of degrees and other awards,
- the provision of teaching and learning that engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry

[625] *University of New South Wales Act 1989*, s 6(1).

- development of governance, procedural rules, admission policies, financial arrangements and quality assurance processes sufficient to ensure the integrity of the University's academic programs.[626]

Composition of the University Council

9.4 The Act prescribes that the University Council is to consist of a minimum of 11 and a maximum of 22 members with the total number determined from time to time by a two-thirds majority of the Council.[627] The Council must include official members, elected members, Council appointed members, and ministerially appointed members. The number of members in each category, other than official members, is to be prescribed by rules made by the Council.[628] A majority of the total number must be external persons, and no single category may constitute a majority.[629] The Senate must notify the Minister within seven days of any resolution under s 8B.[630]

9.5 As at mid-July 2026, publicly available information indicates that the University Council comprises 15 members:

- three official members (the Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor and President, and the President of the Academic Board)
- seven appointed members (five Council-appointed (one vacant) and two ministerially appointed)
- five elected members (two academic staff, one professional staff, one undergraduate student and one postgraduate student).[631]

Transparency

9.6 University Council meetings are open to any member of staff or students to attend, apart from confidential items.[632] Reports of Council meetings are published on the university website.[633]

626 *University of New South Wales Act 1989*, s 6(2).

627 *University of New South Wales Act 1989*, s 8B.

628 *University of New South Wales Act 1989*, s 8B(4).

629 *University of New South Wales Act 1989*, s 8B(6) and (7).

630 *University of New South Wales Act 1989*, s 8B.

631 University of New South Wales, *Council membership: UNSW Council membership as at 1 July 2026*, https://www.unsw.edu.au/governance/council-committees/council-committees-membership.

632 Evidence, Scientia Professor Vlado Perkovic, Provost, University of New South Wales, 13 July 2026, p 17.

633 Answers to questions on notice, Scientia Professor Vlado Perkovic, Provost, University of New South Wales, 31 July 2026, p 11.

UNSW Academic Board

9.7 The UNSW Academic Board is comprised of 28 elected academic staff, six elected student representatives, 23 ex-officio staff representatives and five ex-officio student members.[634]

Governance concerns

9.8 Inquiry participants raised a number of specific concerns relating to governance at UNSW: improving representation on council; structural constraints on student voices; the change from semesters to trimesters and back again; the SHARP Scheme by which internationally renowned researchers are recruited to the institution; wage remediation; and transparency. These are examined in turn below.

Improving representation

9.9 The UNSW Branch of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), like other branches across the universities, called for greater representation of staff and students on the University Council. In doing so, it pointed to the corporate values that it sees as structurally dominant at present:

> Of 15 Council members, just 2 are elected by students, and 3 elected by staff. We also believe that having more local public voices would help contribute to maintaining the social licence of the University. This lack of key stakeholder input has led to a corporate University that is more interested in competing for ranking in international league tables than in following its core mission.[635]

9.10 Student representatives also sought more representation on Council, with Mr Akash Nagagajan, General Secretary of the National Union of Students and an Arts/Law student at UNSW underscoring, 'This is not just about having a student in the room; it is about whether students and staff have enough power to meaningfully test university management decisions.[636]

9.11 Dr Jessica Milner Davis FRSN, who previously served on the UNSW Council for 19 years over three periods, as Deputy Chancellor and Pro Chancellor, Elected Graduate Member and Chair of numerous Council committees,[637] made the case for reinstating an independent alumni voice in UNSW's governance and across

634 Submission 44, The University of New South Wales, p 3.

635 Submission 43, National Tertiary Education Union, University of New South Wales Branch, p 1.

636 Evidence, Mr Akash Nagarajan, General Secretary, National Union of Students, 13 July 2026, p 31.

637 Dr Jessica Milner Davis FRSN also served on the University of New South Wales Alumni Board.

the broader sector. In her submission, Dr Milner Davis accounted the change in composition of the UNSW Council over time, with the gradual reduction in number of elected members, the advent of Council's power to directly co-opt members, the removal of graduate-elected positions, the reduction in elected academic members, and the consequent expansion of Council-nominated appointed and co-opted members. Dr Milner Davis underscored the value of the independent judgement that elected alumni, who by definition are answerable to their peers, bring to governance:

> Today's unelected graduates on Councils likely owe their position to nomination by the university management or chancellor, not initiated by the minister and certainly not by the body of their peers, as was formerly the case of those elected. Graduates are important not just because there are so many of them, but because they are (mostly) not employees of the university but do understand the realities of academic work and have a sense of the history of their own institution. Further, they are professionally qualified by their degrees to contribute to the governance of their own alma mater. All this is true whether they are appointed via nomination from within the university or elected. But only in the second case are they answerable to the wider body of their peers. Elected graduates are free to exercise their own independent judgement about proposals brought to Council and must answer to their electorates when the next electoral cycle arrives. Appointed graduates seeking reappointment have no such independent base or accountability.[638]

9.12 Looking more broadly beyond Council membership, staff representatives told the committee that, like others across the entire sector, they do not perceive that their views are valued at UNSW, underscoring this as one aspect of a managerialist approach lacking in transparency and accountability.[639]

Structural constraints to student voices

9.13 UNSW SRC representatives expressed the view that the governance structure at UNSW 'causes a level of bureaucracy that often gets in the way of our ability to represent students and create real change'.[640]

9.14 Mr William Scharzenberger Moran, President of the SRC, told the committee that while the UNSW Council has both an undergraduate and postgraduate student member, 'SRC has no direct access to the Council'.[641] Ms Diya Sengupta, General Secretary, further stated:

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638 Submission 115, Dr Jessica Milner Davis, pp 1-2.

639 Evidence, Professor Ben Golder, Faculty of Law and Justice, University of New South Wales and National Tertiary Education Union University of New South Wales Branch Representative, 13 July 2026, p 19.

640 Evidence, Mr William Scharzenberger Moran, President, University of New South Wales Student Representative Council, 13 July 2026, p 26.

641 Evidence, Mr Scharzenberger Moran, 13 July 2026, p 26.

> There are several student leadership groups, but the SRC's big goal is to represent all students. While the SRC president sits ex officio on several university boards, the role exists in a paradox. The president is expected to represent the interests of the entire student body, yet the powers available to effect these changes are heavily constrained and ultimately dependent on these external bodies like the Council, the Arc Board and the Academic Board.[642]

9.15 Ms Sengupta went on to highlight that while the SRC's role is to effect change at the systemic level, two bureaucratic barriers significantly limit its ability to do this. First, when the SRC seeks to implement change, it is unable to do that without the support or approval of the university or Arc, which is the overarching student organisation responsible for extracurricular programs as well as advocacy through the SRC and Postgraduate Representative Council. Arc itself has a board, comprised of eight directly elected student members, as well as the presidents of the PGC and SRC, sitting ex officio, and five non-student directors, being two alumni, two from UNSW and the chief executive officer. Ms Sengupta stated that, 'where Arc disagrees with our position, it means that they have the final authority and we can't do anything. Similarly, when we advocate for reform within the university, our influence is limited to governance bodies that the SRC president sits on.'[643] She expressed frustration that this limits the SRC role to being a vehicle for communication rather than change, 'because the university refuses to meet with us on individual levels unless we go through these channels'.[644]

9.16 Ms Sengupta then pointed to inadequate consultation as a second barrier to the SRC's systemic advocacy role:

> [T]he university has no obligation to consult the SRC before implementing policy changes and, frankly, they rarely inform us when significant changes are being considered. Whether consultation occurs is left to the discretion of the individual staff member responsible for a project or policy, and that makes it heavily dependent on our individual relationships with the staff of the day, as opposed to an obligation to be accountable to students. Even in the limited instances where students are consulted, there is little evidence that meaningful consideration is ever given to feedback.[645]

9.17 As an example, Mr Scharzenberger Moran spoke of a draft complaints management and investigations policy that was passed on to SRC leadership by a third party one week before feedback was due. The SRC then reviewed the document and raised issues regarding confidentiality and transparency, with their views received positively. However, he and Ms Sengupta expressed concern

642 Evidence, Ms Diya Sengupta, General Secretary, University of New South Wales Student Representative Council, 13 July 2026, p 26.

643 Evidence, Ms Sengupta, 13 July 2026, pp 26-27.

644 Evidence, Ms Sengupta, 13 July 2026, pp 26-27.

645 Evidence, Ms Sengupta, 13 July 2026, pp 26-27.

they only found out about the consultation on this important policy document by chance, noting that 'our Women's Officer's whole role is to oversee a lot of this stuff.'[646]

9.18 Student representatives told the committee that based on their experience, where consultation does occur, it is often 'affirmative in nature', providing a 'wax seal' that indicates a student has looked over a document, rather than 'actually meaningfully, constructively working on things'.[647] The consultation process attached to the academic calendar, as discussed in the following section, was cited as a key example.[648]

9.19 Accordingly, Ms Sengupta recommended that governance reform should embody 'a stronger obligation' on the university to routinely and genuinely consult with students, to report back to them on changes being made, and to demonstrate the steps the university has taken 'to genuinely engage with feedback instead of just tick off the box and say, "We've talked to students about this."' She called for students to be given a seat at the table not by discretion but as standard practice.[649]

Semesters to trimesters to semesters

9.20 Both student leaders and union representatives highlighted the shift from semesters to trimesters, and the impending shift back again, as emblematic of deficiencies in governance, and specifically genuine consultation, at UNSW.[650]

9.21 Mr Akash Nagagajan, General Secretary, National Union of Students (NUS) and an Arts/Law student at UNSW, described the move from semesters to trimesters as an example of 'expensive, disruptive decisions without proper accountability to the people that have to live with the consequences.'[651] Both he and the NTEU argued that stronger representation of staff and students on UNSW Council would have enabled greater scrutiny and required greater justification for such a costly and disruptive change.[652]

9.22 According to the NTEU, the decision to move from semesters to trimesters (officially termed UNSW 3+) was made by the then Vice-Chancellor in 2016 in the face of trenchant criticism from students and staff. It was launched in 2019 after

646 Evidence, Mr Scharzenberger Moran, 13 July 2026, p 29; Evidence, Ms Sengupta, 13 July 2026, p 29.

647 Evidence, Ms Sengupta, 13 July 2026, p 29.

648 Evidence, Ms Sengupta, 13 July 2026, p 27.

649 Evidence, Ms Sengupta, 13 July 2026, pp 26-27.

650 Evidence, Professor Golder, 13 July 2026, p 19; Evidence, Ms Sengupta, 13 July 2026, p 27.

651 Evidence, Mr Nagarajan, 13 July 2026, p 31.

652 Evidence, Mr Nagarajan, 13 July 2026, p 31; Submission 43, National Tertiary Education Union, University of New South Wales Branch, p 2.

three years of hard work for staff, with the problems they had foreseen coming to pass, with much stress and overwork, in addition to plummeting student satisfaction. The union noted that the university is now preparing for a return to semesters (officially termed flex-semesters) 'with another three years of hard work to get ready for a 2028 launch.[653]

9.23 Professor Ben Golder of the Faculty of Law and Justice and NTEU UNSW Branch Representative, referred to the university's 'sham consultation' ahead of the original change:

> In the lead-up to the decision, both staff and students were "consulted" and shared their almost unanimous views that this was a disastrous idea that would undermine educational standards and place unreasonable demands on students and professional and academic staff for no discernible pedagogic benefit. The university went ahead anyway. Every single outcome we had not only predicted but repeatedly warned university management about came to pass.[654]

9.24 Noting that the UNSW staff are now again redesigning their courses to fit the incoming semester model, Professor Golder argued that, 'The trimester debacle was—is—a story about an unaccountable university management making decisions based on profit seeking, not research and teaching, guided not by the views of their own staff and students but by expensive management consultants pursuing their private interests, not the values of the public university.'[655]

9.25 Professor Golder acknowledged that for the shift back to semesters, the university has consulted 'more widely, more deeply and more seriously', with schools and faculties. In doing so, he noted that while staff widely support the change as much more workable, 'it still requires us to perform a lot of extra work to get there'.[656] He further attested to the challenging impact on staff in certain faculties arising from limited space. By way of example he spoke of significant apprehension among staff at the Faculty of Law and Justice as to whether they will be required to work in shared offices or in open plan environments, saying, 'There's a lot of uncertainty around our work conditions at exactly the time that that work is going to be intensified, to get us back to something like we were doing in 2015-16. So it's an experience of exhaustion from staff at university—exhaustion and uncertainty'.[657]

9.26 Student representatives, on the other hand, challenged the genuineness and extent of consultation that the university has undertaken with them regarding the return to semesters. Ms Sengupta told the committee that when the

653 Submission 43, National Tertiary Education Union, University of New South Wales Branch, p 2; Evidence, Professor Golder, 13 July 2026, p 19.

654 Evidence, Professor Golder, 13 July 2026, p 19.

655 Evidence, Professor Golder, 13 July 2026, p 19.

656 Evidence, Professor Golder, 13 July 2026, p 20.

657 Evidence, Professor Golder, 13 July 2026, p 20.

university met with a 'bunch of student representatives, attendees were asked a series of 'broad and vague' questions such as 'Are students concerned about their mental health?' and 'What do you think would happen if a student went on holidays?' The questions did not address the actual calendar; nor were attendees asked to comment on the two models under consideration. Indeed students did not know that there were two models being considered at that time. On this basis Ms Sengupta concluded that the student consultation process was 'just to tick the box … and nothing that I actually said was going to meaningfully impact the structure of the calendar'.[658]

9.27 Like staff, student representatives confirmed that they 'had always been against the trimester model', on the basis of the effects on life, work and religious holidays, and the shorter exam period necessitated by shorter breaks, sometimes with weekend exams.[659]

9.28 The committee took up these issues with Scientia Professor Vlado Perkovic, Provost, who explained the rationale for the decision to introduce the trimester academic year from 2019 to:

- strengthen educational excellence and improve campus utilisation
- provide students with greater flexibility and study-life balance across the year
- enable better use of campus facilities throughout the year
- increase teaching capacity to meet growing demand
- better align UNSW with leading institutions in the Northern Hemisphere, seen as an important consideration for postgrad students and academic researchers.[660]

9.29 Professor Perkovic advised the committee that a review of the 3+ calendar in 2023 found that while it had delivered a number of positive outcomes, some objectives had been only partially realised. The review identified ongoing challenges associated with the compressed nature of the teaching periods, particularly in relation to student and staff wellbeing. It found that 'other models may better address the future needs of students, given the broader societal changes'.[661] Professor Perkovic stated that following 'extensive' consultation with students, staff and the broader university community, UNSW will move to a 'flex-semester' model for the following reasons:

> From 2028 the flex-semester calendar will provide greater flexibility to meet the needs of our increasingly diverse student community. It offers

[658] Evidence, Ms Sengupta, 13 July 2026, pp 27-28.

[659] Evidence, Mr Scharzenberger Moran, 13 July 2026, p 27.

[660] Evidence, Scientia Professor Perkovic, 13 July 2026, p 10. See also Answers to supplementary questions, University of New South Wales, 31 July 2026, p 1.

[661] Evidence, Scientia Professor Perkovic, 13 July 2026, p 10.

> improved pace for learning, better supports student wellbeing, aligns more effectively with internships and work-integrated learning opportunities, and will also provide greater agility to support future educational innovation and lifelong learning, particularly for postgraduate students, to help deliver against the ambitious tertiary education goals of the Australian Government's accord. Ultimately, this decision reflects our commitment to listening to our community and ensuring that our academic calendar continues to support the best possible educational outcomes for our students, while positioning UNSW to remain one of the world's leading universities.[662]

9.30 Challenged as to whether the trimester model had been a failure, Professor Perkovic pointed to a number of goals that it had achieved, including increased utilisation of space by 13 per cent and increased ability of students to take up more or less than the standard eight units. At the same time, he conceded that 'the world's changed' with the rapid evolution of online learning and increased demand for flexibility, as reflected in the name of the model.[663] The need for additional space is now less strong, even with demand having significantly increased, given the shift to online learning.[664]

9.31 Professor Perkovic acknowledged that staff had expressed concerns at the time about workload arising from the 3+ model, that some of these concerns were realised, and that a recognition of the resultant pressures on staff in various areas of the university, 'some more than others', had been a reason for the recent change. At the same time, he noted that 'a significant portion of our community opposed the move away from the 3+ model, because they found it offered them significant benefits'.[665] Asked what students and staff warned management about before implementation, the university responded that concerns were raised regarding:

- Lack of alignment with school holidays
- Potential impact of shorter teaching terms on staff and student workloads
- Curriculum redesign requirements
- Effect of the change on student services provision and capacity
- Systems interdependencies
- Flow on effects of a delay in making a decision.[666]

9.32 In response to a written question regarding the 2023 review's findings about the impact of the trimesters on paid work, student life and social connection, UNSW acknowledged, 'some students indicated that they experienced reduced capacity for paid work [and] participation in extracurricular activities. Others suggested

662 Evidence, Scientia Professor Perkovic, 13 July 2026, p 10.

663 Evidence, Scientia Professor Perkovic, 13 July 2026, p 11.

664 Evidence, Scientia Professor Perkovic, 13 July 2026, p 13

665 Evidence, Scientia Professor Perkovic, 13 July 2026, p 11.

666 Answers to supplementary questions, University of New South Wales, 31 July 2026, pp 3-4.

that the calendar negatively affected their ability to socialise and holiday with friends from other universities who operate on different calendars.'[667]

9.33 Asked about the union's involvement in consultation on the reversion to semesters, Professor Perkovic confirmed that consultation with union representatives was occurring on a regular basis, for example with respect to managing workload during the transition. He emphasised that the university was very sensitive to the workload issues arising from the transition and had 'committed significant resources to making sure that … staff have a manageable workload through that transition process'.[668]

9.34 Questioned about the cost of the move to the flex-semester model, Professor Perkovic advised that the university has estimated $66 million, including contingencies, which he described as about 0.1 per cent of the UNSW budget for each of the next two years. He further advised that the university had engaged external consultants on two occasions in respect of the new model:

- $90,000 'to ensure that we had considered all the relevant factors before making a decision'
- approximately $60,000 'to ensure that the move was set up for success'.[669]

9.35 Following the hearing the university confirmed the estimated cost of $66 million for curriculum transformation and enhancement of program and course offerings, including preparations for the flex-semester academic calendar, and further advised:

> Importantly, this includes a range of initiatives aimed at modernising and updating both the University's approach to curriculum and the curriculum content itself. These activities would need to be undertaken regularly, irrespective of the calendar transition. The calendar-specific costs are intertwined and cannot be separated out. In addition, around $75 million of planned spending on the construction and refurbishment of teaching spaces was brought forward to accommodate the additional space requirements of the new calendar.
>
> It is important to reiterate that much of this work – both curriculum enhancement and uplift of teaching spaces, and associated systems uplift – would occur regardless of academic calendar transitions, so these figures are indicative only.[670]

667 Answers to supplementary questions, University of New South Wales, 31 July 2026, p 3.

668 Evidence, Scientia Professor Perkovic, 13 July 2026, p 11.

669 Evidence, Scientia Professor Perkovic, 13 July 2026, p 12.

670 Answers to questions on notice, University of New South Wales, 31 July 2026, p 2.

9.36 The university further indicated that the costs of the implementation of the UNSW 2025 Strategy, which included moving to the 3+ academic calendar, were assumed to be approximately $44.5 million.[671]

9.37 The committee asked about staff consultations regarding the use of space in the Faculty of Law and Justice and the Faculty of Arts, Design and Architecture, where there has been dramatic growth in student numbers. Professor Perkovic indicated that UNSW had developed university-wide policies on the use of space, to ensure public facilities are used in an appropriate, efficient and effective way. Reviews had identified that some offices and workspaces are only used two days a week on average, leading the university to consider that spaces can be used more efficiently and effectively. He advised that those 'space principles' have now been implemented, for example, in the new Health Translation Hub building, 'and have been welcomed by the majority of staff in that faculty, despite initial substantial concerns before the move was made.' He insisted that 'broader improvement in amenity and the specific focus on work approaches and workflows has … been welcomed by the majority of staff, despite the fact that the total number of offices is less than what people are used to'.[672]

9.38 Professor Perkovic continued that, as of July 2026, consultation with staff as to the final structure of the refurbishment to both of their buildings is continuing, reassuring the committee that, 'In both cases, we're not talking about hot-desking for all staff. We're talking about a more focused and efficient use of offices, potentially with a reduced number, but also flexible workspaces that better meet the needs of modern workers.' He further noted the university's flexible working policy, 'that encourages people to do their work in the environment that best suits them'.[673]

9.39 Professor Perkovic concluded, 'As a university, we're absolutely committed to providing facilities to all of our staff that allow them to work in the best way possible, and equally to doing that in a consistent way across the university'.[674]

SHARP hires

9.40 The NTEU UNSW Branch expressed strong criticism regarding the UNSW practice of recruiting Nobel Prize winners under its SHARP scheme for the purpose of improving the university's rankings. In doing so, the union questioned the governance values attached to spending very significant university funds on such arrangements, citing the appointment of:

- Professor Fraser Stoddart to a part-time position, at age 75, in 2017, for a package worth an estimated $70 million

671 Answers to questions on notice, University of New South Wales, 31 July 2026, p 2.

672 Evidence, Scientia Professor Perkovic, 13 July 2026, pp 17-18.

673 Evidence, Scientia Professor Perkovic, 13 July 2026, p 18.

674 Evidence, Scientia Professor Perkovic, 13 July 2026, p 18.

- other senior international researchers that were hoped might become Nobel winners, who were hired as research-only staff with packages of $15 to $25 million (covering themselves and their team)
- a person appointed on a $20M package in the School of Medical Sciences forced to resign in their first year after allegations of serious scientific misconduct emerged in relation to previous positions.[675]

9.41 Professor Golder argued that programs such as the SHARP scheme, not only at UNSW but across the sector, exemplify an approach to research that is 'elitist, individual and top down', where the 'answer to supporting quality research is "We need to buy in and fly in a Nobel Prize winner'.[676] Instead he challenged the university to think harder about how to best improve research rankings, as well as research culture and productivity, arguing that it would be much better to spend such sums on attracting and supporting excellent early career researchers, converting casual and contingent researchers to permanent roles, and engaging Indigenous academics and others from under-represented cohorts.[677]

9.42 Asked about the scheme, Professor Perkovic responded that 'All universities certainly seek to recruit high-performing researchers, not only because of the research they do, but because of the impact that that has on the broader ecosystem'.[678] He confirmed that UNSW previously ran the SHARP Scheme under its 10-year plan to 2025 'designed to attract not just Nobel Laureates, but certainly high performing researchers who were interested in relocating'. He further advised that the university now operates a similar scheme, titled Green Fellows, by which two years of funding is provided to attract staff, based on the principle that 'we want our researchers but also our students to have exposure to the best in the world'.[679]

9.43 With respect to how this relates to university rankings, Professor Perkovic acknowledged that the research and reputation attached to certain recruitment does affect university rankings but emphasised the experience and learning that staff and students gain from their exposure to distinguished staff. He advised that responsibility for such strategy sits within the Division of Research, headed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor-Research, who assesses and manages 'various measures of our research impact, including rankings as one of those'.[680]

9.44 The university advised that for the last five years (2021 to 2025), UNSW spent $82.815 million on the SHARP program, stating that those costs relate to 'people,

675 Submission 43, National Tertiary Education Union, University of New South Wales Branch, pp 1-2.

676 Evidence, Professor Golder, 13 July 2026, p 25.

677 Evidence, Professor Golder, 13 July 2026, p 26.

678 Evidence, Scientia Professor Perkovic, 13 July 2026, p 14.

679 Evidence, Scientia Professor Perkovic, 13 July 2026, p 14.

680 Evidence, Scientia Professor Perkovic, 13 July 2026, p 15.

non-people and support'. It further stated that the Division of Research 'has conducted a review of the program and found it to be highly effective'.[681]

Figure 1 Yearly spending on the SHARP Program, 2021-2015[682]

2021 $000s	2022 $000s	2023 $000s	2024 $000s	2025 $000s	Total $000s
18,568	18,076	15,546	15,678	14,947	82,815

Wage theft remediation

9.45 A further governance-related matter at UNSW examined by the committee concerned the university's actions towards wage theft remediation.

9.46 The NTEU submission noted that UNSW has provisioned roughly $70 million for wage remediation, investigations having revealed systemic underpayments to staff across teaching and research roles over a long period.[683]

9.47 In July 2026 the university entered into an enforceable undertaking with the Fair Work Ombudsman to complete more than $32 million in rectification payments to over 33,000 staff. Under the enforceable undertaking, UNSW admitted to underpaying staff entitlements under UNSW enterprise agreements between 2014 and 2023, and to breaching record-keeping and pay slip requirements. The university had failed to pay academic staff the correct rates for activities including lectures, tutorials, demonstrations, course co-ordination meetings, exam supervision and marking; entitlements not paid to professional staff included minimum wage rates, overtime rates, allowances, shift loadings and long service leave entitlements. As part of the undertaking, UNSW was fined $500,000. It must also implement a range of measures to ensure compliance with workplace laws going forward.[684]

9.48 In the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia decision in the case brought by the Fair Work Ombudsman that preceded the enforceable undertaking, Judge Obradovich's conclusions included that:

> At the most basic level, all of the trouble UNSW finds itself in, as far as the present proceedings are concerned, arose out of UNSW's failure to properly and adequately record the working hours of its casual employees over a number of years. ...

681 Answers to questions on notice, University of New South Wales, 31 July 2026, p 5.

682 Answers to questions on notice, University of New South Wales, 31 July 2026, p 5.

683 Submission 41, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division, p 6.

684 Fair Work Ombudsman, *The University of NSW Signs Enforceable Undertaking* (3 July 2026), https://www.fairwork.gov.au/newsroom/media-releases/2026-media-releases/july-2026/20260703-unsw-eu-media-release.

> Even after UNSW was aware of the issues with its record keeping, and even though it took steps to commence rectification of the issues, it did so without any sense of urgency. …
>
> While UNSW itself recognised as early as December 2019 that something as simple as time sheets would likely address the failures in its record keeping requirements, it did not implement them in any meaningful form, until approximately the time these proceedings commenced.[685]

9.49 The judgement further noted that in June 2018 UNSW received detailed advice from Deloitte as to how the problems occurred and should be rectified. UNSW then advised Deloitte that all schools would be implementing a timesheet system from the start of semester 2, 2018 that would capture actual hours worked, however this did not occur.[686]

9.50 Dr Sarah Gregson, Casual Academic at the UNSW Business School and former NTEU Branch President, set out a number of union concerns about the historic underpayments, informed by her having taken up a number of individual cases to the then Industrial Relations Manager, and having sat on a union committee with management since 2019 when the university's audit commenced:

- When concerns were raised by the union, representatives were repeatedly told it was an individual issue rather than systemic problem.
- The systemic problem arose from broad pressures on local schools and faculties to keep their budget down.
- The remediation process has at times been iterative, in that the university will return to matters allegedly already remediated, then make further payments to the same staff.
- When staff are informed of how much they are owed they are not provided with the detail of how the amount was calculated, hence they are unable check it.
- Staff who have left the university may not be aware they were underpaid.[687]

9.51 The committee asked Professor Perkovic about the wage remediation matter, including the adverse finding against the university for its insufficient systems, despite having received consultant advice. Professor Perkovic underscored the size and complexity of the remediation process and apologised to those affected:

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685 Fair Work Ombudsman v University of New South Wales [2025] FedCFamC2G 2151, paras 135, 156, 160.

686 Fair Work Ombudsman v University of New South Wales [2025] FedCFamC2G 2151, paras 63-66.

687 Evidence, Dr Sarah Gregson, Casual Academic, University of New South Wales Business School and former National Tertiary Education Union Branch President, 13 July 2026, pp 21-22.

> [T]hat has been a huge program of work that has gone back and assessed, effectively, every payment that every casual, academic and professional staff member at our university has received over several years, and every way that we pay them, to ensure that anyone who was underpaid is repaid fully and to ensure that we set up proper systems to manage this going forward. That's not just an issue of turning on a new computer program, for example. That affects workflows across the university; it affects the culture. There's a huge training piece that comes with it. There was a wide array of activities that in a university the size of UNSW unfortunately takes a long time to implement. We've expressed our regret and, again, I apologise unreservedly to everyone who was underpaid during that process. But we're absolutely committed to making sure every staff member receives every dollar that they're owed.[688]

9.52 UNSW subsequently advised that it first became aware of potential underpayment of casual employees in 2018, stating that it was not initially apparent that that the issue was broader or affected a significant number of staff. In 2020 a project team was established to review the Business School, and as the review progressed that year the scope expanded to include all faculties. The work was later expanded to become a comprehensive review of employee entitlements across the university.[689]

9.53 Further questioned as to what payroll, record-keeping and governance failures allowed the underpayments to occur, the university responded:

> The University's reviews identified historical issues that contributed to non-compliance over time. These included inconsistent local administrative practices across a large, decentralised organisation; limitations in legacy payroll and supporting systems; incomplete and inconsistent recording of actual hours worked by some casual academic employees; weaknesses in payroll controls and record-keeping; and the absence of an enterprise-wide approach to payroll compliance assurance. These issues affected the University's ability to consistently apply Enterprise Agreement requirements and early identification of payroll compliance issues arising from this complexity. [690]

9.54 The university then advised of its measures to ensure the integrity of its systems going forward:

> In response, the University has fundamentally strengthened its payroll governance and compliance framework. This has included implementing positive time recording, strengthening payroll controls and record-keeping practices, enhancing systems, establishing dedicated compliance and quality assurance functions, embedding ongoing monitoring and independent assurance, and increasing executive, Audit

688 Evidence, Scientia, Professor Perkovic, 13 July 2026, p 12.

689 Answers to supplementary questions, University of New South Wales, 31 July 2026, p 4.

690 Answers to supplementary questions, University of New South Wales, 31 July 2026, pp 4-5.

Committee and Council oversight of payroll compliance to support sustainable compliance into the future.[691]

9.55 Looking to the future, Professor Perkovic told the committee that the university had learned that it needs a high level of central oversight and management of payments and record-keeping, and assured us that it had moved to address this. Additionally, the university addressed the need for clear and unambiguous entitlements in the last enterprise agreement, and acknowledged the importance of continuing to work with the unions to furnish that clear, shared understanding.[692] Following the hearing, the university advised a number measures, comprising a 'comprehensive program of payroll, governance and assurance reforms to strengthen payroll compliance and provide confidence that staff are paid correctly for all work performed':

- implementation of a new time and attendance system
- enhancing time and attendance controls including the rollout of time recording and approval processes to better support accurate recording of hours and pay
- strengthening payroll controls, approval processes and record-keeping requirements
- comprehensively reviewing pay-impacting processes
- establishment of dedicated payroll compliance, quality assurance and employee claims management functions to support ongoing monitoring, compliance and continuous improvement
- regular assurance activities
- governance reporting to senior management, the Audit Committee and Council
- regular reporting to the Fair Work Ombudsman in accordance with the enforceable undertaking.[693]

9.56 The committee further requested Professor Perkovic provide a global amount for how much the university spent on all the external advice for wage remediation, payroll review and compliance work. He advised that as at July 2026, UNSW has incurred approximately $24.9 million in external advisory costs, including legal fees, professional services and consultancy fees in respect of the wage theft matter.[694]

691 Answers to supplementary questions, University of New South Wales, 31 July 2026, p 5.

692 Evidence, Scientia Professor Perkovic, 13 July 2026, p 13.

693 Answers to supplementary questions, University of New South Wales, 31 July 2026, pp 5-6.

694 Answers to questions on notice, Scientia Professor Perkovic, 31 July 2026, p 9. Answers to further questions about the wage theft remediation are in this document.

Transparency

9.57 The committee sought information consultant fees for the years 2021 to 2025, which the university provided, as set out in the table below. Additionally, it provided a set of tables listing the university's 25 largest consultancy vendors for each year, together with the principal reason for engagement and the actual expenditure incurred. Remaining consultancy engagements, were aggregated and reported as 'other'. The expenditure disclosed includes both operating and capital-projected consultancy engagements.[695]

The University of New South Wales (Parent)
Consultant Fees 2021-2025

$m	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Opex (Income Statement)	14.9	15.4	12.7	9.1	8.7
Capex (Balance Sheet)	0.1	0.1	0.5	1.2	4.1
TOTAL	**15.0**	**15.5**	**13.2**	**10.3**	**12.8**

9.58 The university informed the committee that it prepares its financial statements in accordance with the Australian Government requirements, and that it would welcome greater consistency in reporting requirements across the higher education sector. In doing so, it commented, 'Clear guidance from the Australian and NSW governments on a standard reporting framework for consultant expenditure would improve comparability between institutions and provide greater transparency for Parliament and the public'.[696]

Other issues

9.59 One UNSW academic highlighted a further range of areas in which the university could improve its governance. These included:

- Various administrative areas including IT, finance, human resources (including recruitment and onboarding) and safety reporting are experienced as inefficient and poor functioning, leading to staff disengagement and frustration, and hindering performance and compliance. Financial management of research projects needs greater

[695] Answers to supplementary questions, University of New South Wales, 31 July 2026, p 8. The detailed yearly tables are at pp 9-13.

[696] Answers to supplementary questions, University of New South Wales, 31 July 2026, p 7.

transparency and responsiveness. A total systems approach, as well as cultural renewal, would help address this.[697]

- While policies and public statements promote inclusivity and open dialogue, internal experience differs. Meetings at all levels are often one way rather than open dialogue, such that valuable insights and expertise are overlooked. There is a tangible impact on curriculum design, program relevance, assessment quality and collaboration with industry. Addressing this 'requires cultivating a culture of open dialogue, respect and collaboration – where academic expertise, industry experience, and public purpose work together to deliver education and research that genuinely serve society'.[698]
- Mechanisms for addressing complaints and psychosocial risks are widely seen as ineffective and burdensome, suggesting they are ineffective in achieving their purpose of providing safe, effective restorative pathways. Perception of unequal treatment and concentration of decision-making and influence among a small, homogenous group, 'point to a need for structural and cultural renewal focused on transparency, equity and trust building'.[699]

Committee comment

9.60 The evidence before the committee regarding UNSW raises important questions about governance, not least the institutional values that are embodied in the decisions of Council and the university's leaders. While UNSW has not undergone the brutal restructuring experienced by other institutions, the evidence we received illuminated a managerial culture and corporatist approach to governance that typifies the shift that has taken place across the sector.

9.61 Staff, students and alumni all sought greater and more genuine representation on Council and in other fora. Outside of Council, staff and students both sought more genuine consultation, in which their views are heard and acted upon, such that they are able to exercise power in the decisions that will profoundly affect them. In addition, student representatives from UNSW made a very persuasive case for the bureaucratic structures that inhibit their role to be rectified, and that students be given a seat at the table not by discretion but as standard practice. Linked to this, while the university advised that meetings are open to any member of staff or students to attend, apart from confidential items, student representatives seemed unaware of this opportunity, suggesting that more needs to be done to avail them, and possibly also staff, of it.

9.62 Union representatives and students also demonstrated their frustration with the move from semesters to trimesters despite their strong and widespread opposition, which they observed as demonstrative of the concentration of power

697 Submission 74, Name suppressed, p 1.

698 Submission 74, Name suppressed, p 2.

699 Submission 74, Name suppressed, p 4.

with university leaders. Although the academic calendar decision was made some time ago and indeed is now reverting to a semester model to take effect from 2028, the committee appreciates staff and students' ongoing frustration with having to live with the negative consequences that they foretold, and with the substantial work that staff must now undertake to prepare for the change back. The committee is also sympathetic to the exhaustion and uncertainty of staff to which their representatives have attested. Professor Perkovic gave important assurances that the university is sensitive to the workload issues arising from the transition, that consultations with staff are ongoing, and that significant funds have been committed to ensuring that staff have a manageable workload through the process.

9.63 The committee can see that governance decisions that enable extraordinarily expensive packages to 'buy in and fly in' international prize winners are galling to many staff. We were astounded by the sum of $82.8 million that UNSW has spent on the SHARP scheme over five years. While UNSW considers this as an effective investment, such a figure illuminates the vast financial inequality between Group of Eight universities and the others around the state, as well as the aggressively competitive international market in which UNSW operates. The committee sees merit in the view that a better, more effective approach to building research rankings, research culture and productivity would flow from decisions that invest in attracting and supporting early career academics, providing permanent roles for those who do not have them, and engaging and supporting Indigenous and other under-represented groups.

9.64 Similarly, the committee heard that UNSW would do well to invest in less visible but fundamental administrative systems including IT, finance, financial management of research projects, human resources and safety reporting. A total systems approach was recommended as a means to achieve this. Additionally, we heard that cultural renewal is needed to improve all of these systems, to build open dialogue, respect and collaboration at all levels, along with equity, transparency and trust. Such a culture, matched with effective systems, is a less visible but fundamental hallmark of a world-leading university.

9.65 Finally, the committee was very troubled by the wage theft matter, which we acknowledge several universities around the state have had to reckon with due to their own actions. Interestingly, this can be seen as both a systems issue and operational culture issue, as well as one that points to the larger values of the institution. The Fair Work Ombudsman's enforceable undertaking that over 33,000 staff be paid more than $32 million in remediation payments, its fine of $500,000, and its requirement for multiple measures to ensure compliance with workplace laws going forward, underscore just how systemic this problem at UNSW has been. The committee was further troubled by the judge's observations that even after the university was aware of the systemic issues with its record keeping, its steps to rectify the problem proceeded without any sense of urgency, and that the university did not apply the simple remedy of time sheets despite knowing that this would assist, from December 2019 until the commencement of litigation.

9.66 In the committee's view it is extraordinary that the university obtained very expensive advice as far back as 2018 as to causes and straightforward remedies, but management decided not to action that advice. This was not only deeply disrespectful to staff; it allowed wage theft to grow, which has of course meant that remediation has been much more complex than it should have been. It also raises a question as to why the university continued to engage Deloitte when it chose to ignore its advice. This saga reflects very poorly on the university's management in multiple ways.

9.67 Having considered the evidence concerning UNSW, the committee now turns to Southern Cross University and the governance, workforce and organisational issues raised during the inquiry in respect of that institution.

Chapter 10 Southern Cross University

Like a number of other universities around New South Wales, Southern Cross University (SCU) has an explicit responsibility towards the regional community in which it is based, along with its various other institutional functions. This chapter examines a number of aspects of governance at SCU raised during the course of the inquiry. First it sets out the main features of the university's enabling Act. It then considers the evidence the committee gathered regarding the salary and key performance indicators attached to the Vice-Chancellor role, along with aspects of decision-making across the executive group and Council. Next, it explores staff accounts of work intensification and employee attrition, before examining the contrasting perspectives of staff and the Vice-Chancellor on the operation of the Southern Cross Model of teaching that has replaced semesters. The chapter then documents the evidence gathered regarding SCU's use of consultants, regional matters and student voice.

The enabling legislation

10.1 The evidence gathered by the committee in respect of the governance of SCU directed the committee to consider the statutory framework underpinning the institution.

Objectives

10.2 The objectives of the university, as stated in the *Southern Cross University Act 1993*, are the promotion, within the limits of the University's resources, of scholarship, research, free inquiry, the interaction of research and teaching, and academic excellence.[700]

Functions

10.3 To fulfill its objectives, SCU's principal functions, as prescribed by the Act, include:

- provision of facilities for education and research of university standard, **having particular regard to the needs of the north coast region of the State**
- encouragement of the dissemination, advancement, development and application of knowledge informed by free inquiry
- provision of courses of study or instruction across a range of fields, and the carrying out of research, to meet the needs of the community
- participation in public discourse
- conferring of degrees and other awards

[700] *Southern Cross University Act 1993*, s 6(1).

- the provision of teaching and learning that engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry
- development of governance, procedural rules, admission policies, financial arrangements and quality assurance processes sufficient to ensure the integrity of the University's academic programs.[701]

Composition of the Council

10.4 SCU is governed by a Council to which the University's Vice-Chancellor reports.

10.5 The Act prescribes that the Council is to consist of a minimum of 11 and a maximum of 22 members with the total number determined from time to time by a two-thirds majority of the Council.[702] The Council must include official members, elected members, Council appointed members, and ministerially appointed members. The number of members in each category, other than official members, is to be prescribed by rules made by the Council.[703] A majority of the total number must be external persons, and no single category may constitute a majority.[704] The Senate must notify the Minister within seven days of any resolution under s 8B.[705]

10.6 As at mid-August 2026, the Council comprises 12 members:

- three official members (Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Chair of Academic Board)
- six appointed members (four Council appointed and two ministerially appointed)
- three elected members (two academic staff and one student).[706]

Governance concerns

10.7 The committee examined a range of matters regarding the way that governance operates at SCU including: the salary, key performance indicators (KPIs) and appointment process attached to the Vice-Chancellor role; decision-making across the executive group and Council; work intensification and staff attrition;

701 *Southern Cross University Act 1993,* s 6(2).

702 *Southern Cross University Act 1993,* s 9B(1) and (2).

703 *Southern Cross University Act 1993,* s 9B(4).

704 *Southern Cross University Act 1993*, s 9B(6) and (7).

705 *Southern Cross University Act 1993*, s 9B(8).

706 Southern Cross University, *University Council*, https://www.scu.edu.au/about/leadership/university-council/; Evidence, Professor Tyrone Carlin, Vice-Chancellor, Southern Cross University, 13 July 2026, p 5. Professor Carlin advised that at the time of his hearing, the Council comprised 14 members: three official, seven appointed and four elected.

the operation of the Southern Cross teaching model that has replaced semesters; the use of consultants; regional matters; student voice; and protections for staff who might criticise university decisions and culture.

10.8 The committee notes that it did not receive oral or written evidence from elected student representatives or student representative bodies at CSU. As a result, the committee is unable to draw conclusions regarding student perspectives on the issues examined in this chapter.

Vice-Chancellor appointment, salary and key performance indicators

10.9 SCU staff expressed concerns to the committee regarding the processes for the present Vice-Chancellor's appointment and for determining his significant increase in remuneration. In doing so, they questioned how a large and expensive executive team is justified for an institution so small in comparison with other NSW universities, and with persistent financial difficulties.[707]

10.10 Separately, the NTEU NSW Branch noted that before his appointment as Vice-Chancellor in 2020, Professor Tyrone Carlin had served as President of CPA Australia 'during its governance scandal involving inflated executive remuneration and suppression of member dissent' and suggested, 'that background should have prompted caution'.[708]

10.11 The committee asked the university what due diligence Council undertook on governance and disclosure practice when appointing the Vice-Chancellor in 2020 and reappointing him in 2025, including consideration of the CPA Australia independent review. It also asked whether either process openly advertised or externally searched. The university responded, 'The University Council thoroughly and carefully deliberated in appointing the Vice-Chancellor in 2020 and in reappointing him in 2025, in accordance with its governance processes'.[709]

10.12 In September 2025 the media reported that Professor Carlin received a $240,000 pay rise over three years, earning $1 million the previous year. This was despite SCU being the smallest university in the state, as well as having plummeted in a global ranking and received applications from just 1263 potential students out of the 280,000 who sought to study at a NSW university in 2025.[710]

10.13 The committee asked Professor Carlin about both his salary increase and the KPIs against which his performance is assessed. Professor Carlin advised that his KPIs

[707] *In camera* evidence, 13 July 2026, p 1, published by resolution of the committee. The transcript itself remains confidential.

[708] Submission 41, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Branch, p 8.

[709] Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Tyrone Carlin, Vice-Chancellor, Southern Cross University, 27 July 2026, p 2.

[710] Julie Hare, 'University boss got a $240k payrise over three years', *Financial Review*, 4 September 2025, https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/university-boss-got-a-240k-pay-rise-over-three-years-20250902-p5mrth.

are set by Council, and that in each of the past three years, two foundational indicators have applied:

- financial performance
- safety systems, policies, processes and culture.[711]

10.14 In addition, he advised that Council sets annual 'focal points' for the Vice-Chancellor aligned to the University's strategy:

- in 2023, the implementation of the Southern Cross Model, enhancement of student experience and admissions, and the Lismore Campus Master Plan
- in 2024, enhanced student attraction and attrition outcomes, enhancing staff engagement and capability, and implementation of the strategic plan
- in 2025, educational innovation and learner engagement, the Gold Coast/ Tweed campus master plan, and enhancing technology capability.[712]

10.15 Professor Tyrone advised that his fixed salary is $870,000. Asked whether his package amounts to over $1 million, he confirmed that this was not the case. Then, asked to confirm that there is a discrepancy between what is reported publicly and what is the case, he responded that there is no discrepancy, but rather, a difference in the methodology for defining a fixed salary package in a contract and the way that it is disclosed for accounting purposes in the university's annual reports.[713]

10.16 Relatedly, the committee sought information on how Professor Carlin's salary is determined. Professor Carlin advised that his salary is determined by the Council's People and Culture Committee, comprised of the Deputy Chancellor, the Chancellor and two other members. He confirmed that at no members of that committee were elected, stating that there was no reason why an elected member could not serve on that committee, although none had to date.[714]

10.17 Professor Carlin further advised that the People and Culture Committee undertakes a 'detailed benchmarking process'[715] for determining his remuneration, whereby it is 'provided with Mercer benchmarking data, which compares total employment cost — base salary, superannuation, benefits and FBT, excluding incentives — against a comparator cohort of Australian universities considered appropriate to the University's scale, location and

[711] Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 2.

[712] Answers to questions taken on notice, Professor Tyrone Carlin, Vice-Chancellor, Southern Cross University, 27 July 2026, p 1; Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 2.

[713] Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, pp 2-3.

[714] Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 3.

[715] Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 2.

context.'[716] The committee then discusses the sector data and forms its conclusions about what it considers his compensation should be.[717]

Executive decision-making

10.18 Linked to the staff views documented at the start of the previous section, SCU staff participants also expressed concerns about a number of aspects of executive decision making at the university that affect operations of the university, and the work of staff, in significant ways.

10.19 Staff suggested that there appears to be scant evidence for structures and practices being benchmarked against other institutions and that many decision makers have little or only superficial experience in the higher education sector. They reported that there is a 'deep-seated distrust' among staff in the university leadership, and attested to a 'climate of silence' that precludes meaningful debate or critique of decisions. They expressed very strong fears of reprisal for their participation in the inquiry.[718]

10.20 Staff made the case that these experiences point to not merely poor decision making but systemic failures in governance across the institution. Despite working in an academic institution, they feel their academic work is neither valued nor respected.[719]

10.21 In a similar vein, the NTEU NSW Branch submission pointed to an adversarial approach to governance, which, combined with program rationalisations in creative arts and humanities, it argued reflects a pattern of executive decision-making with limited transparency and inadequate collegial consultation. It also highlighted a hostile approach to enterprise bargaining subsequently corrected by the Fair Work Commission:

> Under [Professor] Carlin's leadership, SCU eliminated creative arts disciplines vital to the Northern Rivers' cultural economy. In 2022, SCU bypassed collective bargaining obligations and pursued an enterprise agreement that stripped workplace conditions, without union endorsement.
>
> Following a protracted dispute initiated by the NTEU, the agreement was later overturned by the Full Bench of the Fair Work Commission (Fair Work Commission 2023) because 'misrepresentations' (direct quote) by management had secured staff support (Times Higher Education 2023).[720]

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716 Answers to questions taken on notice, Professor Carlin, 27 July 2026, p 1. See also Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 2.

717 Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 2.

718 *In camera* evidence, 13 July 2026, p 1, published by resolution of the committee.

719 *In camera* evidence, 13 July 2026, p 1, published by resolution of the committee.

720 Submission 41, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Branch, pp 8-9.

10.22 The NTEU recommended that university councils be required by law 'to assess the governance record of executive candidates and to certify that institutional decisions on staffing and courses align with the public interest'.[721]

Work intensification and staff attrition

10.23 SCU staff participants highlighted an 'overwhelming' intensification of workload, across both academic and general staff, explicitly linking this to the SCU teaching model explored in detail in the next section. They advised the committee that academic workloads are measured by raw student numbers in classes, a measure staff have no ability to control or influence.[722]

10.24 Staff reported a number of negative impacts of this work intensification:

- Staff wellbeing is very low.
- 'Normal' teaching loads are causing people to leave jobs that they love because the hours are unsustainable.
- Staff attrition is high, with many talented and capable staff leaving permanent roles in the last five to seven years because they can no longer stay under the working conditions.
- Faculties backfill permanent roles with casual employees, with the effect that full time staff must take a greater load.
- Turnover of casual staff is also high.
- Academic staff have little time for their research – despite this being critical to success in the university sector, professional development, personal satisfaction and wellbeing, and teaching the most instructive and innovative knowledge in the classroom.[723]

Southern Cross Model of teaching

10.25 The committee heard that SCU has implemented a six-by-six week teaching calendar known as the Southern Cross Model. The model divides the academic year into six teaching terms, with each term lasting six weeks. Most students study up to two units per term and typically enrol in four terms each year. A two-week break is scheduled between each term.[724]

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721 Submission 41, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Branch, pp 8-9.

722 *In camera* evidence, 13 July 2026, pp 1 and 2, published by resolution of the committee.

723 *In camera* evidence, 13 July 2026, pp 1, 2 and 5, published by resolution of the committee.

724 Southern Cross University, *The Southern Cross Model*, https://www.scu.edu.au/southern-cross-model/#d.en.531409.

10.26 Most units include around three hours of scheduled teaching activities each week, delivered online or on campus. Some units may require up to six hours of scheduled teaching. Students are advised to allow 20 to 25 hours per week in total for study, learning activities and assessment for each unit.[725]

10.27 Staff are allocated two consecutive terms of teaching per year for research, and four for teaching.[726]

10.28 SCU staff told the committee that the six-by-six-week model could be a valuable and innovative educational model, and acknowledged that it has some benefits. However they argued strongly that they are not resourced or supported to apply it in a pedagogically sound and meaningful way, and that the model is very inflexible. In addition, the workloads among staff are inequitable.[727]

10.29 They highlighted the unsustainable load arising from the model for many staff:

- Teaching commonly finishes as late as 10.00 pm.
- Staff with family responsibilities have no ability to shift their timetables.
- The terms are fast paced and intense, placing staff 'under the pump'.
- Managing student expectations, especially when staff are not given adequate support, is challenging.
- Some staff have had to double their teaching to comply with accreditation standards, placing pressure on both them and students, while not being given workload credits for this.
- Some staff now work as long as 8.00 am to 10.00 pm during their teaching blocks in order to meet their responsibilities for preparing unit content and guiding the other staff who teach with them, actually teaching, designing and undertaking assessments, marking and managing student queries. This issue is especially acute for those who teach subjects with large numbers of students and is reflected in university policy.
- Accompanying staff management and coordination responsibilities are not recognised or remunerated when staff are employed as lecturers.
- The nominal two terms for research is seen by some as 'a joke'. Factoring in holidays and university closures, the time for research is much lower, such that staff report using their holidays to undertake their research.[728]

10.30 While they acknowledged that some students appreciate the highly structured approach, engagement, as reflected in online attendance, can be very low. Staff participants also suggested that the model, in concert with online delivery, has

[725] Southern Cross University, *The Southern Cross Model*.

[726] Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 7.

[727] *In camera* evidence, 13 July 2026, p 1, published by resolution of the committee.

[728] *In camera* evidence, 13 July 2026, pp 1-2 and 4-5, published by resolution of the committee.

diminished the student experience and reduced opportunities for the interactions that are critically important for student learning. Additionally, they suggested that there is a lack of time between terms for students to absorb and apply their learning.[729]

10.31 Staff also challenged the veracity of figures cited by the university regarding student success, suggesting that comparing the semester model of teaching with the new model is like comparing apples and oranges.[730]

10.32 In terms of the university leadership's perspective, Professor Carlin advised the committee that the Southern Cross Model was introduced to address two key problems: persistently elevated student attrition, together with lower than desired rates of academic success. He explained that the model is built on two core ideas: that students are asked to focus on fewer things at any given time; and that 'the goalposts … are always within sight'.[731]

10.33 According to Professor Carlin, the model has been very successful, especially for equity cohorts including Indigenous students and those who are the first in their family to attend university.[732] He cited data evidencing the model's success against its core objectives:

> We find that that is incredibly motivating and focusing for students. Our attrition is down [from 35-36 per cent] to the early 20s now, and that has been hugely important for the university. But the other thing is—and it's a direct corollary—academic success, and that progress towards completion has really improved out of sight. We were looking at academic success rates in the high 60s. We're now in the high 80s, early 90s. Effectively, we've moved from an academic setting where three out of 10 attempts at a unit of study resulted in a failure of some sort. We got that closer to one out of 10, and that means more graduates for our regions.[733]

10.34 He further advised that at least two other Australian universities are contemplating a similar model, and that a number of universities in the United Kingdom, United States and Canada have adopted comparable block models,[734] although no further detail on this was presented in evidence.

10.35 The Vice-Chancellor acknowledged that the change 'has been a hard journey' and 'a lot of hard work'.[735] Asked about staff-related concerns attached to the model including staff attrition, inadequate consultation and limited avenues for ongoing feedback, Professor Carlin spoke of the 'huge change' and extent of work

729 *In camera* evidence, 13 July 2026, pp 4 and 5, published by resolution of the committee.

730 *In camera* evidence, 13 July 2025, pp 4 and 5, published by resolution of the committee.

731 Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 6.

732 Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Carlin, 31 July 2026, p 1.

733 Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, pp 6-7.

734 Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 8

735 Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 7.

that staff had undertaken to enable the shift. He also advised that discussions with staff had occurred in at Council, Academic Board and faculty levels prior to implementation.[736] He insisted that staff now provide very positive feedback:

> What I hear around the place now—and I just get this feedback unsolicited—often when I'm walking around, I'll talk to colleagues, "How's it going? What are you up to? Are you teaching this term? Have you got some time for research?" and so on. We've tried to be purposeful to make sure that academics get at least two consecutive terms where they can just concentrate on their research. I have a lot of academics saying, "It's busy, it really is when we're in that teaching term, but we wouldn't have it any other way."[737]

10.36 Asked how a six by six model aligns with the traditional academic balance of 40 per cent of time spent teaching, 40 per cent research and 20 per cent administration, Professor Carlin advised that SCU's enterprise agreement enshrines a 60-30-10 per cent balance.[738]

10.37 Regarding the business case and pedagogical basis for the model, the university advised that the business case was not predicated on staff savings but student retention and academic success, and referred the committee to the university's 'collection of papers on the scholarship of teaching and learning' available on its website.[739]

Use of consultants

10.38 The committee sought a breakdown on consultant versus contract services for 2025. The university advised that for 2025, consultancy expenditure totalled $3.223 million, comprising:

- $1.895 million on technology uplift
- $641,059 on regulatory and legal advice
- $511,592 on strategy development and implementation
- $176,000 on prospective program development.[740]

10.39 Professor Carlin confirmed that the university had not engaged any of the 'big four' consultancies, nor Bain and Company. Asked whether he would undertake to detail consultant spend in the annual report, whether or not the NSW Government

[736] Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 7; Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Carlin, 27 July 2026, p 2.

[737] Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 7.

[738] Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 7.

[739] Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Carlin, 27 July 2026, p 2.

[740] Answers to questions on notice, Professor Carlin, 27 July 2026, p 1. He further advised that the balance of the amount disclosed under Note 8 of the 2025 Annual Report comprises contracts and service providers.

moved to implement the committee's recommendation in its interim report that NSW Treasury Guidelines be updated to require this, Professor Carlin responded that he expected the whole sector would do so.[741]

Regional matters

10.40 In light of SCU's statutory mandate for a focus on the North Coast region of the State, the committee explored the university's expansion into the Gold Coast and metropolitan areas, along with regional representation on Council.

Expansion into the Gold Coast and metropolitan areas

10.41 SCU staff participants expressed concern that in recent years the focus on the Northern Rivers area has increasingly shifted to the Gold Coast in Queensland, in part due to the 'benign neglect' of successive Vice-Chancellors.[742]

10.42 The committee asked Professor Carlin how the university reconciled its expansions on the Gold Coast and metropolitan areas with its statutory function of serving the North Coast of New South Wales.

10.43 Professor Carlin responded that the Gold Coast campus, located in Queensland, on the very border with New South Wales, is the university's largest campus in terms of student numbers and growth. He stated that around 60 per cent of students at that campus come from New South Wales, and the remainder from the southern part of the Gold Coast.[743] In doing so he pointed out that the records of parliamentary debate at the time the university was formed show an intention that the university serve not just Lismore but also northern New South Wales and into south-east Queensland.[744]

10.44 Asked how this sits with the university's metropolitan campuses, Professor Carlin advised that for some 30 years SCU has operated the Hotel School, now based in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth on the basis that those cities are the location or the large international chain hotels providing work experience and ultimately employment for SCU students. He further stated, 'What we've done is harness the existence of those campuses and then expanded those so that we're able to offer a broader array of courses in metropolitan markets. That's been good for us from the point of view of reach, presence and also the sustainability of the university'.[745]

741 Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 3.

742 *In camera* evidence, 13 July 2026, p 1, published by resolution of the committee.

743 Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 4.

744 Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 4.

745 Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 4.

Regional representation on Council

10.45 Regarding regional representation on Council, Professor Carlin advised that of the 14 Council members at present, each of the elected members (two academic staff, one professional staff and one student) are from the regions: two in the Ballina-Lismore-Byron area and two from the Gold Coast. Two of the five appointed members reside in the Northern Rivers area. The Chair of the Academic Board resides in Coffs Harbour. In addition, Council meetings rotate around the SCU campuses.[746]

Student voice

10.46 Asked about the university's mechanisms for student engagement in decision making beyond the one representative on Council, Professor Carlin attested to a purposeful and mentoring approach to student voice on council, and noted the Chancellor's efforts at practical engagement with students ahead of Council meetings. Additionally, he stated that Council meetings include a 'fairly unstructured and open' segment to which a student or staff member is invited 'to come and talk with Council about their experiences and allow Council to ask them any questions directly that they might wish to speak to [which] gives everyone an opportunity to hear something unmediated by me or, frankly, any of the other senior leaders'.[747]

Protections for staff

10.47 Given the extent of fear of reprisals expressed to the committee by SCU staff participants, the committee sought information on what protections exist for staff who criticise university direction. The Vice-Chancellor responded that 'Staff are protected through the intellectual and academic freedom provisions of the Southern Cross University Enterprise Agreement 2024, the University's Code of Conduct and Complaint Policy – Staff, as well as statutory public interest disclosure (whistleblower) protections'.[748]

Committee comment

10.48 The committee was troubled by many of the concerns raised by staff from SCU, as well as those of the NTEU, and considers that these concerns raise important questions regarding the effectiveness and culture of governance at the university. As we examined the evidence of staff participants and Professor Carlin, we observed a profound difference in their perspectives and satisfaction on the same matters.

746 Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 5.

747 Evidence, Professor Carlin, 13 July 2026, p 5.

748 Answers to supplementary questions, Professor Carlin, 27 July 2026, p 3.

10.49 Most tellingly, we were struck by the fear among staff participants of the potential repercussions for participating in the inquiry and for speaking up more broadly. They sought the shield of an *in camera* hearing, and attested to deep distrust and a climate of silence that prevents meaningful debate and critique of decisions. On this basis the committee sought from the university information on the formal protections for staff who criticise university direction. We take this opportunity to remind SCU leaders of these formal protections, and that any action to penalise an inquiry participant may be considered a contempt of Parliament. The committee takes these matters very seriously and we trust that the university does also.

10.50 The committee shares the concerns of some staff and the union about how the remuneration of the Vice-Chancellor is determined, and whether the current salary is commensurate with the size and performance of SCU compared to other universities. An increase of $240,000 over three years, and an annual package of over $1 million, for leadership of a small university that is falling rapidly in the rankings seems extraordinary, and as evidenced in the media article we have cited, does not pass the pub test. We note that the package determination method at SCU explicitly involves reference to Mercer benchmarking data that is comparative in nature. Based on this outcome we question the validity of such benchmarking and observe a lack of transparency in its application. The committee also sees deficiencies in a process where ultimately, the decision rests on subjective assessment by a sub-committee of the Council with no elected member representation. Notably, a very different and hostile approach was employed in respect of staff wages and conditions. Executive salaries are an issue across a number of universities, and in the final chapter we explore this issue further, questioning the validity of the benchmarking which apparently overvalues executive salaries across the sector and the transparency in how it is applied.

10.51 The committee further notes the cursory answer we received from the university about what due diligence Council undertook regarding governance and disclosure practice when appointing the Vice-Chancellor in 2020 and reappointing him in 2025, including consideration of the CPA Australia independent review relevant to his previous tenure there. Based on that response we were unable to understand how this information was taken into consideration. The committee considers that the university's dismissive and opaque answer was typical of many received during the inquiry and highlights the need for greater transparency in respect of executive appointments. We take up this issue in the final chapter.

10.52 The committee was disturbed by reports that academic staff at SCU feel that their work is neither valued nor respected, and inherently linked to this, by their references to an 'overwhelming' intensification of workload across both academic and professional staff in the last five to seven years. We were similarly concerned by participants' accounts that staff have very little time for research, despite this being critical to success in academia, crucial to quality teaching, and key to personal reward and wellbeing. The committee notes that the 60 percent teaching

– 30 percent research – ten per cent administration balance enshrined for SCU academic staff differs from the 40 – 40 – 20 model that operates in many other universities. In terms of the impacts of work intensification, staff gave compelling and sad accounts of low wellbeing and high attrition where people are leaving the jobs that they love and have trained many years for because they can no longer cope with a 'normal' load.

10.53 The committee heard that a key driver of work intensification has been the Southern Cross Model of teaching. We appreciate that the university needed to take steps to address persistently high rates of student attrition and low rates of academic success. We also acknowledge the data cited by Professor Carlin apparently indicating strong improvements on both dimensions, as well as the reported outcomes for equity groups including Indigenous and 'first in family' students. We further note staff participants' expressions of support for some aspects of the model and its potential.

10.54 However, we were again very concerned by the significant costs highlighted to us in terms of unsustainable workloads, inadequate resourcing and support, inflexibility, inequity between staff, non-remuneration for additional responsibilities, absence of workload credits, and impact on research time. It is patently clear that the model is contributing to staff feeling overwhelmed by work and believing that their work is neither valued nor respected. Again, this has a human and institutional toll in terms of low staff wellbeing and high attrition. A further critical institutional impact is that staff consider that the model is not sufficiently resourced or supported to be implemented in a pedagogically sound way. The committee considers that the Southern Cross Model must be reviewed – in close consultation with staff – to ensure pedagogical integrity, to address impacts on staff and to regain reasonableness of workload, equity, flexibility and adequacy of research time.

10.55 Finally, regarding regional representation on Council, the committee notes that while each of the present elected members reside in the catchment of the university, only two of its five appointed members do so. In the committee's view this suggests a double standard and points to a broader pattern among (non-elected) council members in other regional universities, along with wider deficiencies in representation across all universities. We address this in detail in the final chapter. In the case of SCU and other regional universities, the limited presence of regional perspectives among members who are appointed to serve in governance roles on the basis of their expertise cannot serve those universities well.

10.56 Having examined the governance of each of the universities around the state, the committee now turns to the larger picture of governance across the sector, taking up the themes of consultation, transparency and effectiveness in decision-making that were raised in our interim report, and which emerged as critical issues in the evidence gathered across every university.

Chapter 11 Governance

This inquiry has served as a powerful process of illuminating and examining the governance of every university in the state, as well as the legislative and other arrangements that provide for governance across the sector. A great deal of information has been brought to light for the purpose of transparency and accountability. As a result of our role, the committee has been able to gain and publish information from universities that they have not previously made public. We have also gathered the views of staff, students and other stakeholders about how they are being affected by university council and executive decisions, and how they believe the system must improve.

Throughout the second half of the inquiry, participants consistently raised concerns about the transparency, accountability and effectiveness of governance arrangements across the New South Wales university sector. The evidence gathered raised broader questions about the adequacy of existing governance structures, the increasing corporatisation of university management, and the extent to which current arrangements support effective accountability and stakeholder participation. This final chapter summarises the governance concerns identified throughout the inquiry, examines key aspects of contemporary governance arrangements, and concludes with the committee's findings and recommendations on how the NSW Government should act to reset statutory requirements for university governance and thereby reorient the entire sector towards its core mission of teaching, research and service to the broader community.

Recap of the interim report

11.1 The committee's interim report found that concerns about governance in the New South Wales university sector extend beyond individual decisions or institutions. Evidence pointed to systemic issues, including transparency deficits, growing corporatisation, increased reliance on consultants, fragmented accountability arrangements and a concerning disconnect between universities' public mission and contemporary management practices. The report also highlighted concerns regarding the erosion of collegial governance, declining stakeholder participation in decision-making, diminished consistency and weakened oversight in the context of institutional autonomy, and the significant impacts of these trends on staff and students. This chapter builds on those findings by examining these issues in greater detail.[749]

[749] Standing Committee on Social Issues, NSW Legislative Council, *New South Wales university sector - Interim report: University of Technology Sydney, University of Wollongong and consultants* (2026), pp xi-xii.

Governance concerns across the sector

11.2 A number of important observations emerged from the committee's review of 10 universities across both the interim report and this report, namely the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), the University of Wollongong (UOW), Macquarie University (MQ), the University of Sydney (USyd), the University of New England (UNE), the University of Newcastle (UON), Charles Sturt University (CSU), Western Sydney University (WSU), the University of New South Wales (UNSW) and Southern Cross University (SCU):

- university leaders launched major restructures, often with extensive support from consultants, then scaled them back after significant concern from staff and the public about both the reforms and the decision-making process
- restructures, workforce reductions and staff turnover are contributing to the loss of institutional knowledge, creating risks to universities' long-term effectiveness
- the representation of elected staff and student members on university councils has declined, while the presence and influence of externally appointed members with corporate backgrounds and limited university sector experience has increased
- decision-making power has become concentrated among a relatively small group of senior executives and university council members, reducing opportunities for accountability and scrutiny
- collegial governance processes that traditionally enabled academic and professional staff to contribute to institutional decision-making, and which have a statutory role in ensuring academic integrity and accreditation of courses, are being sidelined
- opportunities for meaningful staff engagement in decisions affecting teaching, research and workplace conditions are being reduced
- the entrenchment of corporate management practices is contributing to deteriorations in working conditions and staff wellbeing
- local management practices in schools and faculties are affecting workplace culture and staff wellbeing, as evidenced in fear of reprisal, work intensification, poor management of psychosocial risks and diminished trust in local leaders
- student consultation and representation in decision-making processes is not always adequate and effective
- consultation processes for staff and students are often perceived as occurring after key decisions have effectively been made, limiting stakeholders' ability to meaningfully influence outcomes and contributing to declining trust in decision-making processes

- financial and commercial considerations are being prioritised over educational, research and public-interest objectives
- poor transparency, together with cultures of secrecy and defensiveness, is contributing to declining trust in university governance
- major decisions are not always accompanied by clear explanations of their rationale, anticipated impacts or basis for decision-making
- potential and actual conflicts of interest among university council members point to a need for greater provision for governance integrity and independence
- universities are relying extensively on consultants, often with active ties to university council members, with limited transparency regarding costs, scope, procurement arrangements and value for money
- existing governance arrangements provide insufficient oversight, accountability and assurance of value for public investment.

11.3 These messages provide an important context for considering the evidence received throughout this inquiry into governance arrangements across the New South Wales university sector. While individual circumstances varied between institutions, the consistency of concerns raised by staff, students and other stakeholders pointed to a sector-wide picture and suggested that many of the issues identified are systemic in nature and in need of reform.[750]

Key considerations

11.4 The committee's findings and recommendations seek to address several key considerations arising from the evidence received during this inquiry and, ultimately, to strengthen public confidence in the governance of New South Wales universities. Before turning to its findings and recommendations, the committee outlines the key considerations that emerged from the evidence.

Universities' public purpose and the corporatisation of governance

11.5 The committee heard that governance concerns cannot be separated from the changing financial context of Australian higher education. Professor Emerita Raewyn Connell, USyd, and Honorary Professor Michael Fine, MQ,

[750] Evidence, Professor Ben Golder, Faculty of Law and Justice, University of New South Wales and National Tertiary Education Union University of New South Wales Branch Representative, 13 July 2026, p 19; Evidence, Professor Manuel B. Graeber, President, University of Sydney Association of Professors and Vice-President, Australian Association of University Professors, 13 July 2026, p 49.

observed in their joint submission that contemporary universities operate in a mixed funding model comprising both public funding and commercial revenue. They noted that Commonwealth Government funding and international student fee income together account for a substantial proportion of total university revenue and argued that increasing reliance on revenue generation has encouraged the adoption of corporate values and practices within university governance.[751]

11.6 The committee notes evidence that in the current policy and funding context, universities have become progressively less reliant on direct public funding and increasingly reliant on diversified income streams. Some inquiry participants argued that this has contributed to a perception that universities should operate similarly to private corporations. Others emphasised that universities remain public institutions created through legislation, supported by substantial public investment and entrusted with a broader civic mission of education, research and service to the community. These participants argued that governance arrangements should reflect this public purpose and that universities must be distinguished from purely commercial enterprises.[752]

11.7 The committee heard concerns that governance models increasingly focused on financial performance, growth and competition may fail to adequately recognise universities' public purpose as well as their obligations to students, staff and the wider community. Some participants argued that this shift has contributed to workforce restructures, reductions in collegial decision-making and the prioritisation of financial considerations over educational, research and public-interest objectives.[753]

Stakeholder participation and collegial governance

11.8 Professor Connell and Professor Fine also argued that decision-making affecting academic disciplines, staffing and institutional direction should not be undertaken through opaque, top-down processes modelled on corporate management structures. Instead, they advocated for more inclusive and transparent governance arrangements that enable meaningful participation by staff and students in decisions that affect university communities:

> University decision-making that affects whole fields of knowledge and the wellbeing of whole groups of staff should not be done in the manner of corporate management - top-down, opaque, and shaped by issues of profit

751 Submission 52, Professor Raewyn Connell and Professor Michael Fine, p 8.

752 Submission 52, Professor Raewyn Connell and Professor Michael Fine, p 8; Evidence, Associate Professor Elizabeth Temple, School of Psychology and National Tertiary Education Union University of New England Branch Representative, 29 April 2026, pp 47-48.

753 Submission 52, Professor Raewyn Connell and Professor Michael Fine, p 8.

and competition. Decision-making can be done by inclusive and equitable processes.[754]

11.9 Expanding on the importance of transparency and trust in governance, Professor Connell and Professor Fine further expressed, 'Governance in tertiary institutions requires transparency, not corporate secrecy and distrust. To foster trust rather than suspicion and fear, it's important that decision-making is shared and open'.[755]

Transparency and accountability in university expenditure and consultant engagement

11.10 Against this broader backdrop, in light of the evidence the committee has gathered, we consider that university expenditure, the use of consultants and the transparency of financial reporting cannot be separated from broader issues of accountability and governance across the sector. The committee's concerns are reinforced by recent findings of the NSW Auditor-General. In its *Universities 2025* financial audit report, the Audit Office reported 94 audit findings across the sector, most of which related to cyber security, governance oversight and payroll management. The Audit Office also found that repeat findings from previous audits continued to account for a significant proportion of audit issues, suggesting that known governance and control weaknesses had not been effectively addressed.[756]

11.11 The report also identified weaknesses in consultant engagement and procurement practices. Universities spent $139 million on consultant expenses in 2025, including $46.2 million paid collectively to two firms, Deloitte and KPMG. Additional information provided by the NSW Auditor-General showed that the five highest-paid consultants engaged by the university sector in 2025 were Deloitte ($26.46 million), KPMG ($19.71 million), KordaMentha ($3.79 million), McKinsey & Company ($2.25 million) and Ernst & Young ($1.82 million). The Auditor-General noted that these amounts reflected consultant expenses recorded by universities and did not include other possible payments for professional services or amounts directly capitalised by universities to assets. Nearly 24 per cent of consultancy engagements reviewed were directly sourced, a practice that the Auditor-General noted minimises opportunities for competition and value for money.[757]

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754 Submission 52, Professor Raewyn Connell and Professor Michael Fine, p 8.

755 Submission 52, Professor Raewyn Connell and Professor Michael Fine, p 8.

756 Audit Office of New South Wales, *Universities 2025* (11 June 2026), https://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/our-work/reports/universities-2025.

757 Audit Office of New South Wales, *Universities 2025* (11 June 2026); Answers to questions on notice, Mr Bola Oyetunji, New South Wales Auditor-General, 15 July 2026, p 1.

11.12 The committee also heard concerns about the way some universities communicate their financial circumstances to staff, students and the public. Emeritus Professor James Guthrie AM, Department of Accounting and Corporate Governance, MQ, raised questions about the presentation and interpretation of university financial information in the context of claims of financial crisis within the sector. Referring to UOW, Professor Guthrie argued that public commentary had conflated different financial concepts, including cash balances, operating surpluses and accounting write-downs. Professor Guthrie further noted that UOW had restated its accounts following NSW Auditor-General scrutiny in relation to a significant write-down.[758]

11.13 Related to this, the evidence gathered by the committee from numerous universities, very often via written answers to questions subsequently published on the inquiry website, has brought to light information on spending that would otherwise have remained hidden from public view.

11.14 In the committee's view, this evidence highlights the importance of clear and transparent financial reporting to support informed decision-making and public confidence in university governance. As outlined in the committee's interim report, concerns regarding transparency and accountability in university governance, including the use of consultants, disclosure practices and oversight arrangements, are not limited to individual institutions but reflect broader systemic issues across the sector.[759] The committee notes that the NSW Government has supported in principle our earlier recommendation to improve disclosure of consultant expenditure and is considering our other recommendations aimed at strengthening transparency, accountability and public confidence in university governance. These developments reinforce the importance of continued scrutiny and reform in this area.

Governance reform

11.15 The committee considers that funding and policy settings form an important part of the context in which contemporary governance arrangements have developed. While they do not fully explain the governance deficiencies identified throughout this inquiry, they provide important context for understanding the increasing corporatisation of university management, changes to decision-making structures and the governance concerns raised by staff, students and other stakeholders during this inquiry.

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[758] Evidence, Emeritus Professor James Guthrie AM, Department of Accounting and Corporate Governance, Macquarie University, 13 July 2026, pp 42- 43.

[759] Standing Committee on Social Issues, *New South Wales university sector - Interim report*, pp xi-xii.

11.16 Some inquiry participants emphasised the importance of ensuring that governance reforms are evidence-based, proportionate and responsive to the diversity of operating models across the university sector.

11.17 UNSW expressed the view that reforms should be informed by the findings of the Australian Government's Expert Council on University Governance and by lessons arising from recent NSW Auditor-General reports concerning controlled entities and procurement practices. UNSW further argued that reforms should be guided by principles of transparency, accountability and institutional autonomy, should be proportionate to identified risks, and should be developed in partnership with the higher education sector to minimise unintended administrative and compliance burdens.[760] The committee acknowledges these considerations and notes the substantial evidence received throughout the inquiry regarding concerns about transparency, accountability and stakeholder participation in university governance.

Are universities' governance structures fit for purpose?

11.18 The evidence gathered during this inquiry has raised fundamental questions about whether current governance arrangements remain fit for purpose and indeed capable of sustaining public confidence in the governance of New South Wales universities.

11.19 It is clear to the committee that existing governance structures are not consistently operating in a manner that promotes transparency, accountability, collegial decision-making, stakeholder participation or public confidence. Nor do the legislation and other arrangements provide sufficient safeguards to ensure that institutional decisions are subject to meaningful scrutiny, transparent justification and appropriate stakeholder engagement.

Finding 1

The governance structures for New South Wales universities are not fit for purpose, nor implemented in such a way as to enable public confidence.

Reorienting universities towards their public mission

11.20 The evidence before the committee demonstrates a recurring tension between universities' legislated public missions and increasingly corporate approaches to governance and management. Across multiple universities, staff, students and other stakeholders expressed concern that governance

[760] Submission 44, The University of New South Wales, p 5.

structures and decision-making processes have become progressively more focused on financial performance, growth and organisational restructuring, often at the expense of educational, research and public-interest objectives. Disciplines are being hollowed out, courses are being cut and expertise is being lost – at profound expense for current and future students, for staff and for the broader community and economy.

11.21 The committee heard evidence from participants at UTS, UOW, MQ, USyd, WSU, UNSW and other universities that collegial governance has been weakened, stakeholder participation diminished and major decisions concentrated among a relatively small group of senior executives and council members. The committee accepts that universities face significant financial and policy challenges. However, universities remain public institutions established by legislation and entrusted with crucial public functions. Governance arrangements must reflect these responsibilities and support decision-making that balances financial sustainability with universities' public mission.

Finding 2

In the context of financial and policy challenges, universities have swung too far towards corporatisation at the expense of their fundamental public mission of education, research and service to the broader community.

Finding 3

The ascendancy of corporate management of universities, and the decisions that have followed, are having a profound impact on universities' human capital and academic infrastructure, with significant consequences for staff, students, and the broader university community.

11.22 The committee therefore considers that broader reform of university enabling legislation is necessary to ensure that governance arrangements remain aligned with the educational, research and community purposes of New South Wales universities and continue to reflect contemporary expectations of transparency, accountability and public stewardship. As a key example, the committee notes evidence that UTS announced significant reductions in course offerings, including teacher education and public health programs, with the National Tertiary Education Union (NSW Division) arguing that such trends 'signal a shift from educational and civic priorities towards market-driven decision-making'.[761] Similarly, MQ decided to significantly reduce disciplines including sociology, ancient history and politics, launching concerns from inquiry participants that the university was hollowing out core humanities and social science fields that are central

[761] Submission 41, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division, p 3.

to its educational, research and public mission.[762] In addition, UOW disestablished disciplines and closed courses including in humanities, languages, marketing, business, mining, archaeology, geography, engineering and mathematics, with stakeholders highlighting the impact on educational choice and opportunities in that region, the institutional consequence of universities losing their ability to reproduce themselves intellectually, and the broader loss to society over time.[763]

11.23 The committee recommends that the New South Wales Government undertake a comprehensive review of university enabling Acts to ensure that the objects and functions of universities, the public purpose of higher education institutions, the responsibilities and duties of governing bodies, and requirements relating to accountability, transparency, collegial governance and stakeholder participation, remain fit for purpose and are being implemented effectively. The committee notes that a number of submissions to this inquiry provided detailed proposals for legislative amendment, including line-by-line consideration of existing university Acts. In particular, the University of Sydney Association of Professors argued that governance practices had become misaligned with the statutory mission of teaching, research and public service, and recommended amendments to the *University of Sydney Act 1989* to require closer alignment between university budgets and the institution's academic mission, together with enhanced transparency and public reporting regarding expenditure on research, teaching and student support.[764] The review should consider whether existing governance arrangements sufficiently ensure that governing bodies act consistently with the educational, research and public-interest purposes of universities, and whether the statutory duties of council members appropriately reflect the public mission of universities and the wellbeing, health and safety of university communities.

11.24 The committee notes that international examples demonstrate the value of embedding universities' public purpose explicitly within enabling

[762] Submission 41, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division, p 3; Standing Committee on Social Issues, *New South Wales university sector - Interim report*, pp 12 and 19-20; Submission 84, National Tertiary Education Union, Macquarie University Branch, p 26.

[763] Evidence, Dr Adam Lucas, Honorary Senior Fellow, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Wollongong, 17 December 2025, p 4; Evidence, Professor Fiona Probyn-Rapsey, former National Tertiary Education Union University of Wollongong Branch President, 17 December 2025, pp 11-12; Evidence, Dr Susan Engel, Associate Professor, Politics and International Studies, University of Wollongong and National Tertiary Education Union University of Wollongong Branch President; pp 11-12; Evidence, Mr Hanzel-Jude Pador, Outgoing President and Incoming General Secretary, Wollongong Undergraduate Students' Association, 17 December 2025, pp 18 -19; Evidence, Ms Caitlin Veigel, Outgoing General Secretary and Incoming President, Wollongong Undergraduate Students' Association, 17 December 2025, pp 18-19.

[764] Submission 9, University of Sydney Association of Professors, pp 4-5.

legislation and governance frameworks. For example, the University of California's public trust status links its governance responsibilities to serving the people of California, while the University of Bologna recognises an obligation to generate and disseminate knowledge for the benefit of individuals and society as a whole. Closer to home, the *Adelaide University Act 2023* requires that institution to serve the South Australian and Australian communities, and the public interest, by enriching the diverse cultural life of the community, elevating public awareness of educational and other developments, and championing free inquiry and public discourse.[765] These approaches highlight the value of legislative frameworks that clearly articulate public purpose, public benefit, transparency, accountability and stewardship responsibilities, and provide a clear foundation for governance decision-making.[766]

11.25 While governance arrangements must continue to reflect local circumstances, the committee considers that the review of New South Wales university enabling Acts should examine whether the objects, functions and governance obligations of universities are sufficiently directed towards public-interest outcomes, community confidence, management of conflicts of interest and transparent decision-making, as well as the public mission of teaching, research and service to the community. The committee notes that current legislation in New South Wales does not impose an explicit duty on university councils to act in the public interest or to demonstrate that major decisions advance educational and community objectives. We consider that this gap should be examined as part of the proposed review of university enabling legislation.

Recommendation 1

That the New South Wales Government undertake a comprehensive review of the enabling Acts of all New South Wales universities to reorient universities towards their public mission of education, research and service to the broader community. In doing so, it should have regard to each of the recommendations of this report and the submissions to this inquiry.

Staff and student wellbeing

11.26 The committee notes that concerns regarding staff wellbeing, psychosocial safety, workloads, organisational culture and student impacts emerged consistently throughout the inquiry. Evidence from MQ, USyd, UON, CSU, WSU and SCU demonstrated that governance decisions are having profound consequences for the working lives, health and wellbeing of staff, as well as

765 *Adelaide University Act 2023*, s 7(1).

766 Morgan Harrington, 'Campuses too cosy for comfort', *Newcastle Herald*, 3 August 2026, p 20.

for students' engagement and educational experiences. Time and again the committee heard from staff and their representatives attesting to the real, human impact of ill-considered or poorly justified decisions.

11.27 The committee was particularly concerned by evidence regarding deteriorating trust, increased workloads, stress and the psychosocial impacts associated with organisational change. We were further struck by the fear of reprisal among inquiry participants across many institutions including MQ, UON, SCU and UWS – especially regarding Deans, Heads of School and other senior faculty staff, who are entrusted with enormous power over their colleagues. While universities operate in complex financial and policy environments, the committee considers that governance arrangements must support, rather than diminish, the wellbeing of university communities. Punishment for speaking up or seeking improvements is unacceptable.

11.28 The committee also notes evidence that concerns about staff wellbeing are closely linked to organisational culture and perceptions of accountability within universities. One name-suppressed academic from UNSW made the case that:

> A complete cultural shift is needed within our universities, where unacceptable behaviours such as bullying, sexual harassment, academic misconduct, etc. are promptly investigated and appropriately addressed. At present, it appears that full Professors often face little accountability, with the standard response being that "appropriate action has been taken in accordance with policy", while the behaviour persists. Implementing transparent consequences and ensuring swift, appropriate action could help dismantle this toxic culture. In no commercial sector would individuals exhibiting such behaviour be allowed to retain positions of power and influence. University processes should be more closely aligned with standards common in other professional workplaces.[767]

11.29 The committee notes this evidence as illustrative of broader concerns across universities regarding workplace culture, accountability and confidence in institutional processes. Clearly, psychologically safe workplaces depend not only on appropriate policies and procedures, but also on staff having confidence that concerns will be investigated fairly, addressed promptly and resolved without fear of reprisal.

11.30 The committee considers that universities' obligations to staff and students should be more clearly reflected within university enabling legislation. This includes recognition that universities must provide safe, effective and accessible environments for students and staff, including people with disabilities, those from Aboriginal and culturally diverse

[767] Submission 74, Name suppressed, p 4.

backgrounds and other groups that may face barriers to participation.[768] The committee notes evidence from students at USyd that existing enabling legislation does not expressly require governing bodies to have regard to staff or student welfare when exercising their functions, despite governance decisions having significant consequences for wellbeing, educational experiences and workforce conditions.[769] Explicit recognition of these matters would reinforce the importance of staff and student wellbeing as a core governance consideration and help ensure that governing bodies take appropriate account of the foreseeable impacts of major decisions on university communities.

Finding 4

The enabling Acts of New South Wales universities do not recognise the wellbeing, health and safety of staff and students, including the importance of psychologically safe and accessible learning and working environments, as core considerations in university governance and decision-making.

Recommendation 2

That the New South Wales Government, as part of its review of university enabling Acts, consider amendments to the legislation to:

- require university governing bodies to have regard to the wellbeing, health and safety of staff and students when exercising their functions and making significant strategic, organisational and operational decisions
- promote psychologically safe workplaces and prevent bullying, harassment and other harmful workplace behaviours
- enhance the objects and functions of universities to explicitly recognise the provision of safe, effective and accessible learning environments for students
- enhance the statutory functions and duties of governing bodies to expressly include responsibility for promoting the wellbeing, welfare and educational experience of students, and the wellbeing, health and safety of staff, when making decisions affecting university communities.

[768] Evidence, Mr Andrew Shim, Director, State Our Rights Campaign, 13 July 2026, pp 34-35 and 38-39.

[769] Submission 76, Name suppressed, p 3.

Recommendation 3

That, in order to better protect the psychosocial safety of staff and address fears of reprisal, the New South Wales Government, as part of its review of the enabling Acts, consider how the legislation can provide checks and balances on the very significant power held by Heads of School, Deans and other senior leaders.

Independent oversight

11.31 Throughout the inquiry, the committee heard concerns regarding the adequacy of existing mechanisms by which the governance of universities can itself be overseen, and university councils and executive held accountable for their decisions. Evidence from UTS, UOW, MQ, UON, WSU and others revealed that very concerningly, major decisions involving restructures, workforce reductions, commercial activities and consultant engagements were often subject to limited external scrutiny.

11.32 Indeed, as noted at the start of this chapter, the parliamentary authority of this committee has enabled it to gather and publish information not previously available, including in respect of consultancy spending, wage theft remediation, executive salaries, other significant spending, governance practices and major institutional decision-making. The committee considers that the disclosure of this information demonstrates the value of independent external scrutiny and raises questions as to whether existing accountability mechanisms are sufficient to ensure transparency in the governance of New South Wales universities. The public interest is served by bringing this information to light.

11.33 Some inquiry participants advocated for stronger parliamentary oversight of universities. Dr Shumi Akhtar, Associate Professor in Governance, Financial Crime, Artificial Intelligence and Higher Education at the University of Sydney, and representative, Australian Association of University Professors, recommended that standing committees be provided with powers to 'compel witnesses, request documents and examine universities' operations' and encouraged 'regular hearings to review financial and governance performance'.[770] As noted in chapter 8, the Member for Blacktown, the Hon Stephen Bali MP, also suggested that regular parliamentary examinations of universities could strengthen transparency and accountability in relation to major institutional decisions.[771]

11.34 The committee notes the repeated findings of the NSW Auditor-General regarding governance controls, procurement practices and oversight

[770] Submission 23, Dr Shumi Akhtar, p 15.

[771] Evidence, Mr Stephen Bali MP, State Member for Blacktown, 12 June 2026, pp 36-40; Submission 126, Mr Stephen Bali MP, p 1.

deficiencies across the sector. While institutional autonomy remains important, the committee considers that greater external accountability is necessary where universities receive substantial public funding and perform significant public functions.[772]

Finding 5

There is insufficient external oversight of university governance across all New South Wales universities, despite them receiving substantial public funding and performing significant functions in the service of the public.

Recommendation 4

That the Legislative Council Portfolio Committee responsible for Tertiary Education:

- annually inquire into and report on universities' fulfilment of their responsibilities under their respective enabling Acts
- commence its annual inquiry following the lodgement of the universities' annual reports in NSW Parliament.

Appointment of senior office holders

11.35 Evidence to the committee highlighted the substantial influence exercised by Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors in shaping institutional culture, governance and strategic direction. The committee heard concerns regarding transparency in appointment and reappointment processes and the absence of clear mechanisms for addressing serious governance failures.

11.36 The committee considers that stronger accountability mechanisms would increase public confidence in the sector while preserving institutional autonomy. The committee heard how greater transparency in appointment processes can be achieved. For example, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) (NSW Division) recommended that legislation should require university councils to disclose the vetting processes for executive appointments and publish written justifications against codified public interest criteria. It further recommended that university councils be required by law to assess the governance record of executive candidates and to certify that institutional decisions on staffing and courses align with the public interest.[773] The committee considers that measures of this nature would strengthen accountability and public confidence in appointments to senior university leadership positions. Such measures would also help to

[772] Audit Office of New South Wales, *Universities 2025* (11 June 2026).

[773] Submission 41, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division, p 8.

ensure that those most worthy of the roles, and most capable of them, are selected. The recent events at UOW, currently being scrutinised by the Independent Commission Against Corruption (discussed further below), as well as the early reappointment of the Vice-Chancellor of UTS in 2024 with no public transparency,[774] have highlighted the need for mechanisms to deal quickly and effectively with governance failures.

11.37 Any legislative changes to the appointment of Vice-Chancellors must ensure there are transparent appointment and re-appointment processes, public disclosure of selection criteria and performance measures, and independent review before reappointment. Any term limit should be capable of extension only in exceptional circumstances and following a public explanation by the governing body.

11.38 Any removal of Vice-Chancellors and Chancellors must ensure procedural fairness, natural justice and clearly defined grounds such as serious misconduct, incapacity, material breach of duty or persistent failure against agreed performance measures.

Finding 6

Current legislative arrangements provide insufficient transparency regarding the appointment and reappointment of senior university office holders, and insufficient mechanisms for addressing serious governance failures.

Recommendation 5

That the New South Wales Government improve legislative provisions relating to the:

- transparency of appointments and reappointments of Vice-Chancellors and Chancellors, including safeguards such as limits on successive terms of appointments, to strengthen accountability and public confidence
- appointment, performance oversight, suspension and removal of Chancellors, Vice-Chancellors and university councillors, to ensure there are clear and effective accountability mechanisms where serious governance failures occur.

[774] Evidence, Professor Andrew Parfitt, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Technology Sydney, 7 November 2025, pp 18-19; Answers to questions on notice, Professor Andrew Parfitt, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Technology Sydney, 11 December 2025, p 2. See also: Standing Committee on Social Issues, *New South Wales university sector - Interim report*, pp 21-22.

Conflicts of interest and integrity

11.39 The committee heard evidence raising concerns regarding actual, potential and perceived conflicts of interest among council members and senior university leaders. Particularly troubling were allegations regarding conflicts of interest raised in relation to UOW and concerns regarding accountability and transparency raised across several universities.

11.40 These concerns were further underscored by the NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption's (ICAC) Operation Scandi investigation into governance practices at the UOW. As outlined in Chapter 1, ICAC examined allegations relating to the management of conflicts of interest associated with the appointment of the interim Vice-Chancellor and the engagement of external consultants, as well as allegations concerning recruitment processes and the awarding of work to external providers. While ICAC had not handed down its findings at the time this report was finalised, the matters under investigation highlight the significance of robust conflict-of-interest management, transparency and accountability mechanisms within university governance frameworks.[775]

11.41 The committee considers that robust conflict-of-interest frameworks and stronger protections for those raising governance concerns are necessary to maintain confidence in university governance.

Finding 7

There is insufficient transparency, prevention and management of potential conflicts of interest for university executives and staff, as well as for university council members.

Recommendation 6

That the New South Wales Government:

- require regular conflict of interest declarations by senior executives and staff exercising significant financial, procurement or decision-making responsibilities
- mandate New South Wales universities to maintain a centralised register of interests for all executives, staff and council members
- mandate New South Wales universities to maintain and publish a public register of interests for all university council members and university executives.

[775] NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption, *University of Wollongong - allegations concerning Chief Governance Officer and Secretary, Chancellor and staff (Operation Scandi)*, https://www.icac.nsw.gov.au/investigations/current-investigations/2026/university-of-wollongong---operation-scandi.

Finding 8

Staff can be reluctant to raise concerns regarding governance, management practices or organisational decision-making due to fears of adverse consequences, reprisal or damage to future career prospects.

Recommendation 7

That the New South Wales Government consider establishing an independent external mechanism through which university staff can confidentially raise governance, integrity and maladministration concerns, with appropriate whistleblower protections.

University councils

11.42 One of the most consistent themes throughout the inquiry concerned the composition, operation and effectiveness of university councils.

Representation

11.43 The committee heard compelling evidence that elected academic staff, professional staff and student representatives have become progressively underrepresented on governing bodies while externally appointed members with corporate and commercial backgrounds have become increasingly influential. Such concerns were raised at UTS, UOW, MQ, USyd, WSU and UNSW. Not surprisingly, many participants and the committee observed a direct line between the preponderance of corporate expertise on councils and the adoption of commercial priorities at the expense of public mission, and linked to this, the burgeoning use of consultants.

11.44 The committee does not accept that expertise resides only outside universities, nor that corporate expertise should be allowed to eclipse other competencies. Academic staff, professional staff, students and alumni possess significant governance, financial, professional and institutional expertise that should be reflected in university governing bodies. The committee notes that this approach is consistent with recent proposals to reform the *Australian National University Act 1991*, which include providing for a balance of elected and ministerially appointed members on the council, recognising the importance of both representative participation and external expertise.[776]

11.45 The committee is also concerned that some governance arrangements may overstate the extent of elected representation on university councils by

[776] Department of Education, *Strengthening the Australian National University Act 1991: Consultation Paper* (2026), p 4.

treating ex-officio positions as equivalent to directly elected representatives. In particular, the committee considers that office holders who sit on councils by virtue of another position, such as the Chair of an Academic Senate, perform an important governance role but should not be counted as elected representatives for the purpose of minimum elected representation requirements or membership of council committees and subcommittees.

11.46 Moreover, many inquiry participants called for greater representation as a democratic right, given their status as key stakeholders of the university community. It is self-evident that the public interest is well served by the democratisation of governance. The committee considers that representative governance is strengthened where academic staff, professional staff and students are directly elected by, and accountable to, the constituencies they represent.

11.47 The committee considers that stronger representative governance arrangements would improve accountability, transparency, institutional knowledge and public confidence.

11.48 The committee also heard persuasive evidence that representative governance involves not only the presence of elected staff and student members but also that university governing bodies should reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. Witnesses emphasised the importance of including people with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and individuals with diverse lived experiences within governance structures, as well as representation of local communities. The committee observed that regional communities need to be better represented on the councils of regional universities, not least among appointed members. For example, at CSU while each of the current elected members are regionally based, only two of five appointed members are.

11.49 Participants made a powerful case that greater representation on council of the communities that a university serves is also highly important in validating the aspirations of diverse students and communities. The committee considers that universities are strengthened when governing bodies draw on a broad range of perspectives and experiences that reflect the diversity of university communities and the wider public.[777]

11.50 A number of union participants highlighted that elected staff representatives are unreasonably constrained from consulting with their constituents about matters before council. The committee agrees that while some confidentiality is reasonable, representatives should not be barred from consulting with those they represent.

[777] Evidence, Professor Chris Moran, Vice-Chancellor, University of New England, 29 April 2026, p 38; Evidence, Mr Shim, 13 July 2026, pp 34-35 and 38-39.

Finding 9

The governance arrangements established under New South Wales university enabling Acts do not sufficiently support broad and balanced representation on university councils.

Recommendation 8

That the New South Wales Government amend the enabling Acts for all New South Wales universities to strengthen representative governance by:

- increasing minimum requirements for 50 per cent elected academic staff, professional staff and student representation on university councils
- recognising that relevant governance, financial and institutional expertise may be drawn from within the university community as well as from external appointees
- achieving greater diversity in university council membership, including through the appointment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disabilities and individuals from other underrepresented groups, as well as from local communities, whose lived experience can contribute to effective governance and public accountability
- requiring elected representatives to be represented on all standing council committees and subcommittees
- requiring elected representatives to constitute a majority on all standing council committees and subcommittees that deal with:
  - appointments to senior leadership positions
  - appointments to university councils
  - the remuneration of senior executives
- ensuring elected representatives are able to seek advice and input from the constituencies they represent in performing their governance responsibilities
- clarifying that, for the purposes of minimum elected representation requirements and membership of council committees and subcommittees, ex-officio members are not to be counted as elected representatives
- requiring university enabling Acts to provide, where practicable, for at least one graduate or alumni representative on each governing body, elected by that institution's alumni
- requiring the president, or equivalent position, of the student representative council to be an ex-officio member of the university council in addition to any other elected student representatives.

Transparency in appointments

11.51 The committee heard concerns from a range of participants that the processes used to appoint university council members are often opaque and difficult to scrutinise. While universities commonly emphasise the importance of appointing members with appropriate skills and experience, there is limited public information about how appointment decisions are made, the criteria applied, or the extent to which appointees satisfy identified governance needs.[778]

11.52 The committee considers that greater transparency in appointment processes would strengthen public confidence in university governance and provide assurance that appointments are being made on merit and in the best interests of the institution and the wider community. Increased disclosure of the skills and experience sought by councils, together with greater independent oversight of appointment processes, would improve accountability while preserving universities' ability to attract suitably qualified members.

Finding 10

There is insufficient transparency in the direct appointment of university council members, including regarding appointees' skills and experience, and the extent to which they meet the requirements of the role. There is also insufficient independent scrutiny of university council appointment processes, thus limiting public accountability and confidence in appointment decisions.

Recommendation 9

That, in order to improve effectiveness and transparency in university council appointments, the New South Wales Government:

- consider establishing an independent review of university council appointment processes that examines options to strengthen public accountability and external oversight of appointments, including consideration of alternative governance models used in Australian and international universities
- seek to amend the enabling Acts for all New South Wales universities to require them to develop, maintain and publish a skills matrix for university council appointments, including an assessment of appointed members against the skills matrix in their annual reports.

[778] Evidence, Dr Tim Connor, Senior Lecturer, School of Law and Justice, University of Newcastle, 30 April 2026, p 19; Evidence, Mr Claudio Dionigi, Faculty Librarian, Charles Sturt University, 30 April 2026, p 42.

Governance capability of members

11.53 The committee also heard evidence that effective governance depends not only on who serves on university councils but whether members are adequately equipped to discharge their responsibilities.[779] University governing bodies operate within a complex environment that requires an understanding of higher education regulation, public accountability obligations, financial stewardship and the distinctive mission of universities.

11.54 While many council members bring substantial professional experience to their roles, the committee notes that there is no consistent approach across the sector for induction and ongoing governance development. The committee considers that structured and continuing training would assist all council members to make informed decisions, manage conflicts of interest, engage effectively with stakeholders and appropriately balance financial considerations with universities' teaching, research and public interest functions.

Finding 11

The effectiveness of university councils depends not only on their composition and appointment processes but also on the governance capability of their members. There is no consistent requirement across New South Wales universities for induction and ongoing governance training for council members.

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[779] Submission 128, Associate Professor Mourad Tayebi, p 5; Evidence, Associate Professor Mourad Tayebi, Biomedical Sciences (Neuroscience) and Member of Academic Senate, Western Sydney University, 12 June 2026, p 24; Evidence, Mr Bali MP, 12 June 2026, p 40.

Recommendation 10

That the New South Wales Government require universities to provide induction and ongoing specific governance training for university council members beyond the existing practice of completing the Australian Institute of Company Directors course, including training on:

- the public mission of universities
- conflicts of interest
- higher education regulation
- stakeholder engagement
- the duties and obligations imposed on council members under university enabling legislation
- practical guidance on how council members are to discharge their statutory duties and responsibilities in decision-making, including balancing financial considerations with the educational, research and public interest functions of universities.

Independent governance support structure

11.55 Evidence from a number of universities raised concerns about the relationship between university management and governing bodies, including councils, senates and boards. Witnesses highlighted that governing bodies can become reliant on information and advice provided by management and, as a consequence, may be less able to critically interrogate significant proposals and decisions. Some evidence suggested that governing bodies can, at times, operate as a 'rubber stamp' for management decisions rather than testing information, exploring options and exercising the independent scrutiny expected of them.[780] This stands in contrast to the 'genuine inquisitiveness' highlighted by the Australian Government's Expert Council on University Governance as one aspect enhanced leadership and culture that is required in universities' governing bodies. The Expert Council's report called on governing bodies, led by Chancellors, to 'proactively demonstrate a genuine inquisitiveness around performance and improvement' as an important means of rebuilding trust.[781] The importance of this approach has been reinforced by the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO), which in its 2026 audit of Australian National University financial management cited the Expert Council's call for genuine inquisitiveness, further noting that ANAO performance audits of public sector boards have consistently found that

[780] Evidence, Dr Connor, 30 April 2026, p 22.

[781] Expert Council on University Governance, *Final Report and Principles* (2025), p 27.

board members must actively question and challenge management in the exercise of their governance responsibilities.[782]

11.56 Evidence regarding UTS illustrated concerns that governing bodies may not always be responsive to new information or alternative viewpoints once a preferred course of action has been established.[783] A further example of such a cultural disinclination towards genuine inquisitiveness was the advice in the USyd *Senate Fellows Role Statement* that fellows should regard committees of the Senate and the Vice-Chancellor as their principal sources of information and advice, and seek additional information on any matter from the Vice-Chancellor in the first instance.[784]

11.57 The committee considers that these concerns raise questions about whether existing governance structures provide governing body members with sufficient support to independently evaluate management proposals and test the adequacy of the information presented to them.

11.58 While training and professional development can assist members to discharge their responsibilities, the committee considers that training alone is insufficient. Governing body members must also have access to independent sources of advice and support and be able to seek advice on matters before their council independent of university management, particularly where significant strategic, financial or organisational decisions are under consideration. The committee therefore sees merit in establishing a dedicated council secretariat function within each university that is structurally independent of university management and accountable directly to the governing body. Such a secretariat could provide professional support, governance expertise and independent advice, strengthening the ability of members to scrutinise management proposals and enhancing the effectiveness of university governance arrangements. To preserve that independence, the secretariat should not be appointed, directed or supervised by university management or by ex-officio members of the governing body. The committee considers that an independent secretariat would help ensure that governing body members are able to obtain objective governance advice and support independent of management perspectives.

11.59 The committee also notes that professional networks in other sectors provide an important mechanism for sharing expertise, developing consistent practice, identifying emerging governance risks and reducing

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782 Australian National Audit Office, *Australian National University Financial Management* (4 June 2026), https://www.anao.gov.au/work/other/australian-national-university-financial-management. See para 1.7 and Box 2.

783 Submission 70, Go6, p 3; Evidence, Professor Stephen Taylor, Distinguished Professor of Accounting, University of Technology Sydney and author of the UTS Alternative Plan, 7 November 2025, p 31.

784 Submission 50, The University of Sydney, p 61.

institutional isolation. A sector-wide network of Independent Council Secretariats would support collaboration, professional development, benchmarking and the dissemination of best practice governance approaches. Similar arrangements among electoral commissions and other independent statutory oversight bodies demonstrate the value of structured professional collaboration while maintaining institutional independence. The committee considers that a network of independent council secretariats would strengthen governance capability across the university sector and support more effective and informed decision-making by university councils. Such a network would also promote greater consistency in governance practices and support the continuous improvement of governing body performance across the sector.

Finding 12

University councils, senates and boards lack access to an independent governance support function with the authority, capability and professional standards necessary to support effective oversight of management decisions.

Recommendation 11

That the New South Wales Government amend the enabling legislation for each New South Wales university to require the establishment of an independent university council secretariat at each university, accountable to and operating under the direction of the university's governing body rather than university management. Each independent university council secretariat would provide professional governance support, advice and administrative services to the members of the governing body and be subject to a legislated code of conduct and minimum professional standards.

Recommendation 12

That the Department of Education appoint, through an open and merit-based process, the initial Head of the independent university council secretariat to be established at each university. All other members of each secretariat are to be employed by the Head of that secretariat.

Recommendation 13

That the New South Wales Government establish and support a network of independent university council secretariats across New South Wales universities to enable sharing of best practice across the sector.

Enhancing transparency

11.60 The committee repeatedly heard that formal compliance with governance and reporting requirements was not always accompanied by meaningful transparency. Staff, students and other stakeholders across multiple universities described difficulties in understanding how major decisions were made, what information was relied upon, how competing options were assessed, and whether their views had been genuinely considered.

11.61 Evidence from USyd, CSU, WSU, MQ and other universities suggested that transparency is often approached as a matter of procedural compliance rather than as a broader commitment to openness, accountability and public trust. Linked to this, the committee heard concerns regarding limited visibility of council deliberations and decisions, insufficient explanations for major organisational decisions, inconsistent publication of council information and a lack of accessible information about governance processes.

Transparency in council decision making

11.62 The committee considers that universities, as publicly funded institutions established under legislation, should operate with a high degree of transparency. Staff, students and the wider public are entitled to be informed of the decisions that significantly affect teaching, research, employment and the operation of university communities, and to understand the reasons for such decisions.

11.63 In this regard, the committee observed that numerous universities – UTS, UOW, UON, CSU, WSU and MQ – all provided inadequate justification for their large-scale restructures. Each appeared to overstate their financial crises and correspondingly, to overreach in their restructures and cuts to staff, at the ultimate expense of their institutional and public purpose.

11.64 The committee is also concerned by the use of 'commercial-in-confidence' provisions to withhold information about council deliberations and decisions. While we acknowledge that limited confidentiality may be necessary in certain circumstances, an overly broad application of commercial-in-confidence claims masks the rationale for significant decisions, impedes appropriate public scrutiny and ultimately, undermines trust. Given that universities are established under legislation and funded substantially through public resources, the committee considers that claims of commercial sensitivity should not prevent the disclosure of information necessary to assess whether universities are acting consistently with their legislative objects, public purpose and governance obligations.

11.65 The committee notes that greater transparency is increasingly expected across the higher education sector, with recent reforms and policy developments, including at the Commonwealth level, signalling a stronger emphasis on the public availability of governance information, such as council meeting minutes. The committee therefore considers that greater transparency in council decision-making would strengthen accountability and public confidence in university governance.

Finding 13

There is insufficient transparency regarding university council decisions, including the financial basis for their decisions, despite their significant impacts on staff and students.

Recommendation 14

That, to improve transparency in university council decision making, the New South Wales Government:

- require New South Wales universities to publish the minutes of university council meetings, including the rationale for major decisions affecting staff and students, subject to appropriate confidentiality requirements
- review the operation of commercial-in-confidence provisions to ensure they are used only where necessary and do not prevent disclosure of matters of significant public interest
- require universities not to rely on adjusted financial measures in the public justification of restructures, budget decisions and other significant organisational changes where those measures do not accord with audited financial statements, and to disclose any material differences between adjusted and audited results
- consider further measures to require greater transparency about, and justification of, the financial rationale for restructures and other significant decisions.

Transparency and accountability in executive decision-making

11.66 Running parallel to the need for greater transparency in university council decision- making is the same need in respect of executive decision making. Of great concern to the committee was that during the course of the inquiry we encountered multiple examples of university executives making decisions against the advice of experts or proper process, and of very significant levels of authority on the part of executive managers.

11.67 The circumstances of Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh's involuntary redundancy at MQ was a notable example of how management decisions can be maintained contrary to the findings of expert review processes established to assess whether institutional procedures have been applied fairly and properly. [785] In the committee's view this matter raised broader questions about institutions' respect for the integrity of such mechanisms when final decision-making authority remains concentrated within senior management.

11.68 Additionally, as noted in chapter 9, UNSW paid Deloitte substantial funds to identify how its systemic wage theft had occurred and to advise how it should be remedied. Having obtained advice in 2018, university management chose not to implement it.[786]

11.69 A further example was reflected in the resistance of the previous Vice-Chancellor of UNE to an evidence-based academic workload model developed by a committee comprising three union staff representatives, three staff-elected representatives and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor – Research, as mandated by the enterprise bargaining agreement. Following a dispute in the Fair Work Commission, the model was adopted.[787]

11.70 As a further example of the very significant power that executives may exercise under current governance arrangements, Professor Leon of CSU advised the committee that the CSU Council maintains a delegated threshold of $10 million and does not authorise individual contracts below that amount.[788]

11.71 In the committee's view, there is a significant need to enhance transparency and accountability in respect of executive decision making across the sector.

Recommendation 15

That the New South Wales Government improve legislative provisions for transparency and accountability in university executive decision-making.

[785] Correspondence from Chair to Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor and President, Macquarie University, 18 June 2026, p 2; Correspondence from Chair to Professor Dowton, 6 July 2026, p 1.

[786] Fair Work Ombudsman v University of New South Wales [2025] FedCFamC2G 2151, 24 December 2025, paras 63-66.

[787] Evidence, Associate Professor Temple, 29 April 2026, p 45; Answers to questions on notice, Associate Professor Temple, 22 May 2026, p 1.

[788] Answers to questions on notice, Professor Renée Leon, Vice-Chancellor and President, Charles Sturt University, 3 July 2026, p 20.

Transparency in executive remuneration

11.72 The committee heard concerns at SCU, CSU, WSU and other universities regarding the transparency of executive remuneration arrangements. While executive remuneration is ultimately a matter for university governing bodies, the committee considers that stakeholders are entitled to understand the basis upon which remuneration decisions are made, as universities are publicly funded institutions.

11.73 The committee notes that notwithstanding that current benchmarks provide comparison with CEOs of public sector and not-for-profit organisations, similar concerns were examined by the Australian Senate's Education and Employment Legislation Committee in its inquiry into the quality of governance at Australian higher education providers. That committee observed that concerns regarding executive remuneration were often linked not only to remuneration levels, but also to limited transparency and public confidence in the processes by which remuneration decisions are made. The Senate committee concluded that a lack of trust in remuneration processes was at the centre of the issue and supported the development of a more transparent framework for determining Vice-Chancellors' and senior executives' remuneration.[789]

11.74 The committee is concerned that remuneration decisions are sometimes determined through processes that are not readily understood by staff, students or the public. We also note concerns regarding the use of benchmarking in determining Vice-Chancellors' and senior executives' remuneration. While benchmarking may provide a point of comparison, the committee is concerned that current remuneration frameworks place upward pressure on executive salaries without sufficient regard to institutional size, performance, public expectations or fairness. As discussed in chapter 10, the package of the Vice-Chancellor of SCU, the smallest university in the state, is a case in point that raises broader questions about the validity of the benchmarks used, as well as transparency in applying them.

11.75 Moreover, the committee is concerned that executive salaries are overvalued across the entire sector. The over-inflation of university executive salaries is directly linked to the corporatisation and commercialisation of the sector and is out of step with community expectations. How can the Vice-Chancellor of a university earn more than the Premier or Prime Minister? Indeed, by comparison, the Prime Minister earned $622,050 last year, while the highest earning Vice-Chancellor in Australia was paid between $1.48 and $1.49 million, more than the Vice-

[789] Education and Employment Legislation Committee, Australian Senate, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers – final report* (2025), pp 116-117.

Chancellors of Oxford and Cambridge.[790] Again this suggests the benchmarks being applied are inherently flawed, and benchmarking against a cohort in which remuneration levels are already elevated cannot provide an optimal basis for determining remuneration outcomes at publicly funded institutions. The committee considers that remuneration decisions should be supported by clear evidence of performance and value, rather than relying principally on comparisons with executive salaries elsewhere in the sector.

11.76 In the committee's view, greater transparency regarding remuneration frameworks, performance measures and associated decision-making would strengthen accountability and trust in university governance. The committee also considers that there is merit in examining whether additional guidance or independent oversight of remuneration-setting processes would assist in improving public confidence.

11.77 Relatedly, the committee was very concerned by the adequacy of disclosures regarding a residential loan provided by MQ to its Vice-Chancellor. While the existence of the loan was disclosed in the university's annual reports, limited public information was available regarding matters such as the terms of the arrangement, interest rate, approval process, governance oversight and associated remuneration considerations. The committee's efforts to obtain further information highlighted the potential for significant executive benefits or related-party arrangements to be only partially transparent, notwithstanding their relevance to public confidence in university governance. The committee considers that greater disclosure of the basis, terms and oversight of such arrangements are warranted to strengthen accountability and trust in executive remuneration processes.

Finding 14

There is insufficient transparency in the processes used to determine executive remuneration at New South Wales universities.

790 Maani Truu, 'The university executives paid more than the prime minister', *Australian Financial Review*, 27 July 2026, https://www.afr.com/policy/health-and-education/the-university-executives-paid-more-than-the-prime-minister-20260720-p60grw.

Recommendation 16

That the New South Wales Government:

- require universities to disclose in their annual reports in a standardised format:
  - the process and considerations by which remuneration for their Vice-Chancellors and senior executives is determined, including performance measures, key performance indicators, bonuses, incentive arrangements, allowances, loan arrangements, reimbursements and other material non-salary benefits
  - the performance against the key performance indicators and performance measures used to assess Vice-Chancellors and senior executives
  - whether remuneration decisions were informed by external benchmarking, remuneration frameworks, independent advice, details of the methodology used, or other comparative assessment processes.
- require the detailed rationale for any review or adjustment of remuneration for Vice-Chancellors and senior executives to be published in the university council minutes
- consider whether an independent remuneration framework or advisory mechanism would improve transparency, consistency and public confidence in the determination of remuneration for Vice-Chancellors and senior executives.

Transparency in consultant expenditure

11.78 One of the most consistent concerns raised throughout the inquiry related to universities' use of consultants. Evidence from UTS, UOW, USyd, WSU and UNSW appeared to substantiate participants' concerns regarding the scale of consultant expenditure, the influence of consultants on major organisational decisions, and the limited availability of information regarding procurement processes, deliverables and value for money.

11.79 The committee accepts that universities may legitimately engage external expertise in some circumstances. However, we are concerned that consultant involvement has, at times, extended beyond specialist advisory functions and into areas traditionally performed by university staff and governance bodies. Additionally, there are legitimate questions as to whether all consultant services are required or provide value for money. Other Legislative Council inquiries have found evidence of predatory practices on the part of consultants, and the university sector has been identified as one actively targeted for business by consulting firms.

11.80 The committee is also concerned that existing reporting arrangements make it difficult to determine the true extent of consultant involvement in institutional decision-making.

11.81 The committee notes that the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee also identified concerns regarding consultant expenditure in the higher education sector and recommended greater public disclosure of consultancy spending, including the purpose of consultancy engagements and the extent to which the relevant capability existed within the institution.[791] The committee considers that our own inquiry has demonstrated a need to go further by improving transparency not only regarding expenditure, but also regarding procurement processes, decision-making and outcomes.

11.82 The committee considers that stronger reporting requirements are necessary to ensure transparency regarding consultancy expenditure, to improve accountability for procurement decisions and to enable stakeholders to assess whether public resources are being used effectively.

Finding 15

There is insufficient transparency regarding the purpose, justification and outcomes of consultancy expenditure by New South Wales universities.

Recommendation 17

That, to enable greater transparency in consultancy appointments in the university sector, the New South Wales Government:

- require universities to disclose in their annual reports details of major consultancy expenditures, including their purpose, justification, procurement process and, where practicable, the outcomes achieved
- develop a mandatory procurement and reporting guideline for consultancy engagements that includes requirements to seek competitive tenders unless an exemption applies, to publish reasons for direct procurement, and for greater public disclosure of consultancy contracts.

Transparency and consent in use of data

11.83 The committee was further concerned by evidence regarding the operation of Nous Group's UniForum benchmarking program. While Nous Group emphasised that participating universities retain ownership of their own

[791] Education and Employment Legislation Committee, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers – Final report*, p 115.

data, evidence established that sector-wide benchmarking products are dependent upon the aggregation of data contributed by participating institutions. The committee notes that this data includes information derived from service effectiveness surveys of academic and professional staff from workforce allocation information regarding how staff time is spent across university functions.[792]

11.84 Evidence provided to the committee indicated that decisions regarding participation in benchmarking programs, access to results and the sharing of information with third parties are made by university executives and administrators.[793] The committee is concerned that staff and students whose information contributes to these datasets may have limited visibility of, or control over, how their information is subsequently aggregated, benchmarked and used by private organisations. The committee considers that there is an important distinction between institutional consent provided by a university and informed consent provided by the individuals whose information contributes to benchmarking products.

11.85 The committee also notes evidence that the methodologies and statistical models underpinning UniForum are proprietary and not publicly available, notwithstanding that benchmarking outputs may inform significant organisational decisions including restructures, staffing arrangements and service delivery models. The committee further notes evidence questioning the extent to which UniForum's methodologies can be independently scrutinised or validated by universities and external stakeholders, given that the underlying formulas and benchmarking methods are not publicly disclosed and remain the intellectual property of Nous Data Insights. The committee acknowledges concerns that the absence of independent external review or audit may limit the ability of universities, staff and policymakers to assess the rigour, reliability and appropriateness of benchmarking outputs relied upon in significant organisational decision-making.[794] Significantly, however, UniForum results are being utilised by universities in workforce planning, restructuring and workforce reduction decisions.[795] While benchmarking may provide useful comparative information, the committee considers that greater transparency, accountability and safeguards are required where university-generated data is shared with private third parties and incorporated into products that derive ongoing commercial value from the participation of universities across the sector.[796]

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792 Evidence, Mr Timothy Orton, Managing Principal and Chief Executive Officer, Nous Group, 18 February 2026, pp 16-18.

793 Evidence, Mr Orton, 18 February 2026, p 17; Answers to questions on notice, Nous Group, 12 March 2026, p 4.

794 Submission 137, Dr Tim McLellan and Dr V Chitra, pp 4-5.

795 Answers to questions on notice, Nous Group, 12 March 2026, pp 13-14.

796 Evidence, Mr Orton, 18 February 2026, p 26.

Finding 16

There is insufficient transparency, accountability and informed consent regarding the sharing of university staff and student data with third-party organisations for benchmarking, analytics and comparative performance purposes.

Recommendation 18

That the New South Wales Government prohibit New South Wales universities from providing staff or student data to private third-party organisations for sector-wide benchmarking, analytics or comparative performance products unless the explicit informed consent of affected staff and students has first been obtained, in line with the National Health and Medical Research Council's Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. In doing so, the Government should require universities to:

- publicly disclose all third-party benchmarking and analytics arrangements involving staff or student data
- clearly inform staff and students how their data will be collected, used, shared, retained and incorporated into benchmarking products
- provide meaningful opportunities for staff and students to opt out of secondary uses of their data without adverse consequences
- publish details of governance arrangements applying to benchmarking programs, including the categories of data shared, participating organisations and the purposes for which benchmarking outputs may be used
- ensure independent oversight of benchmarking arrangements that are relied upon in significant decisions relating to organisational restructuring, workload allocation, staffing levels or service delivery.

Transparency for university-controlled entities

11.86 Evidence received regarding UOW and its associated commercial activities, as documented in our interim report, highlighted the significant governance and accountability challenges that can arise where substantial operations are conducted through controlled entities and related bodies.

11.87 While universities may legitimately engage in commercial activities that support their educational and research objectives, the committee considers that public accountability must continue to apply regardless of the organisational structure through which those activities are undertaken. Staff, students, Parliament and the public should be able to understand how

controlled entities operate, how risks are managed and how those activities contribute to universities' public missions.

Finding 17

There is insufficient transparency regarding the activities, governance and financial performance of university-controlled entities and commercial operations.

Recommendation 19

That the New South Wales Government strengthen public reporting requirements for university-controlled entities and commercial operations, including disclosure of governance arrangements, financial performance, key risks and their contribution to the university's public mission. Reporting requirements should apply on a mandatory basis and include sufficient detail to enable the Parliament, staff, students and the public to understand the activities and performance of university-controlled entities and their relationship to the university's statutory objects and functions.

Transparency in financial accounting

11.88 The committee heard widespread concerns regarding the complexity of university financial reporting and the difficulties faced by staff, students and the public in understanding universities' financial positions. Evidence from UOW, UON and other universities raised questions regarding the presentation of financial information, the use of non-statutory financial measures, and the extent to which financial reporting practices may influence perceptions of financial pressure or organisational necessity.

11.89 The committee acknowledges that university finances are complex and that reporting requirements are governed by established accounting standards. However, the committee considers that greater transparency and consistency are necessary, not least where financial information is used to justify major organisational decisions affecting staff, students and academic programs. Universities should ensure that financial reporting is sufficiently accessible and explanatory to enable informed public scrutiny and debate.

Finding 18

Variations in accounting presentation and disclosure practices make it difficult for staff, students and the public to understand the financial position of universities and assess claims regarding financial pressures.

Recommendation 20

That the New South Wales Government, in consultation with NSW Treasury and relevant regulators, establish enhanced reporting requirements for university annual reports, including explanatory disclosure of significant accounting treatments, contingent labour expenditure, consultancy expenditure, asset classifications and material changes in financial reporting practices. These requirements should promote greater consistency and comparability between universities and include sufficient explanatory information to allow non-specialist readers to understand the impact of significant accounting treatments and financial reporting decisions.

Genuine consultation with staff and students

11.90 One of the most consistent themes encountered throughout the inquiry was dissatisfaction with consultation processes within universities. Evidence from MQ, USyd, UON, CSU, WSU, UNSW and other universities suggested a widespread perception that consultation occurs after key decisions have effectively been made and that opportunities to influence outcomes are limited.

11.91 The committee heard repeatedly that consultation is frequently experienced as a procedural exercise designed to satisfy formal requirements rather than a genuine opportunity for participation in decision-making. Staff, students and representative bodies all expressed a desire not merely to be informed of decisions, but to contribute meaningfully to their development. Stakeholders also want to be informed of the outcomes of the decisions upon which they are consulted, including the reasons why their views were not adopted.

11.92 As noted previously in relation to UON and USyd, meaningful consultation requires more than opportunities to comment on substantially developed proposals. Effective consultation should occur early, provide genuine opportunities to influence decisions and demonstrate how stakeholder feedback has informed outcomes. The committee considers that improvements in consultation practices are essential to restoring trust and confidence in university governance.

Finding 19

Consultation processes within New South Wales universities are often undertaken after key decisions have effectively been made, limiting opportunities for meaningful staff and student participation in decision-making.

Recommendation 21

That, to bring about more genuine consultation within all universities, the New South Wales Government consider:

- amending university enabling Acts to require universities to demonstrate how staff and student feedback has informed major organisational change proposals before decisions are finalised
- additional mechanisms to enhance cultural and practical change in this regard including requirements to:
  - publish consultation outcomes, including responses to key stakeholder concerns and explanations of how feedback was incorporated into final decisions
  - demonstrate that consultation occurred before decisions were substantially settled
  - provide reasons where stakeholder feedback was not adopted.

Strengthening collegial governance

11.93 Evidence in respect of every single university demonstrated widespread concern regarding the weakening of collegial governance within universities. Across multiple institutions, staff expressed concern that academic expertise, professional knowledge and stakeholder perspectives are becoming increasingly marginalised in favour of more centralised executive and council decision-making. This is despite their profound investment in the success of their institution in fulfilling its mission of teaching, research and public service, as well as their responsibility in ensuring academic integrity.

11.94 The committee heard concerns regarding changes to academic boards and equivalent governance bodies, reductions in elected representation, limitations on the scope of collegial decision-making processes and the concentration of authority within executive leadership structures. At the same time, the committee heard positive evidence from UNE regarding the role that innovative participatory mechanisms can play in rebuilding trust and strengthening engagement.

11.95 The committee notes the evidence received regarding UNE's Convocation, a statutory body comprising staff, former staff, graduates, council members and former council members. As noted in chapter 5, several other universities also have this forum built into their enabling Acts, however UNE is the only institution in which it is active. Witnesses described Convocation as a forum for collegial governance and democratic participation, enabling members of the university community to debate governance matters and make formal proposals to the university council. The committee heard that

Convocation was revived following concerns regarding governance at UNE and has since provided a structured mechanism through which staff, alumni and other members of the university community can participate in discussions about governance and accountability. While UNE participants sought greater recognition for and responsiveness to that body, the committee considers that the UNE experience highlights the potential value of structured mechanisms that facilitate meaningful participation by stakeholders in university governance and decision-making.[797]

11.96 Several inquiry participants drew attention to governance arrangements at internationally recognised universities such as Oxford and Cambridge. These institutions incorporate substantial elected representation, meaningful alumni participation and, in some cases, separate scrutiny bodies that provide additional oversight of governing councils. The committee also notes that other world-leading universities have adopted different governance models that incorporate strong elements of representative and collegial oversight. For example, Harvard University operates through two governing bodies: the Harvard Corporation, which exercises fiduciary responsibilities, and the elected Board of Overseers, comprising alumni and tasked with providing independent oversight, external review and strategic counsel to the university's leadership. The committee does not suggest that any single international model should be adopted in New South Wales. However, these examples demonstrate that strong collegial governance, representative participation and independent scrutiny can successfully operate within large, complex and globally respected universities, and that effective governance need not be vested solely in a corporate-style governing board.[798]

11.97 The committee also heard evidence that governance concerns are experienced not only through university councils and executive leadership, but also through decision-making within faculties, schools and administrative units. Across some universities, staff raised concerns regarding the concentration of authority in senior academic and administrative leadership positions, including Deans and Heads of School, and the limited opportunities for staff to influence decisions affecting teaching, research, workloads and workplace culture. An earlier

[797] Evidence, Associate Professor Eric Ghosh, School of Law and National Tertiary Education Union University of New England Branch Representative, 29 April 2026, pp 44-45; Evidence, Dr Craig Johnson, Senior Technical Officer, School of Environmental and Rural Science and National Tertiary Education Union University of New England Branch President, 29 April 2026, p 42.

[798] Evidence, Dr Nicholas Harrigan, Senior Lecturer in Quantitative Sociology and National Tertiary Education Union Macquarie University Branch President, 1 April 2026, p 37; Evidence, Dr Robin B. Fitzsimons AM, Honorary Fellow and Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of Sydney, 29 April 2026, pp 22-23; Submission 100, Dr Robin B. Fitzsimons AM, pp 2, 7-8 and 10; Harvard University, *Leadership and governance*, https://www.harvard.edu/about/leadership-and-governance/.

recommendation in the context of staff and student wellbeing addressed checks and balances on these positions.

11.98 The committee notes the case made by Professor John Buchanan of the USyd Business School, that governance reform should extend beyond peak governing bodies to include the internal governance arrangements operating within universities. Professor Buchanan expressed concern that internal governance rules at USyd had centralised considerable authority in the hands of the Provost and appointed academic leaders, particularly Deans, and argued that these arrangements had weakened traditional collaborative approaches to governance and academic self-governance. He further contended that academic self-governance is important to ensuring that teaching, research and disciplinary expertise inform decisions regarding the organisation and operation of faculties and schools.[799]

11.99 The committee considers that this evidence reinforces concerns raised throughout the inquiry regarding the concentration of decision-making authority and the importance of ensuring meaningful participation by staff and academic communities in decisions affecting teaching, research and organisational structures. While governance arrangements must reflect local institutional contexts, the committee considers that the review of university governance captured in our first recommendation should examine options to strengthen accountability, representation and collegial participation in the appointment and operation of academic leadership positions.

11.100 The committee considers that universities operate most effectively when financial sustainability, academic expertise, staff engagement and community accountability are treated as complementary rather than competing objectives. Collegial governance is not an impediment to effective decision-making; rather, it is an important safeguard that strengthens institutional decision-making by ensuring that diverse expertise and perspectives are considered. This principle applies not only to university councils and academic boards, but also to governance and leadership arrangements at faculty, school and divisional levels.

11.101 The committee therefore considers that stronger legislative recognition and protection of collegial governance processes would enhance accountability, improve decision-making and better align governance arrangements with universities' public missions.

[799] Answers to questions on notice, Professor John Buchanan, University of Sydney Business School, 27 May 2026, p 4.

Finding 20

Collegial governance arrangements have been weakened at a number of New South Wales universities, reducing opportunities for academic expertise, and staff and student perspectives to inform institutional decision-making.

Recommendation 22

That the New South Wales Government review governance provisions in university enabling Acts to strengthen the role of collegial governance bodies in major academic and organisational decisions. The review should consider:

- mechanisms to ensure that academic boards and other collegial governance bodies have a meaningful role in significant academic, strategic and organisational decisions
- mechanisms to strengthen accountability, transparency and staff participation in the appointment and operation of academic leadership positions, including Deans, Executive Deans and Heads of School
- relevant international governance models that promote representative participation, independent scrutiny and accountability while maintaining institutional effectiveness.

Wage theft remediation

11.102 The committee was deeply concerned by recurring evidence of wage underpayments across the New South Wales university sector. Evidence from WSU, UNSW and other universities demonstrated that wage underpayment is not only an institution-specific problem but reflects broader weaknesses in governance, compliance oversight, workforce management systems and organisational culture. The evidence also indicated that, in a number of cases, underpayments persisted over many years before being addressed, resulting in large-scale remediation programs affecting thousands of current and former staff, at significant financial and reputational cost.

11.103 Paying staff correctly and on time is among the most fundamental obligations of any employer. The committee was particularly concerned by the scale of underpayment liabilities identified at a number of universities, including WSU's provision of approximately $29 million for historical underpayments[800] and the reported provision by UNSW of approximately

[800] Evidence, Mr Bill Parasiris, Chief Operating Officer, Western Sydney University, 12 June 2026, p 17; Evidence, Distinguished Professor George Williams AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, Western Sydney University, 12 June 2026, pp 47-48.

$70 million for wage remediation.[801] These liabilities represent substantial failures of employment compliance and governance. The Auditor-General reported that, in 2025, universities paid a total of $37.2 million to staff identified as being underpaid, highlighting the significant scale of wage remediation activity occurring across the sector.[802] The committee is concerned that affected staff were required to wait extended periods for remediation while universities undertook reviews, recalculations and system reforms. The committee further notes that regulatory intervention, including enforceable undertakings and remediation requirements, demonstrates both the seriousness of these failures and the need for stronger institutional oversight.

11.104 The committee considers that wage compliance should not be viewed solely as an operational or payroll matter. Rather, it is a governance issue requiring proactive oversight by governing bodies and senior executives. Governance frameworks that fail to identify, prevent or promptly address underpayments undermine institutional integrity, staff trust and public confidence. The committee considers that governing bodies and senior executives must be accountable for ensuring that appropriate systems, controls and monitoring mechanisms are in place to prevent such failures. This includes ensuring universities have access to internal expertise with a strong understanding of relevant industrial instruments, including awards and enterprise agreements, and the capability to interpret and apply these instruments accurately. Evidence suggests that many human resources and people and culture functions do not consistently possess the specialist industrial relations or systems expertise required, resulting in an ongoing reliance on external consultants who may also lack detailed knowledge of the university sector. Building or recruiting this capability within institutions would help reduce errors, strengthen compliance processes and lessen the need for repeated external intervention. The evidence provided by universities demonstrated that wage underpayments can arise from a combination of inadequate oversight, deficient payroll and record-keeping systems, unclear workplace processes, and insufficient scrutiny of workforce management practices. As we saw at UNSW, the evidence further showed that wage theft can arise and continue because of a lack of commitment on the part of executives and councils to ensuring that staff are paid their entitlements.

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801 Submission 42, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Branch, p 6. The committee notes that the Fair Work Ombudsman's enforceable undertaking required $32 million in rectification payments and that UNSW advised the committee it had incurred approximately $24.9 million in external advisory costs in respect of the wage theft matter. See Fair Work Ombudsman, *The University of NSW signs Enforceable Undertaking* (3 July 2026), https://www.fairwork.gov.au/newsroom/media-releases/2026-media-releases/july-2026/20260703-unsw-eu-media-release; Answers to questions on notice, Scientia Professor Vlado Perkovic, Provost, University of New South Wales, 31 July 2026, p 9.

802 Audit Office of New South Wales, *Universities 2025* (11 June 2026).

11.105 The committee therefore considers that stronger accountability, assurance and reporting mechanisms are necessary to ensure that universities meet their obligations to staff and prevent similar failures from recurring. Universities should be required to demonstrate not only that historic underpayments have been remediated, but also that robust controls, governance arrangements and independent assurance mechanisms are in place to identify compliance risks early and prevent underpayments from occurring. Transparent reporting on the scale of identified underpayments, progress of remediation programs and measures implemented to address underlying causes will be critical to restoring staff confidence and public trust.

Finding 21

The recurring underpayment of staff across New South Wales universities reflects a systemic failure of governance, compliance oversight and organisational culture.

Recommendation 23

That the New South Wales Government require universities to:

- ensure governing bodies and senior executives demonstrate effective oversight of wage compliance, workforce management and payroll assurance, including independent auditing and clear accountability for underpayments
- develop and maintain in-house expertise in the interpretation and application of industrial instruments, including awards and enterprise agreements, and strengthen institutional knowledge of industrial relations systems and laws to support compliance, reduce reliance on external consultants and minimise the risk of underpayments
- report annually on wage compliance assurance activities, identified underpayments, remediation actions and controls implemented to prevent recurrence, including the use and oversight of contingent labour arrangements.

Conclusion

11.106 The evidence gathered in this inquiry demonstrates that the governance challenges facing New South Wales universities are not isolated incidents confined to particular institutions. Rather, the inquiry identified recurring and systemic concerns regarding transparency, accountability, representative governance, consultation, organisational culture, the use of consultants, and the growing influence of corporate management

approaches across the sector. At the same time, these concerns have a very human impact on the skilled and dedicated university workforce, the students who seek to learn and gain their profession, and the communities that gain from an educated and skilled workforce.

11.107 While universities operate in an increasingly complex financial and policy environment, they remain public institutions established by legislation and entrusted with critically important educational, research and community responsibilities. The committee considers that governance arrangements must be capable of balancing financial sustainability with universities' broader public mission, while maintaining the confidence of staff, students, Parliament and the wider community.

11.108 The committee's findings and recommendations seek to strengthen transparency, accountability and public confidence, restore meaningful staff and student participation in decision-making, and ensure that governance arrangements remain aligned with the public purpose of higher education. Taken together, the recommendations provide a framework for reorienting university governance towards stewardship, integrity, collegiality and service to the people of New South Wales.

Appendix 1 Submissions

No.	Author
1	Name suppressed
2	Jason Stanley
3	Public Universities Australia
4	Professor John Quiggin
5	Confidential
6	Name suppressed
7	Dr Raffaele Ciriello
8	Name suppressed
9	University of Sydney Association of Professors (USAP)
10	Name suppressed
11	Name suppressed
12	Professor Hans Zoellner
13	Australian Association of University Professors (AAUP)
13a	Australian Association of University Professors (AAUP)
14	Name suppressed
15	Name suppressed
16	Professor Katie Barclay
17	Ms Sarah Sheets
18	Dr Peter Chen
19	Dr Marija Taflaga, Dr Francis Markham and Distinguished Professor Keith Dowding
20	Professor Manuel Graeber
20a	Professor Manuel Graeber
21	Ms Zoe O'Loughlin
22	Confidential
23	Professor Shumi Akhtar
24	Members of the UTS Governance Project
25	University of Technology Sydney
26	Ms Judith King
27	NTEU members in the Faculty of Law, UTS
28	Miss Ruby Buckeridge
29	Name suppressed

No.	Author
30	NSW International Student Representative Committee
31	University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Branch of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU)
32	Bachelor of International Studies team, UTS
33	Mr Gus Stephen
34	Name suppressed
35	Professor Corinne Cortese
36	Wollongong Undergraduate Students' Association
37	Public Service Association of NSW
38	Professionals Australia
39	Universities Australia
40	People with Disability Australia
41	National Tertiary Education Union (NSW Division)
42	Young Labor Left NSW
43	UNSW Branch of the National Tertiary Education Union
44	The University of New South Wales
45	The University of Newcastle
46	National Tertiary Education Union CSU Branch
47	Dr Ruth French
48	Audit Office of New South Wales
49	Confidential
50	The University of Sydney
51	NSW Department of Education
52	Professor Emerita Raewyn Connell and Honorary Professor Michael Fine
53	Independent Scholars Association of Australia Inc
54	National Students With Disability Leadership Collective
55	Independent Education Union of Australia (NSW and ACT Branch)
56	School of Law, Western Sydney University
57	NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee
58	Universities Australia
59	Professor Thomas Clarke
60	Confidential
61	Dr Philip Lee
62	Name suppressed
62a	Confidential

No.	Author
63	Name suppressed
64	Name suppressed
65	Professor Luke Beck
66	Charles Sturt University
67	National Union of Students
68	University of Wollongong
69	Dr Jessica Harris, Dr Kathleen Smithers, Dr Sarah Gurr
70	Go6
71	Dr Adam Lucas and Professor James Guthrie
71a	Dr Adam Lucas and Professor James Guthrie
72	Ms Swikriti Bhandari
73	Mr Hugh Bright
74	Name suppressed
75	Name suppressed
76	Name suppressed
77	Name suppressed
78	Mrs Imelda Gilmore
79	Name suppressed
80	Mr James Butler
81	Confidential
82	Confidential
83	Unions NSW
84	The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), Macquarie University Branch
85	Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA)
86	State Our Rights Campaign, the National Union of Students (NUS), the Australian Medical Students Association (AMSA), the Australian Law Students Association (ALSA)
87	Professor John Buchanan
88	Disability Entrepreneurship and Innovation Australia
89	Name suppressed
90	Name suppressed
91	Grant Wilson
92	Name suppressed
93	Alex Simpson
93a	Alex Simpson

No.	Author
94	Australian Dental Association NSW Branch
95	Name suppressed
95a	Name suppressed
96	Name suppressed
97	Name suppressed
98	Name suppressed
99	Mr John Taylor
100	Dr Robin Fitzsimons AM
101	Confidential
102	Confidential
103	Lisa Simmons
104	Colette Geier
105	Name suppressed
106	Dr Stephen Lake
107	Name suppressed
108	Name suppressed
109	Associate Professor Patricia Pender
110	Confidential
111	Teri Roberts
112	Confidential
113	Confidential
114	Confidential
115	Dr Jessica Milner Davis
116	Name suppressed
117	Confidential
118	James Cryer and Vanessa Giliberti
119	Mr Adrian Cardinali
120	Confidential
121	Confidential
122	Ms Patricia Stanwell
123	Confidential
124	Confidential
125	Confidential
126	Mr Stephen Bali MP
127	University of Newcastle Students' Association

No.	Author
128	Associate Professor Mourad Tayebi
129	Ms Evelyn Stagg
130	Confidential
131	Mr James McCallum
132	Confidential
133	Professor Ronald J. Clarke
134	Confidential
135	Name suppressed
136	Name suppressed
137	Dr Tim McLellan and Dr V Chitra
	Attachment 1 – Appendix A
	Attachment 2 – Appendix B
	Attachment 3 – Appendix C
138	Name suppressed

Appendix 2 Witnesses at hearing

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
Friday 7 November 2025 **Macquarie Room** **Parliament House, Sydney**	Professor John Quiggin	Professor of Economics, University of Queensland
	Professor Katie Barclay	Australian Research Council Future Fellow and Professor in History, Macquarie University
	Dr Thomas Clarke	Visiting Professor, University of Technology Sydney
	Mr Vince Caughley	Secretary, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division
	Dr Sarah Attfield	University of Technology Sydney Branch President, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division
	Dr Fiona Probyn-Rapsey	Former University of Wollongong Branch President, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division
	Professor Andrew Parfitt	Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Technology Sydney
	Associate Professor Peter Docherty	Associate Professor in Economics, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
	Professor Stephen Taylor	Distinguished Professor of Accounting, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
	Professor David Brown	Acting Head Accounting Discipline Group, UTS Business School and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
	Professor Martin Bugeja	Professor of Accounting, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
	Dr Sue Wright	Professor of Accounting, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Dr Robert Czernkowski	Senior Lecturer, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
	Dr Lisa O'Brien AM	UTS Council Member, University of Technology Sydney (appointed by Council)
	Ms Anne O'Driscoll FAICD FCA	UTS Council Member, University of Technology Sydney (appointed by Council)
	Professor Lynn Sinclair	Chair of Academic Board, and UTS Council Member, Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) Faculty of Health, University of Technology Sydney
,	Mr Richard Fleming	UTS Council Member, and Chair, Infrastructure Committee, University of Technology Sydney (appointed by Council)
	Dr Jack Steele	UTS Council Member, and Chair, Audit and Risk Committee, University of Technology Sydney (appointed by Council)
	Dr John F Laker AO	Deputy Chancellor, and UTS Council Member, University of Technology Sydney (appointed by Council)
	Mr Richard Howes	UTS Council Member, University of Technology Sydney (appointed by Council)
	Witness A	
	Ms Thalia Anthony	Professor of Law, University of Technology Sydney
	Dr Robert Czernkowski	Senior Lecturer, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
	Ms Mia Campbell	President, UTS Students' Association
	Ms Neeve Nagle	Welfare Officer, UTS Students' Association

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Ms Salma Elmubasher	Ethnocultural Officer, UTS Students' Association
Wednesday 17 December 2025 **Jubilee Room,** **Parliament House, Sydney**	Dr Adam Lucas	Honorary Senior Fellow, School of Humanities & Social Inquiry, Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities, University of Wollongong
	Professor Fiona Probyn-Rapsey	Former National Tertiary Education Union Branch President, University of Wollongong
	Dr Susan Engel	Associate Professor, Politics and International Studies, University of Wollongong, and Branch President, NTEU University of Wollongong
	Mr Hanzel-Jude Padol	President (outgoing) - General Secretary (incoming), Wollongong University Students' Association
	Ms Caitlin Veigel	Outgoing General Secretary, Incoming President, Wollongong University Students' Association
	Ms Alexia Chipperfield	2025/2026 Women's Representative, Wollongong University Students' Association
	Ms Lisa Simmons	Former Executive Manager, Faculty Research Operations and Chair, WHS Committee, University of Wollongong
	Witness B	
	Ms Marisa Mastroianni	Group CEO and Managing Director, University of Wollongong, Global Enterprises
	Mr Michael Still	Chancellor, University of Wollongong
	Professor G. Q. Max Lu AO	Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Wollongong
	Mr Warwick Shanks OAM	Deputy Chancellor, University of Wollongong

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Professor Nina Reynolds	Chair of Academic Senate, University of Wollongong
Wednesday 18 February 2026 **Jubilee Room,** **Parliament House, Sydney**	Professor Corinne Cortese	Professor of Accounting, University of Wollongong
	Dr David Bond	Director of Online Programs, UNSW Business School
	Mr Jack Thrower	Senior Economist, The Australia Institute
	Mr Timothy Orton	Managing Principal and Chief Executive Officer, Nous Group
	Mr Paul Taylor	Principal, Nous Group
	Ms Claire McGuinness	NSW Government Lead Partner, KPMG
	Mr Chris Matthews	National Sector Lead Partner – Education, KPMG
	Mr Allan Mills	Lead Partner, NSW Government and Public Sector, Deloitte
	Ms Lucy Mannering	Partner, Cyber and National Privacy Lead, Deloitte
Wednesday 1 April 2026 **Macquarie Room,** **Parliament House, Sydney**	Mr Dean Yates	EY Oceania, Government and Health Services Leader, EY
	Mrs Leigh Walker	EY Oceania, Risk Management and Independence Leader, EY
	Mr John Dewar AO	Partner, KordaMentha
	Mr Lea Patterson	President/CEO, Pilbara
	Ms Michelle Brooke	Program Manager, Pilbara
	Mr Adam Gallard	Chief Product Officer, Pilbara
	Professor S. Bruce Dowton	Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Professor Eric Knight	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (People and Operations), Professor of Strategic Management, Macquarie University
	Professor Chris Dixon	Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University
	Dr Nicholas Harrigan	Senior Lecturer in Quantitative Sociology and NTEU Macquarie University Branch President
	Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh	School of International Studies, Macquarie University
	Associate Professor Nicole Matthews	School of Communication, Society and Culture, Macquarie University
Wednesday 29 April 2026 **Macquarie Room,** **Parliament House, Sydney**	Professor Annamarie Jagose OAM, PhD, FAHA	Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, University of Sydney
	Dr Peter J. Chen	Senior Lecturer in Government and International Relations and NTEU University of Sydney Branch President
	Professor Laura J. Shepherd	School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Sydney
	Professor John Buchanan	University of Sydney Business School
	Mr Andrew West	Former elected Fellow, University of Sydney
	Dr Robin B. Fitzsimons AM	Honorary Fellow and Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of Sydney
	Ms Grace Street	President, University of Sydney Students' Representative Council
	Ms Kayla Asmara Hill	Disabilities Officer, University of Sydney Students' Representative Council
	Ms Jazzlyn Breen	Casework and Policy Officer, University of Sydney Students' Representative Council
	Professor Chris Moran	Vice-Chancellor, University of New England

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Dr Craig Johnson (via videoconference)	Senior Technical Officer, School of Environmental and Rural Science and NTEU University of New England Branch President
	Associate Professor Eric Ghosh	School of Law and NTEU University of New England Branch Representative
	Associate Professor Elizabeth Temple	School of Psychology and NTEU University of New England Branch Representative
Thursday 30 April 2026 **Hunter Room,** **Newcastle City Hall, Newcastle**	Professor Alex Zelinksy AO	Vice Chancellor, University of Newcastle
	Professor Belinda Tynan	Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Newcastle
	Mr Paul McCubbin	Chief Financial Officer, University of Newcastle
	Professor Craig Simmons	PVC Engineering, Science and Environment, University of Newcastle
	Associate Professor Terrence Summers	Branch President, NTEU University of Newcastle Branch
	Dr Tim Connor	Senior Lecturer, School of Law and Justice, University of Newcastle
	Professor Paul Dastoor	School of Science (Physics), University of Newcastle
	Dr Elena Aydos	Senior Lecturer, School of Law and Justice, University of Newcastle
	Dr Richard Denniss	Co-Chief Executive Officer, Australia Institute
	Ms Imogen Reid	Chair and President, University of Newcastle Students' Association
	Mr Liam Brenner	Vice President Welfare and Wellbeing, University of Newcastle Students' Association
	Mx Jennifer Lowe	Former President, University of Newcastle Students' Association

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Dr Anna Corbo Crehan	Senior Lecturer, Australian Graduate School of Policing and Security and NTEU Charles Sturt University Branch President
	Dr Emma Rush	Senior Lecturer, School of Social Work and Arts and NTEU Charles Sturt University Branch Vice President
	Mr Claudio Dionigi	Faculty Librarian, Charles Sturt University
	Associate Professor Patricia Pender	Individual
Friday 12 June 2026 **Macquarie Room,** **Parliament House, Sydney**	Professor Renée Leon	Vice-Chancellor and President, Charles Sturt University
	Mr Bill Parasiris	Chief Operating Officer, Western Sydney University
	Mr Mario Milanovic	Interim Chief Financial Officer, Western Sydney University
	Professor Robert Mailhammer	Professor of Linguistics and Chair of Academic Senate, Western Sydney University
	Associate Professor Mourad Tayebi	Associate Professor in Biomedical Sciences (Neuroscience) and Member of Academic Senate, Western Sydney University
	Dr David Burchell	Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Communication Arts and President, NTEU Western Sydney University Branch
	Mr David Maurice	Data Platforms Manager, Division of Operations and Member, NTEU Western Sydney University Branch
	Mr Stephen Bali MP	State Member for Blacktown
	Distinguished Professor George Williams AO	Vice-Chancellor and President, Western Sydney University

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
Monday 13 July 2026 **Macquarie Room,** **Parliament House, Sydney**	Professor Tyrone Carlin	Vice-Chancellor, Southern Cross University
	Scientia Professor Vlado Perkovic	Provost, University of New South Wales
	Professor Ben Golder	Faculty of Law and Justice, UNSW and NTEU UNSW Branch Representative
	Dr Anne Barnes	UNSW Faculty of Medicine and Health (Professional Staff) and NTEU UNSW Branch Representative
	Dr Sarah Gregson	Casual Academic, UNSW Business School and Former NTEU Branch President
	Mr William Scharzenberger Moran	President, UNSW Student Representative Council
	Ms Diya Sengupta	General Secretary, UNSW Student Representative Council
	Mr Felix Hughes	National President, National Union of Students
	Mr Akash Nagarajan	General Secretary, National Union of Students
	Mr Andrew Shim	Director, State Our Rights Campaign
	Mr Neel Erande	Student, University of Sydney
	Ms Lucy Fawcett	2025 Welfare Officer, National Union of Students
	Dr Adam Lucas	Honorary Senior Fellow, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Wollongong
	Emeritus Professor James Guthrie AM	Department of Accounting and Corporate Governance, Macquarie University
	Professor Manuel B. Graeber MD PhD FRCPath	President, University of Sydney Association of Professors (USAP) and Vice-President,

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
		Australian Association of University Professors (AAUP)
	Professor Gabriel Donleavy, MA (Cantab), LLB (Lond), PhD (Glasg), FCA(ANZ), FRSA, FCMI, FHEA	Professor of Accounting, University of New England and AAUP Representative
	Dr Shumi Akhtar	Associate Professor, Governance, Financial Crime, AI and Higher Education, The University of Sydney and AAUP Representative
	Witness C	
	Witness D	
	Witness E	

Appendix 3 Minutes

Minutes no. 21
Monday 18 August 2025
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Room 1043, Parliament House, Sydney at 1.31pm

1. Members present
Dr Kaine, *Chair* (via videoconference)
Mrs Mitchell, *Deputy Chair* (via videoconference)
Dr Cohn (via videoconference)
Mr D'Adam (via videoconference)
Mr Martin, (via videoconference)
Ms Merton
Mr Nanva (via videoconference) (until 1.35 pm)
Ms Suvaal (via videoconference) (until 1.35 pm)

2. Correspondence
The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 15 August 2025 – Letter from Hon Sarah Kaine MLC, Hon Taylor Martin MLC and Hon Amanda Cohn MLC requesting a meeting of the Standing Committee on Social Issues to consider a proposed self-reference into university governance.

3. Consideration of the terms of reference
Chair tabled letter dated 15 August 2025 proposing the following self-reference:

1. That the Standing Committee on Social Issues inquire into and report on the crisis in the New South Wales University sector, as raised by the petition to the Legislative Council, and in particular:
    a. The current legislative governance frameworks that regulate Universities in New South Wales, in particular:
        i. The structure, powers and responsibilities of university councils as defined in each university's enabling Act
        ii. The consistency and variation in governance provisions across the existing New South Wales public university Acts
        iii. Alignment of governance practices with the objects and functions outlined in each university's Act
        iv. Reporting obligations to the NSW Parliament, Department of Education and NSW Auditor General under the Acts, including compliance with these reporting obligations
        v. The powers granted to universities under their Acts to engage in commercial activities and manage controlled entities
        vi. Powers and responsibilities of the Minister under the Acts
    b. The delineation of responsibilities between the State and Federal jurisdiction for the regulation and oversight of Universities
    c. The role of governance structures in safeguarding the public mission of universities, academic freedom, research ethics, student welfare, and social outcomes
    d. The accountability of University Councils, in particular:
        i. The qualifications, experience and appointment processes for council members, including elected staff, student and graduate representatives
        ii. Mechanisms for dismissal, remuneration, and conflict of interest management as permitted under the Acts
        iii. The extent to which councils reflect contemporary governance standards and stakeholder representation

iv. Public access to council decisions, strategic plans, and financial reports

e. The ability for current legislative and governance arrangements to provide oversight of University staffing, financial management, and use of external consultants

f. The ability for current legislative and governance arrangements to support the accessibility of university education and derive public benefit, in particular:

i. Supporting diversity, inclusion and access for disadvantaged groups

ii. Promotion of regional development, Indigenous engagement, and community partnerships

iii. Advancing public discourse and civic responsibility

g. The reporting and oversight of controlled entities including international campuses

h. Opportunities for legislative reform to strengthen governance, transparency and accountability considering, in particular:

i. Best practice governance arrangements for Universities in other Australian jurisdictions and internationally

ii. Lessons from recent audits, inquiries and performance reviews of NSW universities

i. Any other related matters.

Mr Nanva and Ms Suvaal left the meeting.

Resolved, on the motion of Dr Cohn: That:

- the terms of reference be amended by inserting the words 'from 2,619 petitioners of New South Wales dated 7 August 2025' after 'as raised by the petition'.
- the committee adopt the terms of reference as amended.

4. Conduct of the inquiry into university governance

4.1 Proposed timeline

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee adopt the following timeline for the administration of the inquiry:

- submissions close - Friday 17 October 2025
- first hearing - early November 2025.

4.2 Stakeholder list

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That:

- the secretariat circulate to members the Chair's proposed list of stakeholders to be invited to make a submission
- members have two days from when the Chair's proposed list is circulated to make amendments or nominate additional stakeholders
- the committee agree to the stakeholder list by email, unless a meeting of the committee is required to resolve any disagreement.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 1.40 pm until 9.00 am Thursday 8 October 2025 (report deliberative – impacts of harmful pornography).

Talina Drabsch
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 23
Friday, 7 November 2025
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 9.45 am

1. Members present

Dr Kaine, *Chair*
Mrs Mitchell, *Deputy Chair* (via videoconference)

Ms Boyd (substituting for Dr Cohn for the duration of the inquiry into the New South Wales university sector) (via videoconference)
Mr D'Adam
Mrs Merton
Mr Nanva (via videoconference)
Ms Suvaal

2. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That draft minutes nos. 21 and 22 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 17 October 2025 – Email from Mr Rob O'Brien, individual, to secretariat, expressing interest to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the New South Wales university sector
- 25 October 2025 – Email from Dr Susan Barrell AO, Council Member, University of Technology Sydney, declining an invitation to appear at the university sector hearing on 7 November 2025
- 26 October 2025 – Email from Ms Dianne Hill, Council Member, University of Technology Sydney, declining an invitation to appear at the university sector hearing on 7 November 2025
- 27 October 2025 – Email exchange between secretariat and Ms Danielle Woolley, Head of Government Relations and Policy, UTS, requesting that Chancellor Catherine Livingstone AC appear alongside Vice-Chancellor Andrew Parfitt, at the university sector hearing on 7 November, and advising the Chancellor's term ends on 30 November 2025
- 27 October 2025 – Email from Ms Kim McKay AO, Council Member, University of Technology Sydney, declining an invitation to appear at the university sector hearing on 7 November 2025
- 28 October 2025 – Email from individual, declining an invitation to appear at the university sector hearing on 7 November 2025
- 29 October 2025 – Email from Mr Antony Riordan, Council Member, University of Technology Sydney, declining an invitation to appear at the university sector hearing on 7 November 2025
- 29 October 2025 – Email from Ms Shumi Aktar to the secretariat, requesting to appear at a hearing of the university sector inquiry
- 29 October 2025 – Email from Mr John Karmas advocating for an inquiry into NSW housing policies and processes and its impact on homelessness and individuals with mental health challenges
- 31 October 2025 – Email from individual, author of submission 63, offering to appear at a hearing of the university sector inquiry to give evidence of criminal conduct
- 31 October 2025 – Email from an individual declining an invitation to appear at the university sector hearing on 7 November 2025
- 31 October 2025 – Email from Mary Russell, Chief Executive Officer, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, informing the secretariat that the agency will need to seek permission from the Federal Education Minister to appear at the 7 November university sector hearing
- 3 November 2025 – Email from members of the UTS Governance Project providing their submission and offering to appear in camera at the hearing of the university sector inquiry on 26 November 2025
- 4 November 2025 – Email from the Jasmine Johnston, Executive Officer, Expert Council on University Governance, advising Ms Cilento, Chair, is unable to appear at the university sector hearing on 7 November
- 5 November 2025 – Email from Dhamendra Unka, Director Executive Office and Strategic Delivery, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, declining an invitation to appear at the hearing of the inquiry into the NSW university sector on 7 November and providing a copy of the TEQSA submission to the Senate inquiry into university governance.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam:

- That the committee keep the correspondence from an individual, declining to appear at the hearing on 7 November, dated 28 October 2025, confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat, as it contains identifying information
- That the committee keep the correspondence from the author of submission 63, dated 31 October, confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat, as it contains identifying information
- That the committee keep the correspondence from an individual, declining to appear at the hearing on 7 November, dated 31 October 2025, confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat, as it contains identifying information.

4. Inquiry into NSW university sector

4.1 Public submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos. 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 13, 16 - 19, 21, 23-28, 30, 31, 33, 35 - 48, 50-53, 55-59, 61, 65-73, 78, 80, 83.

4.2 Partially confidential submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were partially published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submissions nos. 1, 6, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 29, 34, 62, 64, 74-77, 79.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Merton: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the request of the author: names and/or identifying and sensitive information in submissions nos. 1, 6, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 29, 34, 62, 64, 74-77, 79.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Merton: That the committee authorise the publication of submission no. 32, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information which is to remain confidential, as per the request of the author.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva:

- That the committee authorise the publication of submission nos. 12 and 20 with the exception of potential adverse mention which is to remain confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat
- That the committee authorise the publication of submission 63 with the exception of adverse mention which is to remain confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat and identifying information, which is to remain confidential, as per the request of the author.

4.3 Confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee keep submission nos. 5, 22, 49, 54, 60, 62a, 81, 82 confidential, as per the request of the author as they contain identifying and/or sensitive information.

4.4 Hearing dates in 2025

The committee noted that it agreed via email to the following hearing dates:

- 26 November, Macquarie Room
- 17 December, Jubilee Room.

4.5 Declaration of interests

Ms Suvaal made a declaration that her staffer would be attending the public hearing as a witness for the UTS Students' Association and that she would not be present for the duration of the staffer's evidence. Ms Suvaal also made a declaration that she is currently a student at the University of Newcastle.

The Chair made a declaration that she was previously an Academic Councillor at the University of Technology Sydney.

4.6 Public hearing

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Professor John Quiggin, Professor of Economics, University of Queensland (via videoconference)
- Professor Katie Barclay, Australian Research Council Future Fellow and Professor in History, Macquarie University
- Dr Thomas Clarke, Visiting Professor, University of Technology Sydney.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Vince Caughley, Secretary, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division
- Dr Sarah Attfield, University of Technology Sydney Branch President, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division
- Dr Fiona Probyn-Rapsey, University of Wollongong Former Branch President, National Tertiary Education Union Division.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Associate Professor Peter Docherty, Associate Professor in Economics, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan

- Professor Stephen Taylor, Distinguished Professor of Accounting, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
- Professor David Brown, Acting Head Accounting Discipline Group, UTS Business School, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
- Professor Martin Bugeja, Professor of Accounting, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
- Professor Sue Wright, Professor of Accounting, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
- Dr Robert Czernkowski, Senior Lecturer, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Ms Anne O'Driscoll FAICD FCA, UTS Council Member (appointed by Council), University of Technology Sydney.
- Dr Lisa O'Brien AM, UTS Council Member (appointed by Council), University of Technology Sydney.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Professor Lynn Sinclair, Chair of Academic Board, UTS Council Member, and Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning), Faculty of Health, University of Technology Sydney
- Mr Richard Fleming, UTS Council Member (appointed by Council), and Chair, Infrastructure Committee, University of Technology Sydney
- Dr Jack Steele, UTS Council Member (appointed by Council), and Chair, Audit and Risk Committee, University of Technology Sydney
- Dr John F Laker AO, Deputy Chancellor, and UTS Council Member (appointed by Council), University of Technology Sydney
- Mr Richard Howes, UTS Council Member (Appointed by Council), University of Technology Sydney

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public and the media withdrew.

Having previously agreed via email on 22 October 2025 to conduct an *in camera* hearing with certain individuals, the committee proceeded to take *in camera* evidence.

Persons present other than the committee: committee secretariat, Hansard reporters and audiovisual and broadcast staff.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Witness A
- Ms Thalia Anthony, Professor of Law, University of Technology Sydney
- Dr Robert Czernkowski, Senior Lecturer, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted.

Ms Suvaal left the meeting.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Ms Mia Campbell, President, UTS Students' Association
- Ms Neeve Nagle, Welfare Officer, UTS Students' Association
- Ms Salma Elmubasher, Ethnocultural Officer, UTS Students' Association.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 5.30 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 5.31 pm until Wednesday 26 November 2025.

Sarah Newlands
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 24
Wednesday, 17 December 2025
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 9.01 am

1. Members present
Dr Kaine, *Chair*
Mrs Mitchell, *Deputy Chair* (via videoconference)
Ms Boyd
Mr D'Adam
Mrs Merton
Mr Nanva (via videoconference)
Ms Suvaal

2. Previous minutes
Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That draft minutes no. 23 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence
The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 31 October 2025 – Letter from Stephanie Gotlib, Executive Director, All Means All, to Chair, endorsing State Our Rights' submission to the university sector inquiry
- 4 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to Chair, providing context for their submission to the inquiry into the university sector and requesting to appear at a private hearing
- 4 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting that certain organisations be invited to appear at a private hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 7 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting that another individual be invited to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 7 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, detailing their experience and requesting to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 7 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, providing further information relating to their appearance at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector, attaching the UTS Student Representative submission against the Change Proposal, requesting that it be kept confidential
- 13 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to Chair, indicating that members of the Australian Association of University Professors are open to being invited to appear at a public hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 18 November 2025 – Email from Ms Joy Misrachi, to Chair, about her experience with Metropolitan Memorial Parks in respect of her late mother's grave
- 24 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting that their sections of the *in camera* transcript of 7 November 2025 for the inquiry into the university sector remain confidential
- 27 November 2025 – Email from Mr Robert Czernkowski, UTS Council Member, to the secretariat, requesting that specific sections of his *in camera* transcript of 7 November 2025 for the inquiry into the university sector be redacted and the remainder published
- 27 November 2025 – Email from an individual to the secretariat, providing an overview of their submission and expressing interest in giving *in camera* evidence for the inquiry into the university sector
- 1 December 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, agreeing to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector if compelled by the committee
- 1 December 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting to give evidence *in camera* for the university sector inquiry
- 1 December 2025 – Email from Mark Pietsch, Vice-President of Physical Disability Australia, to the secretariat, requesting to give evidence to the inquiry into the university sector
- 3 December 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting Mark Pietsch, disability advocate, give evidence at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 8 December 2025 – Email from Professor Corinne Cortese, Associate Dean - Higher Degree Research, Faculty of Business and Law, University of Wollongong, to the secretariat, declining to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 8 December 2025 – Email from Danielle Woolley, Head of Government Relations and Policy, Office of the Vice-Chancellor, University of Technology Sydney, to the secretariat, seeking guidance from the committee about a question taken on notice during the hearing of the inquiry into the university sector

- 8 December 2025 – Email from Catriona Reid, Executive Officer, NSW Vice Chancellors' Committee, to the secretariat, attaching a letter from Professor Alex Zelinsky AO, Vice-Chancellor, University of Newcastle, and Convener, New South Wales Vice-Chancellors' Committee, making a formal complaint about the inquiry into the university sector
- 8 December 2025 – Email from Canio Fierravanti, Director, Government and Community Relations, University of Wollongong, to the secretariat, declining the attendance of Mr Greg West (Council Member, Former chair Finance Committee & Former chair UOWGE Board, University of Wollongong), Mr Matthew Wright (Chief Financial Officer/COO, University of Wollongong) and Ms Jennifer Ng (CEO Asia, UOW Global Enterprises / UOW Malaysia), and confirming the attendance of five University of Wollongong representatives at the hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 10 December 2025 – Emails between Ms Thalia Anthony, Professor of Law, University of Technology, and the secretariat, confirming that only her name and opening statement may be published in the *in camera* transcript of 7 November 2025 for the inquiry into the university sector
- 10 December 2025 – Email from Ms Lisa Simmons, former Executive Manager, Faculty of University of Wollongong, to Chair, requesting acceptance of her late submission for the inquiry into the university sector and providing background information for her appearance
- 13 December 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, confirming the UTS Student Representatives' Submission on the Academic Change Proposal can be published
- 14 December 2025 – Email from Dr Adam Lucas, Honorary Senior Fellow, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Wollongong, to the secretariat, advising Emeritus Professor James Guthrie AM FCPA is unable to attend due to sickness a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector.

Sent

- 28 November 2025 – Letter from Chair, to Ms Joy Misrachi, responding to correspondence about Ms Misrachi's experience with Metropolitan Memorial Parks in respect of her late mother's grave.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva:

- That the committee keep the following correspondence confidential, as per the request of the author, as it contains identifying and/or sensitive information:
  - 4 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to Chair, providing context for their submission to the inquiry into the university sector and requesting to appear at a private hearing of the inquiry
  - 4 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting that certain organisations be invited to appear at a private hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
  - 7 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, detailing their experience and requesting to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
  - 7 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, providing further information relating to their appearance at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector, attaching the Student Representative submission against the Change Proposal, requesting that it be kept confidential
  - 24 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting that their sections of the *in camera* transcript at the inquiry into the university sector remain confidential
  - 27 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, providing an overview of their submission and expressing interest in giving *in camera* evidence for the inquiry into the university sector
  - 3 December 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting Mark Pietsch, disability advocate, give evidence at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
  - 10 December 2025 – Email from Ms Lisa Simmons, former Executive Manager, Faculty of University of Wollongong, to Chair, requesting acceptance of her late submission for the inquiry into the university sector and providing background information for her appearance
  - 13 December 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, confirming the UTS Student Representatives' Submission on the Academic Change Proposal can be published.
- That the committee publish the UTS Student Representative submission against the Change Proposal, with the permission of the author.
- That the committee keep the following correspondence confidential as per the recommendation of the secretariat as it contains identifying and/or sensitive information:
  - 7 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting that another individual be invited to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
  - 13 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to Chair, indicating that members of the Australian Association of University Professors are open to being invited to appear at a public hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
  - 1 December 2025 – Emails from an individual, to the secretariat, agreeing to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector if compelled by the committee
  - 1 December 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting to give evidence in camera inquiry into the university sector

  - 27 November 2025 – Email from Mr Robert Czernkowski, UTS Council Member, to the secretariat, requesting that specific sections of his in camera transcript of 7 November 2025 for the inquiry into the university sector be redacted and the remainder published.
- That secretariat de-identify the minutes to keep confidential the identities of certain inquiry participants, as per the above resolutions to keep certain correspondence confidential.

4. Inquiry into NSW university sector

4.1 *In camera* witness to be summoned

The committee noted that it agreed via email on 5 December 2025 that a summons be issued to the appearance of an individual, and for them to give evidence *in camera,* as requested by the witness.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That:

- under the authority of s 4(2) of the *Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901*, the committee issue a summons of an individual to attend and give evidence *in camera* before the committee on Wednesday 17 December 2025, a 11.45 am
- the committee take evidence from the individual *in camera*
- the individual be de-identified in the minutes and referred to as Witness B.

4.2 Correspondence from Chair of New South Wales Vice-Chancellors' Committee

Mrs Mitchell moved: That:

(a) the committee has concerns regarding the issuing of the media release dated 27 November 2025 by the Chair, raised in the letter from the Chair of NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee received 8 December 2025.

(b) that the Chair respond in writing to the Vice-Chancellor's Committee addressing their concerns.

Question put on paragraph (a).

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Question put on paragraph (b).

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee note the correspondence from the Chair of New South Wales Vice-Chancellors' Committee.

4.3 Public submissions

The committee noted that submission 54, previously circulated and resolved to be kept confidential, has since been withdrawn. The submission number was subsequently reallocated to the National Students with Disability Leadership Collective, which was published under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee.

The committee noted that the following submissions were also published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos. 24, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 91, 94.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee authorise the publication of submission no. 103.

4.4 Partially confidential submissions

The committee noted the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos. 92, 95, 95a, 96, 97 and 98.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the request of the author: names and/or identifying and sensitive information in submissions nos. 92, 95, 95a, 96, 97 and 98.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee authorise the publication of submissions nos. 89, 90 and 93, with the exception of potential adverse mention which is to remain confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat.

4.5 Confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee keep submission no. 102 confidential, as per the request of the author.

4.6 *In camera* transcript of 7 November 2025

The committee noted that it agreed via email on 14 November 2025 that the secretariat consult with the three *in camera* witnesses of 7 November 2025 as to whether they would like some or all of their evidence published with or without their name. The secretariat prepared a version of the transcript, highlighted to identify the parts of the transcript that the witnesses request remain confidential.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee publish the *in camera* transcript of 7 November 2025, with redactions as highlighted by the secretariat as per the request of the witnesses, and that highlighted content remain confidential.

4.7 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee authorise the publication of the following answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions:

- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Ms Anne O'Driscoll FAICD FCA, UTS Council Member, and answers to supplementary questions from Ms Anne O'Driscoll FAICD FCA, on behalf of UTS Council Members Panel 1, received 10 December 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Dr Lisa O'Brien AM, UTS Council Member, and answers to supplementary questions from Dr Lisa O'Brien AM, on behalf of UTS Council Members Panel 1, received 10 December 2025
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Dr John F Laker AO, Deputy Chancellor and UTS Council Member, received 10 December 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Richard Howes, UTS Council Member, received 10 December 2025
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Dr Jack Steele, UTS Council Member, and answers to supplementary questions from Dr Jack Steele, on behalf of UTS Council Members Panel 2, received 10 December 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Professor Lynn Sinclair, PFHEA, Chair of Academic Board, Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning), Faculty of Health, UTS, and UTS Council Member, received 10 December 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Richard Fleming, Chair, Infrastructure Committee, and UTS Council Member, received 10 December 2025
- answers to supplementary question from Professor Sue Wright, Professor of Accounting, UTS, on behalf of the authors of the UTS Alternative Plan, received 11 December 2025
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Professor Andrew Parfitt, Vice-Chancellor and President, UTS, received 11 December 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Neeve Nagle, President, UTS Students' Association, received 12 December 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Robert Czernkowski, UTS Councillor, received 16 December 2025.

4.8 Questions on notice – request for extension and assurance of confidentiality

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the secretariat, on behalf of the committee, respond to the Office of the Vice Chancellor's email, received 8 December 2025, indicating that the committee:

- agrees to an extension to Friday 13 February 2026 to provide the staff submissions
- agrees that the submissions be provided in de-identified form
- will consider further the Vice Chancellor's request for confidentiality upon receipt of the submissions.

4.9 Public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

The committee noted that given the proximity of the hearing to the Christmas/New Year break, transcripts, questions on notice and supplementary questions will not be provided to the witnesses before the Christmas break.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That answers to questions on notice be due on Tuesday 27 January 2026.

Witnesses, the public and media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Dr Adam Lucas, Honorary Senior Fellow, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Wollongong (via videoconference).

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Professor Fiona Probyn-Rapsey, Former National Tertiary Education Union Branch President, University of Wollongong
- Dr Susan Engel, Associate Professor, Politics and International Studies, University of Wollongong, and Branch President, National Tertiary Education Union, University of Wollongong.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Dr Hanzel-Jude Pador, Outgoing President and Incoming General Secretary, Wollongong University Students' Association
- Ms Caitlin Veigel, Outgoing General Secretary and Incoming President, Wollongong University Students' Association
- Ms Alexia Chipperfield, 2025/2026 Women's Representative, Wollongong University Students' Association.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses, the public and the media withdrew.

4.10 *In camera* hearing

Having previously agreed to conduct an *in camera* hearing with Witness B, the committee proceeded to take *in camera* evidence.

Persons present other than the committee: committee secretariat, Hansard reporters and audiovisual and broadcast staff.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witness was sworn and examined:
- Witness B.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

4.11 Public hearing

The public and the media were readmitted.

The following witness was sworn and examined:
- Ms Lisa Simmons, Former Executive Manager, Faculty of Research Operations and Chair, WHS Committee, University of Wollongong.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:
- Ms Marissa Mastroianni, Group CEO and Managing Director, University of Wollongong, Global Enterprises.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:
- Mr Michael Still, Chancellor, University of Wollongong.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Professor G. Q. Max Lu AO, Vice Chancellor and President, University of Wollongong.
- Mr Warwick Shanks OAM, Deputy Chancellor, University of Wollongong
- Professor Nina Reynolds, Chair of Academic Senate, University of Wollongong.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee accept and keep confidential the following document tendered during the public hearing:
- Letter dated 26 May 2025 from Justin Benitez, Principal Assessment Officer, Independent Commission Against Corruption, to Ms Lisa Simmons, Former Executive Manager, Faculty of Research Operations and Chair, WHS Committee, University of Wollongong, about her experience at the University of Wollongong.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee accept and publish the following document tendered during the public hearing:

- Attachment V: Chronology of Key Events dated 6 March 2025 by Ms Lisa Simmons, Former Executive Manager, Faculty of Research Operations and Chair, WHS Committee, University of Wollongong, submitted to the Independent Commission Against Corruption about her experience at the University of Wollongong.

5. Adjournment
The committee adjourned at 4.35 pm until Wednesday 18 February 2026.

Bridget Armstrong
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 25
Wednesday, 18 February 2026
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 9.01 am

1. Members present
Dr Kaine, *Chair*
Mr Fang (substituting for Mrs Mitchell, *Deputy Chair*)
Ms Boyd (via videoconference)
Mr D'Adam
Mrs Merton
Mr Nanva (via videoconference)

2. Election of deputy chair for the duration of the hearing
Dr Kaine took the Chair.

The Chair called for nominations for Deputy Chair.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Mrs Merton be elected Deputy Chair of the committee for the duration of the hearing.

There being no further nominations, the Chair declared Mrs Merton elected Deputy Chair for the duration of the hearing.

3. Previous minutes
Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That draft minutes no. 24 be confirmed.

4. Correspondence
The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 19 December 2025 – Email from Professor Rylee Dionigi, President, Australian Association of University Professors (AAUP), to Chair, indicating that members of the AAUP are open to being invited to appear at a public hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 19 December 2025 – Email from Dr Shumi Akhtar, Associate Professor, University of Sydney Business School, The University of Sydney, to the secretariat, indicating that she is open to being invited to appear at a public hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 19 December 2025 – Email from Ms Danielle Woolley, Head of Government Relations and Policy, Office of the Vice-Chancellor, University of Technology Sydney, to the secretariat, requesting guidance from the committee about a question taken on notice during the 17 December 2025 hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 24 December 2025 – Letter from Dr Robin Fitzsimons AM, Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of Sydney, to Chair, indicating she intends to lodge a late submission and is open to being invited to appear at a public hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 26 December 2025 – Letter from an anonymous individual, to Chair, about the Chancellor's installation ceremony at the University of Wollongong
- 27 January 2026 – Email from Mr Weihong Liang, President of the International Students Representative Council of Australia (ISRC), to the secretariat, indicating that the ISRC is open to being invited to appear at a public hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 5 February 2026 – Email from Ms Yifei Zhang, Director, Oceania Public Policy, Ernst & Young, to the secretariat, declining to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector on the basis that they do not believe that they can provide useful evidence that would best support the committee's work under the terms of reference

- 6 February 2026 – Email from Ms Laura Henschke, Regulatory Affairs and Public Policy, PwC, to the secretariat, declining to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 9 February 2026 – Letter from Ms Jasmina Joldic PSM, Deputy Secretary, Higher Education, Research and International at the Australian Government Department of Education, to Chair, advising of the Commonwealth actions currently underway to strengthen university governance
- 10 February 2026 – Email from Ms Jenny Bridge, Partner, Performance Improvement, KordaMentha, to the secretariat, declining to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector on the basis that they have a number of competing commitments
- 16 February 2026 – Email from Dr Jonathon Mackay, Senior Lecturer, School of Business, Faculty of Arts, Business and Society, University of Wollongong, to the secretariat, challenging the answer to supplementary question 11(c) from Ms Marisa Mastroianni, UOW Global Enterprises, regarding concerns raised by staff about opening a campus in Saudi Arabia, along with the following attachments:
  - Email from Dr Mackay to Senior Professor Sue Bennett, Interim Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic and Student Life, UOW, resigning from his role as Chair of the UOW Pride Network, sent 10 April 2025
  - Email from Dr Mackay to UOW Pride Network, advising of his resignation as Chair of the Network, sent 9 April 2025
- 17 February 2026 – Email from Dr Jonathon Mackay, Senior Lecturer, School of Business, Faculty of Arts, Business and Society, University of Wollongong, to the secretariat, providing permission for his correspondence to be published.

Sent

- 23 December 2025 – Email from the secretariat, to Ms Danielle Woolley, Head of Government Relations and Policy, Office of The Vice Chancellor, University of Technology Sydney, advising that the university is requested to provide a summary of the key themes arising in the 500+ submissions from UTS staff providing feedback on the Academic Change Proposal by 13 February 2026
- 10 February 2026 – Email from the secretariat, to Mr Michael Still, Chancellor, University of Wollongong, advising that the committee declined his request for confidentiality regarding question 16 of his supplementary questions on the basis that the answer does not raise any confidentiality issues, and that his answers would be published within 48 hours
- 13 February 2026 – Letter from Chair, to Ms Yifei Zhang, Director, Oceania Public Policy, Ernst & Young, reissuing the invitation to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector and noting the committee's power to issue a summons
- 13 February 2026 – Letter from Chair, to Ms Laura Henschke, Regulatory Affairs and Public Policy, PwC, reissuing the invitation to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector and noting the committee's power to issue a summons
- 13 February 2026 – Letter from Chair, to Ms Jenny Bridge, Partner, Performance Improvement, KordaMentha, reissuing the invitation to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector and noting the committee's power to issue a summons.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam:

- That the committee keep the letter from an anonymous individual, to Chair, about the Chancellor's installation ceremony at the University of Wollongong, dated 26 December 2025, confidential, as per the request of the author, as it contains identifying and/or sensitive information
- That the committee keep the correspondence from Ms Jasmina Joldic PSM, Deputy Secretary, Higher Education, Research and International at the Australian Government Department of Education regarding the Commonwealth's actions currently underway to strengthen university governance, dated 9 February 2026, confidential, as per the request of the author.

5. Inquiry into the New South Wales university sector

5.1 Attendance of consultancy firm witnesses

The committee noted that it agreed via email on 12 February 2026 to write to PwC Australia, EY and KordaMentha to reinvite them to attend the hearing on 18 February 2026, highlighting the value of their evidence for a balanced inquiry and noting the committee's power to issue a summons if needed.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Boyd: That the committee:

- Publish the email from Ms Laura Henschke, Regulatory Affairs and Public Policy, PwC, to the Chair, declining to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector, received 16 February 2026.
- Write to Ms Jenny Bridge, Partner, Performance Improvement, KordaMentha, to re-issue the witness invitation to appear at the next hearing of the inquiry into the university sector.

5.2 Public submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos: 100, 103 and 104.

5.3 Partially confidential submissions

The committee noted the following submissions were partially published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submissions nos: 89, 90 and 93.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the request of the author: names and/or identifying and sensitive information in submissions nos. 89, 90 and 93.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That the committee authorise the publication of submission no. 99, with the exception of potential adverse mention which is to remain confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat.

6. Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following questions on notice and supplementary questions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee:

- answers to supplementary questions from Dr Adam Lucas, Honorary Senior Fellow, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, Faulty of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Wollongong, received 1 February 2026
- answers to supplementary questions from Ms Veigel, General Secretary, Incoming President, Wollongong University Students' Association, received 3 February 2026
- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Pador, President (outgoing) - General Secretary (incoming), Wollongong University Students' Association, received 3 February 2026
- answers to supplementary questions from Ms Chipperfield, 2025/2006 Women's Representative, Wollongong University Students' Association, received 3 February 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Professor G. Q. Max Lu AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Wollongong, received 3 February 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Warwick Shanks OAM, Deputy Chancellor, University of Wollongong, received 3 February 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions Professor Nina Reynolds, Chair of Academic Senate, University of Wollongong, received 3 February 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Ms Mastroianni, Group CEO and Managing Director, University of Wollongong Global Enterprises, received 3 February 2026
- answers to supplementary questions from Ms Lisa Simmons, Former Executive Manager, Faculty Research Operations and Chair, WHS Committee, University of Wollongong, received 9 February 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Michael Still, Chancellor, University of Wollongong, received 3 February 2026
- Answers to questions on notice from UTS, received 13 February 2026.

The committee noted that following a request for confidentiality from Mr Michael Still, Chancellor, University of Wollongong, for question 16 of his answers to supplementary questions, the committee agreed via email on 10 February 2026 that the question does not raise any confidentiality issues and would be published within 48 hours after he was notified of the committee's decision.

Resolved on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee authorise the publication of the following answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions:

- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Dr Engel, Associate Professor, Politics and International Studies, University of Wollongong and Branch President, National Tertiary Education Union, University of Wollongong, received 10 February 2026.

The committee noted the correspondence from Dr Jonathan Mackay, Senior Lecturer, University of Wollongong, and former Chair of the UOW Pride Network, received 16 February 2026, challenging the answer to supplementary question 11(c) from Ms Marisa Mastroianni, UOW Global Enterprises, regarding concerns raised by staff about opening a campus in Saudi Arabia, along with the following attachments:

- Email from Dr Mackay to Senior Professor Sue Bennett, Interim Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic and Student Life, UOW, resigning from his role as Chair of the UOW Pride Network, sent 10 April 2025
- Email from Dr Mackay to UOW Pride Network, advising of his resignation as Chair of the Network, sent 9 April 2025

Resolved on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee write to Ms Mastroianni to provide the opportunity to respond to Dr Mackay's correspondence, with a view to publishing each of the items.

7. Public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Merton: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the public and media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Professor Corinne Cortese, Professor of Accounting, University of Wollongong.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Dr David Bond, Director of Online Programs, UNSW Business School
- Mr Jack thrower, Senior Economist, The Australia Institute (via videoconference).

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Mr Timothy Orton, Managing Principal and Chief Executive Officer, Nous Group
- Mr Paul Taylor, Principal, Nous Group

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Ms Claire McGuinness, NSW Government Lead Partner, KPMG (via videoconference)
- Mr Chris Matthews, national Sector Lead Partner – Education, KPMG (via videoconference)

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Mr Allan Mills, Lead Partner, NSW Government and Public Sector, Deloitte
- Ms Lucy Mannering, Partner, Cyber and National Privacy Lead, Deloitte.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

7.1 Deliberative for interim report
Resolved on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee produce an interim report on a date to be determined by Chair following consultation with the committee.

8. Adjournment
The committee adjourned at 2.20 pm.

Bridget Armstrong
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 26
Wednesday, 1 April 2026
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 9.00 am

1. Members present
Dr Kaine, *Chair*
Mrs Mitchell, *Deputy Chair*
Ms Boyd
Mr D'Adam
Mr Lawrence (substituting for Ms Suvaal for the pre-hearing deliberative meeting) *(via videoconference)*
Mrs Merton
Mr Nanva
Ms Suvaal

2. Previous minutes
Resolved, on the motion of Ms Boyd: That draft minutes no. 25 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence
The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received
- 6 March 2026 – Email from an individual, former Professor at the University of Wollongong, to the secretariat, advising that not all redundancies at the university in 2025 were voluntary

- 9 March 2026 – Letter from Ms Marisa Mastroianni, Group CEO and Managing Director, University of Wollongong Global Enterprises, to Chair, responding to Dr Jonathon Mackay's correspondence of 16 February 2026 challenging her answer to supplementary question 11(c) regarding concerns raised by staff about opening a campus in Saudi Arabia
- 16 March 2026 – Email from Mr Shaun Wilson, a former Macquarie University staff member, to the secretariat, declining to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector on the basis that he is no longer in paid employment in the higher education sector
- 31 March 2026 – Letter from Mr Vince Caughley, Secretary, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division, to Chair, challenging the answer to supplementary question 3 from KPMG regarding their use of laptops acquired by the University of Technology Sydney as part of their contracted work in 2025.

Sent

- 4 March 2026 – Letter from Chair to Ms Marisa Mastroianni, Group CEO and Managing Director, UOW Global Enterprises, providing the opportunity to respond to the correspondence from Dr Jonathan Mackay, and advising that the committee will then consider whether to publish Mr Mackay's correspondence and her response
- 17 March 2026 – Email from the secretariat to Ms Marissa Mastroianni, Group CEO and Managing Director, UOW Global Enterprises, advising that the committee will publish each item of correspondence related to the matter on its website.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva: That the committee keep the following correspondence confidential as per the recommendation of the secretariat as it contains identifying and/or sensitive information:

- Email from an individual, former Professor at the University of Wollongong, to the secretariat, advising that not all redundancies at the university in 2025 were voluntary, received 6 March 2026.

4. Inquiry into the New South Wales university sector

4.1 Publication of correspondence – University of Wollongong Global Enterprises

The committee noted that it agreed via email on 12 March 2026 to publish the following items of correspondence on the inquiry website:

- Email from Dr Jonathan Mackay, Senior Lecturer, University of Wollongong, and former Chair of the UOW Pride Network, received 16 February 2026, challenging the answer to supplementary question 11(c) from Ms Marisa Mastroianni, UOW Global Enterprises, regarding concerns raised by staff about opening a campus in Saudi Arabia, along with the following attachments:
  - Email from Dr Mackay to Senior Professor Sue Bennett, Interim Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic and Student Life, UOW, resigning from his role as Chair of the UOW Pride Network, sent 10 April 2025
  - Email from Dr Mackay to UOW Pride Network, advising of his resignation as Chair of the Network, sent 9 April 2025
- Letter from Chair to Ms Marisa Mastroianni, UOW Global Enterprises providing the opportunity to respond to the correspondence from Dr Mackay, sent 4 March 2026
- Letter from Ms Mastroianni, UOW Global Enterprises, to Chair, responding to the correspondence from Dr Mackay, received 9 March 2026.

4.2 Partially confidential submissions

The committee noted the following submission was partially published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission no: 99.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat: potential adverse mention in submission no. 99.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee authorise the publication of submission no. 105, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information which is to remain confidential, as per the request of the author.

4.3 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following questions on notice and supplementary questions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee:

- answers to supplementary questions from Professor Corinne Cortese, Deputy Dean (Graduate Research), Faculty of Arts, Society and Business, University of Wollongong, received 2 March 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Deloitte, received 12 March 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Dr David Bond, received 12 March 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from KPMG, received 12 March 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Nous Group, received 12 March 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Jack Thrower, Australia Institute, received 16 March 2026.

The committee noted that following a request from Nous Group for additional answers to questions on notice to be kept confidential, the committee agreed via email on 16 March 2026 to consider this request at the next meeting.

Resolved on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee keep confidential the following answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions, as per the request of the author:
- additional answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Nous Group, received 12 March 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Witness B, received 22 February 2026.

4.4 Future hearings

The committee noted that it agreed via email on 31 March 2026 that it will hold two further hearings for the inquiry on Friday 12 June 2026 and Monday 13 July 2026.

4.5 Evidence of KPMG

The committee noted the correspondence from Mr Vince Caughley, Secretary, NTEU NSW Division, to Chair, challenging the answer to supplementary question 3 from KPMG regarding their use of laptops acquired by the University of Technology Sydney as part of their contracted work in 2025.

Resolved on the motion of Ms Boyd: That the committee write to Ms Claire McGuinness, NSW Government Lead Partner, and Mr Chris Matthews, National Sector Lead Partner – Education, KPMG, to provide the opportunity to respond to the allegations of a discrepancy between their evidence to the committee and:
- the information provided in the correspondence from the NTEU NSW Division dated 31 March 2026 regarding laptops acquired by the University of Technology as part of their contracted work in 2025
- information aired in the ABC 4 Corners Program of 30 March 2026.

4.6 Public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the public and media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witness was sworn and examined:
- Mr Dean Yates, EY Oceania, Government and Health Services Leader, EY
- Mrs Leigh Walker, EY Oceania, Risk Management and Independence Leader, EY
- Mr John Dewar AO, Partner, KordaMentha.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Mr Lea Patterson, President/CEO, Pilbara (via videoconference)
- Ms Michelle Brooke, Program Manager, Pilbara (via videoconference)
- Mr Adam Gallard, Chief Product Officer, Pilbara (via videoconference).

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University
- Professor Eric Knight, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (People and Operations), Professor of Strategic Management, Macquarie University
- Professor Chris Dixon, Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Dr Nicholas Harrigan, Senior Lecturer in Quantitative Sociology and NTEU Macquarie University Branch President
- Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh, School of International Studies, Macquarie University
- Associate Professor Nicole Matthews, School of Communication, Society and Culture, Macquarie University

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

4.7 Consideration of Chair's draft report

The Chair submitted her draft report entitled 'Interim report: University of Technology Sydney, University of Wollongong and consultants', which, having been previously circulated, was taken as being read.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That Finding 1 and paragraph 4.65 be amended by omitting 'are not sufficient' and inserting instead 'may be insufficient.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Chapter 1

No amendments

Chapter 2

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 2.1 be amended by omitting 'sent shockwaves across the university' after 'emailed all staff with the news that'.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 2.25 be amended by inserting 'some' at the beginning of the paragraph.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 2.28 be amended by:

a) omitting the first sentence

b) inserting 'in their submission' after 'accountability structures'.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 2.38 be omitted:

> 'The committee pursued matters relating to academic decision-making in its hearing with Professor Parfitt. Challenged as to whether his decision to abolish the role of the Provost (akin to the chief academic officer) served to further centralise control, Professor Parfitt insisted that the intention was 'actually to enable and empower areas across the university to exercise their responsibilities.'

and the following new paragraph be inserted instead:

> 'The committee asked Professor Parfitt questions relating to academic decision making, including the decision to abolish the role of the Provost. Professor Parfitt indicated that the intention was 'actually to enable and empower areas across the university to exercise their responsibilities."

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 2.39 be amended by omitting after 'Professor Parfitt' in the third sentence, 'insisted' and inserting instead 'stated'.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 2.45 be amended by inserting 'some' before inquiry participants.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 2.48 be amended by:

a) omitting the first sentence of the paragraph

b) inserting at the start of the new first sentence, 'Clarity was sought from Professor Parfitt about the five year extension'.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 2.49 be amended by inserting 'some' before 'inquiry participants argued that'.

Question put and passed.

Chapter 3

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 3.42 be amended by omitting the second sentence, 'She repeatedly sought to take the question on notice before eventually providing a broad estimate, stating that 'my salary would be in the range of $600,000.' and inserting instead, 'After initially seeking to take the question on notice, she provided a broad estimate stating that, 'my salary would be in the range of $600,000."

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 3.44 be amended by inserting 'some' before 'witnesses described a clear decline.'

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 3.47 be amended by inserting 'Dr Engel's' before 'evidence to the inquiry.'

Question put and passed.

Chapter 4

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.1 be amended by omitting 'and a narrow view of the institution's role' at the end of the second dot point.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.1 be amended by omitting the third dot point, 'the sidelining of collegial governance processes that have traditionally enabled valuable academic and professional staff engagement in institutional decision making'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.1 be amended by omitting 'weak' before 'student consultation' in the fourth dot point and inserting instead 'issues with'.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.1 be amended by omitting the fifth dot point 'poor transparency in governance and cultures of secrecy and defensiveness, with the impact of eroding trust', and inserting instead 'concerns about transparency in governance and the impact of eroding trust.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.1 be amended by omitting the sixth dot point 'entrenchment of a culture of corporate managerialism that has weakened working conditions.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.1 be amended by omitting the seventh dot point 'extensive use of consultants working hand in glove with the corporatised boards, again with poor transparency as to costs', and inserting instead 'the use of consultants with poor transparency as to costs.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.1 be amended by omitting 'profound' at the start of the ninth dot point.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.9 be amended by omitting the word 'powerfully' before 'articulated by Professor Katie Barclay' in the first sentence.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.52 'Evidence to the inquiry indicated that compliance with formal reporting requirements does not necessarily equate to meaningful transparency for staff, students or the wider public' be moved into the committee comment, in a place to be determined by the secretariat.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.55 be omitted**:**

> 'With regard to university council composition, the committee received compelling evidence of the predominance of externally appointed members with corporate, governance or consulting backgrounds. While the committee recognises the importance of financial, commercial and risk expertise on councils, it is deeply troubled by the substantiated pattern of underrepresentation of elected academic staff, professional staff, and students. Witnesses expressed dismay and profound concern that this imbalance has led to governance cultures that prioritise managerial and financial logics over academic expertise, institutional memory, and public purpose values.'

and the following new paragraph be inserted instead:

> 'With regard to university council composition, the committee received evidence of the predominance of externally appointed members with corporate, governance or consulting backgrounds. Some witnesses expressed concern that this has led to governance cultures that prioritise managerial and financial logics over academic expertise, institutional memory, and public purpose values.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.56 be omitted:

> 'The committee shares the strong view of participants documented in chapters 2 and 3 that academic and other staff, students and alumni all have the right to be represented on university councils, and that the governance of universities will be better for it. Moreover, we were deeply troubled by reports of undemocratic and untransparent processes on the UTS Council and conflicts of interest among UOW council members.'

and the following new paragraph be inserted instead:

> 'The committee shares the view that academic and other staff, students and alumni all have the right to be represented on university councils, and that the governance of universities will be better for it.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.57 be amended by:

a) omitting 'the present' after 'we recognise that' in the first sentence

b) omitting 'is contributing' before 'to a growing reliance' in the second sentence and inserting instead 'may contribute'

c) omitting the sentence 'The committee was again deeply troubled by the example raised at UTS, where consultants produced a spreadsheet ranking academics by selective research metrics, which was later found to be inaccurate.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved on the motion of Ms Suvaal: That:

- The draft report as amended be the report of the committee and that the committee present the report to the House
- The committee secretariat correct any typographical, grammatical and formatting errors prior to tabling
- The committee secretariat be authorised to update any committee comments where necessary to reflect changes to recommendations or new recommendations resolved by the committee
- Dissenting statements must be provided to the secretariat by 3.00 pm Tuesday 7 April 2026
- The secretariat expects to table the report at 11.00 am on Wednesday 8 April 2026
- The Chair to advise the secretariat and members if they intend to hold a press conference, and if so, the date and time.

4.8 Correspondence from stakeholder

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Boyd: That the correspondence from an individual to the Chair regarding the committee's intentions in respect of the University of Sydney be circulated to the committee for its consideration.

4.9 Referral of transcript to Law and Justice Committee

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the portion of the day's transcript related to work health and safety be referred to the Law and Justice Committee for its information in respect of the 2026 Review of the Work health and Safety Scheme.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 4.40 pm.

Bridget Armstrong
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 27
Wednesday, 29 April 2026
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 9.30 am

1. Members present

Dr Kaine, *Chair*
Mrs Mitchell, *Deputy Chair*
Mr D'Adam
Ms Merton

Mr Donnelly (substituting for Mr Nanva for the pre-hearing deliberative meeting)
Ms Suvaal

2. Apologies
Mr Nanva
Ms Boyd

3. Previous minutes
Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That draft minutes no. 26 be confirmed.

4. Correspondence
The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 5 February 2026, 9 February 2026 and 11 February 2026 – Emails from Person 1 to Chair, seeking further input into the inquiry into the university sector
- 31 March 2026 – Email from Person 1 to the office of the Chair, seeking further input into the inquiry into the university sector and a response to previous emails
- 8 April 2026 – Email from Mr Weihong Liang, FASS PhD Student, Postgraduate Senate Fellow, The University of Sydney, to Chair, advising he is pleased to see the interim report's recognition of weak student representation and requesting that future public hearings include stronger student participation, particularly from international student representatives in universities
- 8 April 2026 – Email from Mx Jennifer Lowe, co-chair of National Students with Disabilities, to the secretariat, advising that she is open to being invited to appear at a public hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 8 April 2026 – Email from Mr David Shaw, Cronulla-Caringbah Labor Branch, to Chair, thanking the committee for the work it has put into the inquiry into the university sector
- 13 April 2026 – Email from Ms Catriona Reid, Executive Officer, NSW Vice Chancellors' Committee, to the secretariat, requesting confirmation of receipt of the NSW Vice Chancellors' Committee correspondence dated 8 December 2025
- 13 April 2026 – Email from Person 2 to the secretariat, requesting further information about his confidential submission
- 14 April 2026 – Email from Ms Margaret Sims, retired university professor, University of New England, to the secretariat, advising of her circumstances and projects investigating university governance
- 14 April 2026 – Email from Person 1 to the secretariat, seeking clarification regarding the secretariat's letter dated 14 April 2026
- 15 April 2026 – Email from Dr Jess Harris, Associate Professor and Program Convenor, Master of Leadership and Management in Education, School of Education, The University of Newcastle, to the secretariat, detailing her focus of research at the university and requesting to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 17 April 2026 – Email from Person 1 to the secretariat, asking whether the committee would be open to receiving questions from inquiry participants in advance of the public hearing for the University of Sydney
- 17 April 2026 – Email from Mr Mark Trevaskis, Chief Executive Officer, University of Newcastle Students' Association (UNSA), to the secretariat, nominating Ms Imogen Reid (Student SRC President and Chair of the UNSA) to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector, and detailing UNSA's circumstances regarding the Student Services and Amenities Fee legislation
- 20 April 2026 – Email from Ms Nicole Gower, Vice-President Operations, The University of Sydney, to the secretariat, declining to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector on the basis that she will be overseas on previously committed university business and advising that her colleague, Ms Kirsten Andrews, Vice President External Engagement, The University of Sydney, will attend the hearing in her stead
- 20 April 2026 – Email from Ms Lineve Clarke, Senior Executive Support Officer, Office of the Vice-Chancellor, Charles Sturt University, to the secretariat, declining on behalf of the Vice Chancellor, Professor Leon, to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector on the basis that the 30 April clashes with the graduation ceremonies for graduates at Charles Sturt's Bathurst campus, and requesting for Professor Leon to appear at the next hearing on 12 June 2026
- 22 April 2026 – Email from Ms Brooke Parsons, President, Student Senate 2026, Charles Sturt University Students, to the secretariat, declining to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector on the basis of the late notice received, and referring the committee to the submission made by Vice-Chancellor, Professor Renée Leon, which outlines the role of governance committees within the university
- 23 April 2026 – Email from Person 1 to the secretariat, with further information for the committee's consideration

- 28 April 2026 – Email from Professor Leisa Sargent, Dean, University of Sydney Business School, to the secretariat, declining the invitation to appear at the hearing on 29 April 2026 on the basis of short notice.

Sent

- 13 April 2026 – Email from the secretariat to Ms Catriona Reid, Executive Officer, NSW Vice Chancellors' Committee, confirming receipt of the NSW Vice Chancellors' Committee correspondence dated 8 December 2025 and advising that the committee noted the correspondence at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector on 17 December 2025
- 14 April 2026 – Letter from the secretariat to Person 1, advising on behalf of the committee that the committee intends to focus on high level governance arrangements at the University of Sydney, consistent with the inquiry terms of reference and the focus of the other hearings to date, and explaining that the role of committees is to examine systemic issues rather than to investigate individual complaints or alleged instances of misconduct, corruption or other behaviour
- 15 April 2026 – Email from the secretariat to Person 1, advising that no further action is required
- 20 April 2026 – Email from the secretariat to Person 1, advising that it is not committee practice to receive questions from submission authors ahead of hearings
- 22 April 2026 – Email from the secretariat to the University of New England Students, following up on the witness invitation dated 17 April 2026 and requesting a response regarding attendance at the hearing of the inquiry into the university sector

The committee noted that it agreed via email on 14 April 2026 to write to an individual as described above, and that the following correspondence be kept confidential:

- Emails received from the individual on 5 February 2026, 9 February 2026, 11 February 2026 and 31 March 2026, as per the request of the author
- Letter sent from the secretariat to the individual on 14 April 2026, as per the recommendation of the secretariat.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly:

- That the following correspondence to and from Person 1 be kept confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat, as it contains identifying and/or sensitive information:
  - Emails received from Person 1, 14 April 2026 and 17 April 2026
  - Emails sent to Person 1, 15 April 2026, 20 April 2026 and 23 April 2026
- That the committee keep the correspondence from Person 2, received 13 April 2026, confidential, as per the request of the author
- That the secretariat de-identify the minutes to keep confidential the identities of the following inquiry participants:
  - Person 1
  - Person 2.

5. Inquiry into the New South Wales university sector

5.1 Chair's opening statement

The committee noted its decision regarding the Chair's proposal to include additional paragraphs in her opening statements, circulated via email on 22 April 2026.

5.2 Public submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos. 106, 109, and 111.

5.3 Partially confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Merton: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the request of the author: names and/or identifying and sensitive information in submissions nos. 107 and 108.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee authorise the publication of submission nos. 93a, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information which is to remain confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat.

5.4 Confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Merton: That the committee keep submission nos. 110, 112 and 113 confidential, as per the request of the author.

5.5 Public hearing

The committee noted that, unless the committee decides otherwise, the sequence of questions to be asked at hearings is to alternate between opposition, crossbench and government members, in that order, with equal time allocated to each.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the public and media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witness was sworn and examined:
- Professor Annamarie Jagose OAM PhD FAHA, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, University of Sydney

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Dr Peter J. Chen, Senior Lecturer in Government and International Relations and NTEU University of Sydney Branch President
- Professor Laura J. Shepherd, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Sydney
- Professor John Buchanan, University of Sydney Business School

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Mr Andrew West, Former Elected Fellow, University of Sydney
- Dr Robin B. Fitzsimons AM, Honorary Fellow and Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of Sydney

Dr Fitzsimons tendered the following document: Robin Fitzsimons, 'Menzies' party needs a quick history lesson', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 October 2020.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Ms Grace Street, President, University of Sydney Students' Representative Council
- Ms Kayla Asmara Hill, Disabilities Officer, University of Sydney Students' Representative Council
- Ms Jazzlyn Breen, Casework and Policy Officer, University of Sydney Students' Representative Council

Ms Street tendered the following document: Grace Street, 'USyd Doesn't Listen: Five Key Policies Updated and Implemented Following "Feedback" Process', *Honi Soit,* 6 June 2025.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:
- Professor Chris Moran, Vice-Chancellor, University of New England

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Dr Craig Johnson, Senior Technical Officer, School of Environmental and Rural Science and NTEU University of New England Branch President
- Associate Professor Eric Ghosh, School of Law and NTEU University of New England Branch Representative
- Associate Professor Elizabeth Temple, School of Psychology and NTEU University of New England Branch Representative

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee accept and publish the following document(s) tendered during the public hearing:
- Robin Fitzsimmons 'Menzies' party needs a quick history lesson', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 October 2020, tendered by Dr Fitzsimons
- Grace Street, 'USyd Doesn't Listen: Five Key Policies Updated and Implemented Following "Feedback" Process', *Honi Soit,* 6 June 2025, tendered by Ms Street.

6. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 3.45 pm.

Merrin Thompson
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 28
Thursday, 30 April 2026
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Hunter Room, Newcastle City Hall, Newcastle 10.30 am

1. Members present
Dr Kaine, *Chair*
Mrs Mitchell, *Deputy Chair*
Ms Boyd
Mr D'Adam
Mr Martin
Ms Merton (*via videoconference*)

2. Apologies
Mr Nanva

3. Inquiry into the New South Wales university sector

3.1 Public hearing
Witnesses, the public and media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witness was sworn and examined:
- Professor Alex Zelinksy AO, Vice Chancellor and President, University of Newcastle

Professor Zelinsky tendered the following documents:
- Opening statement – Complete version
- The Wollotuka Institute, *Cultural Standards,* University of Newcastle, 2026
- University of Newcastle, *Looking Ahead 2030: Strategic Plan.*

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Professor Belinda Tynan, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Newcastle
- Mr Paul McCubbin, Chief Financial Officer, University of Newcastle
- Professor Craig Simmons, PVC Engineering, Science and Environment, University of Newcastle

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Associate Professor Terrence Summers, Branch President, NTEU University of Newcastle Branch
- Dr Tim Connor, Senior Lecturer, School of Law and Justice, University of Newcastle
- Professor Paul Dastoor, School of Science (Physics), University of Newcastle
- Dr Elena Aydos, Senior Lecturer, School of Law and Justice, University of Newcastle

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:
- Dr Richard Denniss, Co-Chief Executive Officer, Australia Institute (*via videoconference*)

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Ms Imogen Reid, Chair and President, University of Newcastle Students' Association
- Mr Liam Brenner, Vice President Welfare and Wellbeing, University of Newcastle Students' Association
- Mx Jennifer Lowe, Former President, University of Newcastle Students' Association

Ms Reid tendered the following document: University of Newcastle Student Representative Council, SRC Statement: Psychosocial Safety at the University of Newcastle, Australia.

Mx Lowe tendered the following documents:
- Opening statement – Complete version
- University of Newcastle, Panel Report from the External Review of Financial Services, April 2014.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Dr Anna Corbo Crehan, Senior Lecturer, Australian Graduate School of Policing & Security and NTEU Charles Sturt University Branch President (via videoconference)
- Dr Emma Rush, Senior Lecturer, School of Social Work and Arts and NTEU Charles Sturt University Branch Vice President (*via videoconference*)
- Mr Claudio Dionigi, Faculty Librarian, Charles Sturt University (*via videoconference*)

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:
- Associate Professor Patricia Pender, Individual

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 4.02 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee accept and publish the following document(s) tendered during the public hearing:
- Opening statement – Complete version, tendered by Professor Alex Zelinsky AO
- The Wollotuka Institute, *Cultural Standards,* University of Newcastle, 2026, tendered by Professor Alex Zelinsky AO
- University of Newcastle, *Looking Ahead 2030: Strategic Plan,* tendered by Professor Alex Zelinsky AO
- University of Newcastle Student Representative Council, SRC Statement: Psychosocial Safety at the University of Newcastle, Australia, tendered by Ms Reid
- Opening statement – Complete version, tendered by Ms Lowe
- University of Newcastle, Panel Report from the External Review of Financial Services, April 2014, tendered by Mx Lowe.

4. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 4.01 pm.

Merrin Thompson
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 30
Friday, 12 June 2026
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 9.03 am

1. Members present

Dr Kaine, *Chair*
Ms Boyd
Mr D'Adam
Mr Martin (from 9.35 am)
Ms Merton
Mr Nanva
Ms Suvaal (*via videoconference*)

2. Apologies

Mrs Mitchell, *Deputy Chair*

3. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Merton: That draft minutes no. 27 and 28 be confirmed.

4. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received
- 30 April 2026 – Letter from the Council of the Australian Association of University Professors, to the committee, formally requesting to provide oral evidence at the upcoming hearings of the inquiry into the university sector regarding integrity, evidence completeness, and broad sector representation
- 1 May 2026 – Email from Person 3, previous employee in the Finance Department of the University of Newcastle, to the secretariat, advising that he reported certain matters to both the University of Newcastle Internal Audit team and the Independent Commission Against Corruption

- 4 May 2026 – Email from Person 3, previous employee in the Finance Department of the University of Newcastle, to the secretariat, attaching three confidential documents relating to his departure from the university
- 19 May 2026 – Email from Person 4, to the secretariat, requesting that the committee ensure universities meet their GIPA obligations regarding contract registers
- 22 May 2026 – Email from an anonymous staff member at the University of Newcastle, to the secretariat, advising of their significant concerns regarding the governance, integrity, and management practices at the university
- 26 May 2026 – Email from Ms Stefanie Balogh, Executive Director, Strategic Communications, Western Sydney University, to the secretariat, requesting that Professor Jennifer Westacott AC, Chancellor, be excused from the next university sector hearing on the basis that she will be presiding over graduation ceremonies, that Distinguished Professor George Williams AO, Vice-Chancellor, attend only in the afternoon on the basis that he will be at graduation ceremonies in the morning, and that Mr Bill Parasiris, Chief Operating Officer, attend at any time and answer all questions for that part of the inquiry
- 28 May 2026 – Email from Ms Rosaline Reakes, Principal Executive Assistant, Office of the Vice-Chancellor and President, Western Sydney University, requesting that Sharmaine Gewohn (Chief of Staff) and Stefanie Balogh (Executive Director, Strategic Communications) attend the next hearing as observers only, and that Distinguished Professor George Williams AO deliver a five-minute opening address
- 1 June 2026 – Letter from Ms Grace Street, President of the Students' Representative Council of the University of Sydney, to the Chair, requesting a meeting with the Chair and the Standing Committee on Social Issues, and that the committee hold a further public hearing focused on student welfare as part of the inquiry into the NSW university sector
- 2 June 2026 – Email from Mr Harsumeet Singh, Postgraduate Officer, Student Representative Council, Western Sydney University, to the secretariat, requesting to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 4 June 2026 – Email from Mr Harsumeet Singh, Postgraduate Officer, Student Representative Council, Western Sydney University, to the secretariat, declining to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector on the basis that he has commitments
- 11 June 2026 – Two emails and two letters from Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh, School of International Studies, Macquarie University, to the Chair, regarding her redundancy

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam:

- That the following correspondence from Person 3 be kept confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat, as it contains identifying and/or sensitive information:
  - Emails received from Person 3, received 1 May 2026 and 4 May 2026
- That the committee keep the correspondence from Person 4, received 19 May 2026, confidential, as per the request of the author
- That the committee keep the email from the anonymous staff member at the University of Newcastle, regarding governance concerns, dated 22 May 2026, confidential, as per the request of the author
- That the secretariat de-identify the minutes to keep confidential the identities of the following inquiry participants:
  - Person 3
  - Person 4.

5. Inquiry into the New South Wales university sector

5.1 Public submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos. 115, 118, 119, 122 and 126.

5.2 Partially confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the request of the author: names and/or identifying and sensitive information in submissions no. 116.

5.3 Confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee keep submission nos. 114, 117, 120 and 121 confidential, as per the request of the author.

5.4 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following items were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee:

- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Dean Yates, Oceania, Government and Health Services Leader, EY, received 6 May 2026

- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mrs Leigh Walker, Oceania, Risk Management and Independent Leader, EY, received 6 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr John Dewar AO, Partner, KordaMentha, received 5 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Lea Patterson, President/CEO, Pilbara, received 29 April 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Professor S.Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, received 6 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Professor Eric Knight, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (People and Operations), Professor of Strategic Management, Macquarie University, received 6 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Professor Chris Dixon, Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University, received 6 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Dr Elena Aydos, Senior Lecturer, School of Law and Justice, University of Newcastle, received 18 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Dr Nicholas Harrigan, Senior Lecturer in Quantitative Sociology and NTEU Macquarie University Branch President, received 20 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions, from Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh, School of International Studies, Macquarie University, received 20 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Associate Professor Nicole Matthews, School of Communication, Society and Culture, Macquarie University, received 20 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Associate Professor Elizabeth Temple, School of Psychology and NTEU University of New England Branch Representative, received 22 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Dr Tim Connor, Senior Lecturer, School of Law and Justice, University of Newcastle, received 25 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Paul McCubbin, CFO, University of Newcastle, received 27 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Professor Laura J. Shepherd, School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Sydney, received 27 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Professor John Buchanan, University of Sydney Business School, received on 27 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Dr Peter J. Chen, Senior Lecturer in Government and International Relations and NTEU University of Sydney Branch President, received 29 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Andrew West, Former elected Fellow, University of Sydney, received 29 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Professor Belinda Tynan, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Newcastle, received 29 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Professor Chris Moran, Vice-Chancellor, University of New England, received 29 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Professor Annamarie Jagose OAM, PhD, FAHA, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, University of Sydney, received 29 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Professor Alex Zelinksy AO, Vice Chancellor, University of Newcastle, received 29 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Dr Richard Denniss, Co-Chief Executive Officer, Australia Institute, received 29 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from University of Sydney Students' Representative Council, received 29 May 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Professor Craig Simmons, PVC Engineering, Science and Environment, University of Newcastle, received 30 May 2026.

5.5 Return date for answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee agree that witnesses be requested to return answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions within 14, rather than 21 calendar days.

5.6 Public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Merton: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the public and media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Professor Renée Leon, Vice-Chancellor and President, Charles Sturt University.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Mr Bill Parasiris, Chief Operating Officer, Western Sydney University
- Mr Mario Milanovic, Interim Chief Financial Officer, Western Sydney University

Mr Parasiris tendered the following document: Bill Parasiris, 'Top 30 consultants', Western Sydney University, 2025.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Professor Robert Mailhammer, Professor of Linguistics and Chair of Academic Senate, Western Sydney University
- Associate Professor Mourad Tayebi, Associate Professor in Biomedical Sciences (Neuroscience) and Member of Academic Senate, Western Sydney University.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Dr David Burchell PhD, Senior Lecturer, School of Humanities and Communication Arts and President, NTEU Western Sydney University Branch
- Mr David Maurice, Data Platforms Manager, Division of Operations and Member, NTEU Western Sydney University Branch.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:
- Mr Stephen Bali MP, State Member for Blacktown.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:
- Distinguished Professor George Williams AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, Western Sydney University.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee accept and publish the following document tendered during the public hearing:
- Bill Parasiris, 'Top 30 consultants', Western Sydney University, 2025, tendered by Mr Parasiris.

6. Other business

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Merton: That the committee write to KPMG requesting a detailed explanation of its firewalls against conflicts of interest, and assurances regarding its statement that it has very strict conflict-of-interest processes in place, as outlined in its response to question 4 in the answers to questions on notice received 12 March 2026.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee write to Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, requesting further details about his loan of $875,000 for acquiring a residence, as noted in the Macquarie University Annual Reports from 2013 to 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva: That the committee write to Macquarie University expressing strong concern and requesting an explanation regarding the redundancy of Associate Professor Bayeh, School of International Studies, Macquarie University.

7. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 3.03 pm.

Bridget Armstrong
Committee Clerk

Draft minutes no. 32
Thursday 18 June 2026
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney at 8.45 am

1. Members present

Dr Kaine, *Chair*
Mrs Mitchell, *Deputy Chair* (via videoconference then in person)
Mr D'Adam (via videoconference)
Ms Faehrmann (via videoconference)
Mr Martin
Ms Merton
Mr Nanva (via videoconference)
Ms Suvaal (via videoconference)

2. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 11 June 2026 – Email from Matt Levey, Head of Public Policy, Amazon Australia, to secretariat, declining witness invitation
- 11 June 2026 – Email from Rachel Lord, YouTube Government Affairs and Public Policy – Australia and New Zealand, to secretariat, declining witness invitation.

Sent

- 18 June 2026 – Letter from the Chair to Ms Claire McGuinness, NSW Government Lead Partner, and Mr Paul Taylor, National Sector Lead Partner – Education, KPMG Australia, seeking further assurance regarding KPMG's management of conflicts of interest in relation to the NSW university sector
- 18 June 2026 – Letter from the Chair to Professor S Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, seeking further information regarding loan from Macquarie University for the purchase of a residence in Sydney
- 18 June 2026 – Letter from the Chair to Professor S Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, seeking explanation and detailed assurance as to whether the participation of Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh in the inquiry into the NSW University Sector had any bearing on the decision to confirm her involuntary redundancy.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva: That the committee keep the attachment to the correspondence from Matt Levey, Head of Public Policy, Amazon Australia, declining witness invitation, dated 11 June 2026, confidential, as per the request of the author.

3. Inquiry into the New South Wales University Sector

3.1 Consideration of draft letters

The committee noted that it had previously agreed that the Chair, on behalf of the committee, write to:

- KPMG Australia, seeking further assurance regarding KPMG's management of conflicts of interest in relation to the NSW university sector.
- Professor S Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, seeking further information regarding his $875,000 loan from Macquarie University for the purchase of a residence in Sydney.
- Macquarie University, seeking explanation and detailed assurance as to whether her participation in the inquiry into the NSW University Sector had any bearing on the decision to confirm her involuntary redundancy, subject to the secretariat's addition of certain words in the letter.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee endorse and send the Chair's draft letter to Ms Claire McGuinness, NSW Government Lead Partner, and Mr Paul Taylor, National Sector Lead Partner – Education, KPMG Australia, seeking further assurance regarding KPMG's management of conflicts of interest in relation to the NSW university sector.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee endorse and send the Chair's draft letter to Professor S Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, seeking further information regarding his $875,000 loan from Macquarie University for the purchase of a residence in Sydney.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee endorse and send Chair's draft letter to Professor S Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, seeking explanation and detailed assurance as to whether Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh's participation in the inquiry into the NSW University Sector had any bearing on the decision to confirm her involuntary redundancy, subject to the secretariat's addition of certain words in the letter.

4. Inquiry into the state of live music in New South Wales

4.1 Public hearing

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined.

- Mrs Amy Ryan, Executive Manager, Planning and Development, Newcastle City Council
- Ms Tory Loudon, New Annual Festival Director, Newcastle City Council
- Mayor Sarah Ndiaye, Mayor, Byron Council
- Mr Alan Dalton, Director, Corporate Services, Cowra Shire Council
- Mr Jarrad Shiells, Civic Centre Manager, Cowra Shire Council.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined.

- Mr Peter Ross, Executive Manager, Creative Communities and Experiences, Tamworth Regional Council and Tamworth Country Music Festival
- Ms Sarah Caskey, Entertainment Manager, Longyard
- Mr Craig Power, Director, Longyard
- Ms Patricia Cruzado, President, Tamworth Songwriters Association
- Mr Duncan Hill, Past President (2009-2024) and Life Member, Tamworth Songwriters Association.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined.

- Dr Wendy Brooks, President, Association of NSW Regional Conservatoriums and Chief Executive Officer, Young Regional Conservatorium
- Mr Hamish Tait, Director and Chief Executive Officer, Riverina Conservatorium of Music
- Mrs Ashleigh Baxter, Executive Director, Eastern Riverina Arts
- Mr Garth Prentice, Board Member, Southern Tablelands Arts.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined.

- Mr Morgan Lewis, Owner and Manager, Fillmore's
- Mrs Crystal Brandon, Former Vice President, Kangaroo Valley Folk Festival, Vice President, Shoalhaven Business Chamber, Vocalist
- Mr Colin Hesse, Volunteer presenter, 2UUU Shoalhaven Community Radio
- Ms Zena Armstrong, Festival Director, Cobargo Folk Festival
- Mr Peter Logue, President, Yuin Folk Club Inc.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined.

- Dr Ben Green, Lecturer, Popular Culture and Music Industry, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
- Dr Sam Whiting, Vice-Chancellor's Senior Research Fellow, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
- Ms Christie Bosworth, Doctoral Researcher, University of Wollongong.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined.

- Mr Rossco Waraker, Vice President, Sydney Blues Society, Working Musician
- Mr Paul Blasi, Committee Member, Sydney Blues Society, Working Musician and Owner, Miss Celie's Live Music Venue
- Mr Michael Forshaw, Volunteer, Cronulla Jazz and Blues Society
- Mr Geoff Trio, Cronulla Chamber Vice President, Business Operator of Brass Monkey Hospitality and Music Venue Co-Founder, Cronulla Jazz and Blues Society
- Mrs Robyn Adamski, Co-Founder, Cronulla Jazz and Blues Society
- Mr Paul Berger, Digital Strategy Coordinator, Kiama Jazz and Blues Society.

Mr Forshaw tendered the following document:

- Festival program: Cronulla Jazz and Blues, held on 27 May – 31 May 2026, at Dunningham Park, Cronulla park, Cronulla mall and participating venues.

Mr Waraker tendered the following documents:

- Briefing deck: Sydney Blues Society briefing deck for the inquiry into the state of live music in New South Wales, dated June 2026.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined.

- Mr Tim McGregor, Global Head of Touring, Ticketek Entertainment Group.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 4.18 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

4.2 Tendered documents

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Merton: That the committee accept and publish the following documents tendered during the public hearing:

- Festival program: Cronulla Jazz and Blues, held on 27 May – 31 May 2026, at Dunningham Park, Cronulla park, Cronulla mall and participating venues, tendered by Mr Michael Forshaw, Volunteer, Cronulla Jazz and Blues Society
- Briefing deck: Sydney Blues Society briefing deck for the inquiry into the state of live music in New South Wales, dated June 2026, tendered by Mr Rossco Waraker, Vice President, Sydney Blues Society, Working Musician.

4.3 Additional documents

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Merton: That the committee accept but not publish the following additional documents provided by Ms Patricia Cruzado, President, Tamworth Songwriters Association:

- an overview and history of the Tamworth Songwriters Association, including the work they undertake.
- correspondence from members of the Tamworth Songwriters Association sharing first-hand experiences of musicians working in the live music sector in New South Wales.
- three newspaper articles titled:
    - 'Music matters: Local band's push for more live music in western Sydney'
    - 'Filipino singer entertains children at Dubbo school'
    - 'Thanks to Everyone at the Tropicana for making my Las Vegas debut so wonderful!'

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 4.20 pm.

Jessie Halligan
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 33
Monday, 13 July 2026
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 9.00 am

1. Members present

Dr Kaine, *Chair*
Mrs Mitchell, *Deputy Chair* (*via videoconference*)
Ms Boyd *(via videoconference)*
Mr D'Adam
Mr Martin *(via videoconference)*
Ms Merton
Mr Donnelly (*substituting for Mr Nanva)*
Ms Suvaal (*via videoconference for the deliberative hearing only*)

2. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That draft minutes no. 30 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 5 June 2026 – Email from Ms Roanne Morris, former Occupational Health and Safety Nurse at the University of Newcastle Callaghan campus, to the secretariat advising of a serious breach of staff medical privacy and information by university management and requesting to appear at a hearing into the NSW university sector
- 10 June 2026 – Email from Ms Vicki Bourbous, to the secretariat, requesting the committee note her correspondence raising concerns that there is no external avenue to complain about alleged misconduct by a union and asking where a person can report serious misconduct by the National Tertiary Education Union
- 11 June 2026 – Email from Mr Bola Oyetunji, Auditor-General for NSW, to Chair, providing a copy of the Universities 2025 Report
- 19 June 2026 – Letter from Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, to Chair, advising that for the purposes of the assurance the committee seeks, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), advising that his decision to confirm the redundancy of Ms Jumana Bayeh, former employee, Macquarie University, was not influenced by her participation in the NSW university sector inquiry
- 26 June 2026 – Email from Ms Evelyn Stagg, professional staff member of the University of Newcastle, to the secretariat, advising that she is open to appearing as a witness at a hearing into the NSW university sector
- 29 June 2026 – Email and Policy Brief from Dr Sarah Gurr, Lecturer, Postgraduate & ECR Member Representative, Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia School of Education, Faculty of Arts and Education, Charles Sturt University, to the secretariat, sharing the preliminary 2026 report for the *Perceptions of Academic Work in Australia* survey, which included responses from over 500 academics across Australian universities regarding widespread dissatisfaction driven by unsustainable government funding, repeated institutional restructures, and poor governance practices
- 30 June 2026 – Email from Mr Warrick Louey, General Counsel, Nous Group, to the secretariat, declining Mr Orton's witness invitation on the basis that he will be overseas on 13 July 2026, and requesting clarification why Mr Orton is being asked to provide further evidence and whether Nous Group may respond to further questions from the committee in writing via questions on notice
- 3 July 2026 – Email from Mr Samuel Christopher, Executive Assistant to Professor Crossley, DVC Academic Quality, the University of New South Wales, to the secretariat, declining Professor Crossley's witness invitation on the basis of prior commitments
- 6 July 2026 – Letter from Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, to Chair, providing further information about the redundancy of Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh, former employee, Macquarie University
- 6 July 2026 – Letter from Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, to Chair, providing information regarding the loan from Macquarie University for the purchase of a residence
- 6 July 2026 – Email from Person 1, to the secretariat, requesting again to appear at a hearing into the NSW university sector and asking how she can challenge the answers to questions on notice from the 29 April hearing
- 8 July 2026 – Email from Dr Elena Aydos, Senior Lecturer, School of Law and Justice, University of Newcastle, to the secretariat, requesting that her published answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions be removed from the inquiry website and treated as confidential, based on legal advice she has received
- 9 July 2026 – Letter from Mr Chris Matthews, National Education Sector Lead Partner and Ms Claire McGuinness, NSW Government Lead Partner, KPMG Australia, to Chair, responding to the committee's request for further assurance regarding KPMG's management of conflicts of interest in relation to the NSW university sector, and declining to appear at a hearing into the NSW university sector on the basis that the most appropriate personnel are on annual leave.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam:

- That the committee keep the correspondence from Person 1, received 6 July 2026, confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat, as it contains identifying and/or sensitive information
- That the secretariat de-identify the minutes to keep confidential the identity of the following inquiry participant:
  - Person 1.

4. Inquiry into the New South Wales university sector

4.1 Publication of correspondence – Macquarie University

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly: That the secretariat provide the correspondence to Associate Professor Bayeh, former employee, Macquarie University.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee publish the following items of correspondence on the inquiry website, subject to the consent of Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh, former employee, Macquarie University:

- Letter from Chair to Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, seeking explanation and detailed assurance as to whether the participation of Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh in the inquiry had any bearing on the decision to confirm her involuntary redundancy, sent 18 June 2026
- Letter from Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, to Chair, advising that the decision to confirm the redundancy of Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh, former employee, Macquarie University, was not influenced by her participation in the inquiry, received 19 June 2026
- Letter from Chair to Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, requesting that he advise why the committee should not conclude that the decision to confirm Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh's redundancy was retaliatory, sent 25 June 2026
- Letter from Professor S. Bruce Dowton Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, to Chair, providing further information and advising again that the decision to confirm the redundancy of Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh, former employee, Macquarie University, was not influenced by her participation in the inquiry, received 6 July 2026.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Donnelly:

- That the committee publish the following items of correspondence on the inquiry website:
  - Letter from Chair to Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, requesting further information regarding his $875,000 loan from Macquarie University for the purchase of a residence, sent 18 June 2026
  - Letter from Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, to Chair, providing information regarding his $875,000 loan from Macquarie University for the purchase of a residence, received 6 July 2026.
- That the committee note that Professor Dowton's response provides no further information than has already been published in the Macquarie University annual reports
- That the Chair write again to Professor Dowton seeking further information beyond what has already been publicly disclosed in the Macquarie University annual reports regarding the interest rate on the loan, the payment requirements and the arrangements for charging the university for use of the property for official university business.

4.2 Publication of correspondence – KPMG Australia

The committee noted that KPMG had declined to give evidence at the 13 July 2026 hearing.

Resolved on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee publish the following items of correspondence on the inquiry website:

- Letter from Mr Chris Matthews, National Education Sector Lead Partner and Ms Claire McGuinness, NSW Government Lead Partner, KPMG Australia, responding to the committee's request for further assurance regarding KPMG's management of conflicts of interest in relation to the NSW university sector, received 9 July 2026
- Letter from Chair to Ms Claire McGuinness, NSW Government Lead Partner, and Mr Paul Taylor, National Sector Lead Partner – Education, KPMG Australia, seeking further assurance regarding KPMG's management of conflicts of interest in relation to the NSW university sector, sent 18 June 2026.

4.3 Public submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos. 127, 128 and 129.

4.4 Partially confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee authorise the publication of submission no. 131, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information and/or potential adverse mention, which is to remain confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat.

4.5 Confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Merton: That the committee keep submission nos. 123. 124, 125 and 130 confidential, as per the request of the author.

4.6 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following items were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee:

- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Dr Robin B. Fitzsimons AM, Honorary Fellow and Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of Sydney, received 1 June 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from the University of Newcastle Students' Association, received 5 June 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from the NTEU Charles Sturt University Branch, received 5 June 2026

- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr David Maurice, Data Platforms Manager, Division of Operations and Member, NTEU Western Sydney University Branch, received 19 June 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Distinguished Professor George Williams AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, Western Sydney University, received 3 July 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Bill Parasiris, Chief Operating Officer, Western Sydney University, received 3 July 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Mario Milanovic, Interim Chief Financial Officer, Western Sydney University, received 3 July 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Professor Renée Leon, Vice-Chancellor, Charles Sturt University, received 3 July 2026.

Resolved on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Dr Elena Aydos, Senior Lecturer, School of Law and Justice, University of Newcastle, received 18 May 2026, be kept confidential at the request of the witness.

4.7 Return date for answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee agree that witnesses be requested to return answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions within 7 rather than 21 calendar days.

4.8 Potential provision of misleading evidence by witnesses

The committee noted the following instances of witnesses potentially having misled the committee:

- University of Wollongong witnesses, in light of recent evidence given during the Independent Commission Against Corruption's Operation Scandi hearings
- Nous Group witnesses, in light of information published in the media regarding the Australian National University.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Boyd: That the secretariat seek advice for the committee on appropriate procedures to be followed in the event that, following further consideration of the ICAC transcripts and other information, the committee considers that witnesses have provided false or misleading evidence.

4.9 Public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the public and media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Professor Tyrone Carlin Vice-Chancellor, Southern Cross University.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Scientia Professor Vlado Perkovic, Provost, University of New South Wales.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Professor Ben Golder, Faculty of Law and Justice, UNSW and National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) UNSW Branch Representative
- Dr Anne Barnes, UNSW Faculty of Medicine and Health (Professional Staff) and NTEU UNSW Branch Representative
- Dr Sarah Gregson, Casual Academic UNSW Business School & Former NTEU Branch President.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr William Scharzenberger Moran, President, UNSW Student Representative Council
- Ms Diya Sengupta, General Secretary, UNSW Student Representative Council.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The media and the public withdrew.

4.10 Sub-committee

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee appoint:

- a sub-committee to continue the 13 July 2026 hearing from 3.45 pm until its conclusion
- Dr Kaine, Ms Boyd, Mr Martin and Mrs Mitchell as members of the sub-committee

- Dr Kaine to act as Chair of the sub-committee.

4.11 Public hearing

The media and the public were readmitted.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Mr Felix Hughes, National President, National Union of Students (NUS)
- Mr Akash Nagarajan, General Secretary, NUS
- Mr Andrew Shim, Director, State Our Rights Campaign
- Mr Neel Erande, Student, University of Sydney
- Ms Lucy Fawcett, 2025 Welfare Officer, NUS.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Dr Adam Lucas, Honorary Senior Fellow, School of Humanities & Social Inquiry, Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences & Humanities, University of Wollongong
- Emeritus Professor James Guthrie AM, Department of Accounting and Corporate Governance, Macquarie University.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Professor Manuel B. Graeber MD PhD FRCPath, President, University of Sydney Association of Professors (USAP) and Vice-President, Australian Association of University Professors (AAUP)
- Professor Gabriel Donleavy, MA (Cantab), LLB (Lond), PhD (Glasg), FCA(ANZ), FRSA, FCMI, FHEA, Professor of Accounting, University of New England and AAUP Representative
- Associate Professor Dr Shumi Akhtar, Associate Professor, Governance, Financial crime, AI & Higher Education, The University of Sydney and AAUP Representative.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public and the media withdrew.

Having previously agreed via email on 7 July 2026 to conduct an *in camera* hearing with certain individuals, the committee proceeded to take *in camera* evidence.

Persons present other than the committee: committee secretariat, Hansard reporters, audiovisual and broadcast staff.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:
- Witness C
- Witness D
- Witness E.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee accept and publish the following document tendered during the public hearing:
- Emeritus Professor James Guthrie AM and Dr Adam Lucas PhD, 'Audit, accounting, and governance reform in the New South Wales Public University Sector' to be published as supplementary submission no. 71a.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 5.04 pm.

Bridget Armstrong
Committee Clerk

Draft minutes no. 35
Monday, 14 September 2026
Standing Committee on Social Issues
Room 1043, Parliament House, Sydney at 11.02 am

6. Members present

Dr Kaine, *Chair*
Mrs Mitchell, *Deputy Chair*

Ms Boyd, via videoconference
Mr D'Adam, via videoconference
Mr Donnelly, substituting for Mr Nanva
Mr Martin, via videoconference
Ms Merton
Ms Suvaal

7. Previous minutes

Mr D'Adam moved: That draft minutes no. 33 be confirmed.
Question put and passed.

8. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 1 March 2026 – Email attaching a submission from Mr Adam Matthews to the committee, advising that his submission is intended to assist the committee's consideration of domestic and family violence as a social wellbeing, public health, and service system issue
- 1 July 2026 – Email from Person 4, attaching additional information in respect of their evidence to the committee and requesting that it be kept confidential
- 15 July 2026 – Email from Professor Robert Mailhammer, providing additional information in respect of his evidence to the committee on 12 June 2026 and requesting that it be published to correct the record
- 20 July 2026 – Email from Person 5, to Chair, advising, in confidence, of their experience as a fixed-term casual academic at the University of New England
- 21 July 2026 – Letter from Professor Alex Zelinsky AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Newcastle, to Chair, advising confidentially that he believes some information provided by witnesses has been misconstrued by committee members and seeking to ensure that this assumption is corrected before the final report is prepared
- 22 July 2026 – Email from Person 6, attaching information regarding the University of Sydney
- 27 July 2026 – Email from Person 1 to the committee, proposing questions for the committee to direct to senior University of Sydney staff
- 27 July 2026 – Email from Associate Professor Shumi Akhtar, Australian Association of University Professors, to the committee, providing additional information extending the answers she provided at the hearing on 13 July 2026
- 29 July 2026 - Email from Dr Adam Lucas, University of Wollongong, to Chair, attaching submission made to ICAC concerning governance, conduct and conflicts of interest at the University of Wollongong
- 6 August 2026 – Email from Person 1 to the committee, regarding correspondence with the Vice Chancellor of the University of Sydney
- 10 August 2026 – Email from Person 7, Western Sydney University, to the secretariat, seeking confidential advice regarding possible reprisals for participating in the universities inquiry
- 10 August 2026 – Email from Person 7, Western Sydney University, to the secretariat, forwarding communications evidencing possible reprisals for participating in the universities inquiry
- 11 August 2026 – Letter from Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, to Chair, providing further information regarding his $875,000 loan from Macquarie University for the purchase of a residence
- 14 August 2026 and 30 July 2026 – Email chain from Mr Peter Davey to the committee, alleging Mr John Dewar AO misled the committee during his evidence for the universities inquiry
- 15 August 2026 – Email from Person 8 to the secretariat, raising governance concerns in respect of the University of Sydney
- 15 August 2026 – Email from Ms Tanya Levin to the committee, requesting that the committee consider a deteriorating situation affecting residents of a Homes NSW public housing building in Redfern
- 31 August 2026 – Email from Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh, providing update on her matter with the Fair Work Commission
- 2 September 2026 – Email from Person 1 to the secretariat, seeking guidance on procedure for lodging a formal complaint concerning alleged retaliation by their employer following participation in the universities inquiry
- 3 September 2026 – Email from Person 9 to the secretariat, providing information regarding Southern Cross University
- 10 September 2026 – Email from Professor Manuel Graeber, requesting to lodge a late supplementary submission to the universities inquiry.

Sent

- 30 July 2026 – Letter from Chair to Professor Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University, requesting further information regarding his $875,000 loan from Macquarie University for the purchase of a residence
- 5 August 2026 – Letter from Chair to Professor Alex Zelinsky AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Newcastle, advising that following consideration of concerns raised in his correspondence and clarification from the member concerned, the committee does not propose to take further action, and noting additional information regarding academic workload allocation and union representative time-release arrangements.

Ms Suvaal moved: That the committee:

- keep the additional information from Person 4, received 1 July 2026, confidential, as per the request of the author, and remove the author's name from the minutes
- publish the email from Professor Robert Mailhammer, received 15 July 2026, providing further information in respect of his evidence to the committee on 12 June 2026 and requesting that it be published to correct the record, and that a footnote be added to the transcript of evidence with a link to the email
- keep the correspondence from Person 5, received 20 July 2026, confidential, as per the request of the author, and remove the author's name from the minutes
- keep the correspondence from Professor Alex Zelinksy AO, received 21 July 2026, confidential, as per the request of the author
- keep the email from Person 6, received 22 July 2026, confidential, as per the author, and remove the author's name from the minutes
- note the correspondence from Person 7, received 10 August 2026, seeking confidential advice regarding possible reprisals for participating the universities inquiry, keep the correspondence confidential, as per the request of the author, and remove the author's name from the minutes
- keep the correspondence from Person 8 received 15 August 2026, confidential, as per the request of the author, and remove the author's name from the minutes
- keep the correspondence from Person 1, 2 September 2026, confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat, as it contains identifying and/or sensitive information, and remove the author's name from the minutes
- keep the correspondence from Person 9, received 3 September 2026, confidential, as per the request of the author, and remove the author's name from the minutes
- accept and publish late submission 20a with redactions of the name of a third party, as per the recommendation of the secretariat.

Question put and passed.

9. Inquiry into the New South Wales university sector

9.1 Previous decisions agreed via email

The committee noted the following decisions were agreed via email:

- 13 August 2026 – to publish on the inquiry website the correspondence between the Chair and Professor Bruce Dowton regarding the loan for his residence, dated 30 July 2026 and 11 August 2026
- 13 August 2026 – to note but take no further action in relation to Person 1's correspondence providing questions for senior University of Sydney staff, received 27 July 2026 and suppress her name from the minutes
- 13 August 2026 – to publish as correspondence the additional information from Person 1, received 27 July 2026, which extends the answers she provided at the hearing on 13 July 2026
- 13 August 2026 – to keep confidential and take no further action on the correspondence from Person 1 regarding correspondence with the Vice Chancellor of the University of Sydney, received 6 August 2026
- 24 August 2026 – to note but take no further action on the correspondence from Person 6, received 22 July 2026, attaching information regarding the University of Sydney
- 3 September 2026 – that the Chair's draft report be circulated on Wednesday 9 September 2026, five days prior to the report deliberative.

9.2 Public submissions

The committee noted the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos. 133 and 137.

9.3 Partially confidential submissions

Mr Donnelly moved: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat: names, identifying and sensitive information, and potential adverse mention, in submission nos. 135, 136 and 138.

Question put and passed.

9.4 Confidential submissions

Ms Suvaal moved: That the committee keep submission nos. 132 and 134 confidential, as per the request of the authors.

Question put and passed.

9.5 Attachments to submissions

Mr Donnelly moved: That the committee authorise the publication of the three attachments to submission 137 and publish them online.

Question put and passed.

Mr Martin moved: That the committee keep the attachments to submission 13a confidential, as per the request of the author, due to identifying and sensitive information.

Question put and passed.

9.6 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following items were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee:

- answers to questions on notice from the Auditor General, received 15 July 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Professor Tyrone Carlin, Southern Cross University, received 27 July 2026
- answers to supplementary questions from the National Tertiary Education Union, UNSW Branch, received 27 July 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from the University of New South Wales, including attachment referenced at Question 1, received 31 July 2026.

9.7 Consideration of Chair's draft report

The Chair submitted her draft report entitled 'New South Wales university governance - Final report', which, having been previously circulated, was taken as being read.

Ms Suvaal declared that she is a student at the University of Newcastle and noted she would excuse herself from any parts of the report deliberations should a potential conflict of interest arise.

Chapter 1

No amendments.

Chapter 2

No amendments.

Chapter 3

No amendments.

Chapter 4

No amendments.

Chapter 5

No amendments.

Chapter 6

No amendments.

Chapter 7

No amendments.

Chapter 8

No amendments.

Chapter 9

No amendments.

Chapter 10

No amendments.

Chapter 11

Mrs Mitchell moved: That Finding 1 be omitted: 'The governance structures for New South Wales universities are not fit for purpose, nor implemented in such a way as to enable public confidence', and the following new finding be inserted instead:

> 'The governance structures for New South Wales universities need to be comprehensively reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose and implemented in such a way to enable public confidence'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Martin, Ms Merton and Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Mr Donnelly, Dr Kaine, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That Finding 2 be omitted: 'In the context of financial and policy challenges, universities have swung too far towards corporatisation at the expense of their fundamental public mission of education, research and service to the broader community'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Martin, Ms Merton and Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Mr Donnelly, Dr Kaine, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Merton moved: That Recommendation 4 be omitted: 'That the Legislative Council Portfolio Committee responsible for Tertiary Education:

- annually inquire into and report on universities' fulfilment of their responsibilities under their respective enabling Acts
- commence its annual inquiry following the lodgement of the universities' annual report in NSW Parliament'

and the following recommendation inserted instead:

> 'That the Legislative Council Portfolio Committee responsible for tertiary education undertake risk-based periodic reviews of universities, with targeted inquiries triggered by material governance failures, serious audit findings, major underpayments, significant conflicts of interest or substantial public expenditure concerns.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Martin, Ms Merton and Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Mr Donnelly, Dr Kaine, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That the following new paragraphs be inserted after paragraph 11.36:

> 'Any legislative changes to the appointment of Vice-Chancellors must ensure there are transparent appointment and re-appointment processes, public disclosure of selection criteria and performance measures, and independent review before reappointment. Any term limit should be capable of extension only in exceptional circumstances and following a public explanation by the governing body.
>
> Any removal of Vice-Chancellors and Chancellors must ensure procedural fairness, natural justice and clearly defined grounds such as serious misconduct, incapacity, material breach of duty or persistent failure against agreed performance measures.'

Question put and passed.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Recommendation 5 be amended by omitting the words 'appointment, performance oversight, suspension and removal of Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors' and inserting instead 'appointment, performance oversight, suspension and removal of Chancellors, Vice-Chancellors and university councillors'.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That Finding 9 be omitted: 'The governance arrangements established under New South Wales university enabling Acts do not sufficiently support broad and balanced representation on university councils'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Martin, Ms Merton and Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Mr Donnelly, Dr Kaine, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Michell moved: That the first dot point in Recommendation 8 be omitted: 'increasing minimum requirements for 50 per cent elected academic staff, professional staff and student representation on university councils'

and the following new dot point inserted instead:

'requiring meaningful elected representation of academic staff, professional staff, students and graduates while retaining a substantial majority of independent members appointed for skills, experience and community standing'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Martin, Ms Merton and Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Mr Donnelly, Dr Kaine, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That a new dot point be inserted in Recommendation 8:

'requiring university enabling Acts to provide, where practicable, for at least one graduate or alumni representative on each governing body, elected by that institution's alumni'.

Question put and passed.

Ms Merton moved: That a new dot point be inserted in Recommendation 8:

'expanding the membership of councils for larger universities to at least 23 to enable a sufficient number of elected members'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Martin, Ms Merton and Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Mr Donnelly, Dr Kaine, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mr D'Adam moved that a new dot point be inserted in Recommendation 8:

'requiring the president, or equivalent position, of the student representative council to be an ex-officio member of the university council in addition to any other elected student representatives'.

Question put and passed.

Mr D'Adam moved that a new dot point be inserted in Recommendation 8:

'requiring elected representatives to constitute a majority on all standing council committees and subcommittees that deal with:
- appointments to senior leadership positions
- appointments to university councils
- the remuneration of senior executives'.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Mr Donnelly, Dr Kaine, Ms Suvaal.

Noes: Mr Martin, Ms Merton and Mrs Mitchell.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That the following recommendations be omitted:

'Recommendation 11

That the New South Wales Government amend the enabling legislation for each New South Wales university to require the establishment of an independent university council secretariat at each university, accountable to and operating under the direction of the university's governing body rather than university management. Each independent university council secretariat would provide professional governance support, advice and administrative services to the members of the governing body and be subject to a legislated code of conduct and minimum professional standards.'

'Recommendation 12

That the Department of Education appoint the initial Head of the independent university council secretariat to be established for each New South Wales university, excluding ex-officio members, and that all other members of each secretariat be employed by the Head of that secretariat.'

and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'Recommendation 11
That the NSW Government amend the enabling legislation for each New South Wales university to allow for the establishment of an independent governance support function where a demonstrated need exists, with the head appointed through an open and merit-based process.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mr Martin, Ms Merton and Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Mr Donnelly, Dr Kaine, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved that recommendation 12 be omitted:

'That the Department of Education appoint the initial Head of the independent university council secretariat to be established for each New South Wales university, excluding ex-officio members, and that all other members of each secretariat be employed by the Head of that secretariat.'

and the following new recommendation be inserted instead:

'Recommendation 12

That the Department of Education appoint, through an open and merit-based process, the initial Head of the independent university council secretariat to be established at each university. All other members of each secretariat are to be employed by the Head of that secretariat.'

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That the first dot point of Recommendation 16 be amended by inserting 'in a standardised format' after 'require universities to disclose in their annual reports'.

Question put and passed.

Mr Donnelly moved: That:

The draft report as amended be the report of the committee and that the committee present the report to the House.

The transcripts of evidence, tabled documents, submissions, correspondence and answers to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions relating to the inquiry be tabled in the House with the report.

Upon tabling, all unpublished attachments to submissions be kept confidential by the committee.

Upon tabling, all unpublished transcripts of evidence, tabled documents, submissions, correspondence and answers to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions related to the inquiry be published by the committee, except for those documents kept confidential by resolution of the committee.

The committee secretariat correct any typographical, grammatical and formatting errors prior to tabling.

The committee secretariat be authorised to update any committee comments where necessary to reflect changes to recommendations or new recommendations resolved by the committee.

Dissenting statements be provided to the secretariat within 24 hours after receipt of the draft minutes of the meeting.

The secretariat is tabling the report on 21 September 2026.

The Chair to advise the secretariat and members if they intend to hold a press conference, and if so, the date and time.

10. Other business
Mrs Mitchell thanked members of the secretariat for their work on the inquiry.

11. Adjournment
The committee adjourned at 12.08 pm.

Elspeth Dyer
Committee Clerk