

INQUIRY INTO NEW SOUTH WALES UNIVERSITY SECTOR

Hearing: 17 December 2025

ANSWERS TO SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

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QUESTION: You note in your submission the changing governance practices and structures sections entitled “Structural Recalibration: Committee Composition and Procedural Constraints” and Consolidation of Procedural Power Through Performance Monitoring and you note these changes are reflected in the revised Council handbook of 2025? What are these changes and why should we be concerned?

The 2025 Council Handbook documents a governance recalibration that concentrates power, narrows accountability, and reduces the transparency of decision making at the University of Wollongong. In particular, the Chancellor’s role is expanded to include succession planning, committee leadership, and assurance functions that collapse the boundary between independent oversight and operational control. At the same time, key committees have reduced quorums and diminished academic and elected representation, meaning that a small subset of members can shape decisions before they reach full Council. These changes matter because they erode the collective governance model expected of a statutory public university and increase the risk of decisions being made without visible scrutiny. The following sections outline the transformation of the Chancellor role, the restructuring of committees, the shift in Vice Chancellor performance criteria, and the practical consequences illustrated by the Saudi Arabia expansion.

The Transformation of the Chancellor Role

The evidence before the Committee demonstrates that the role of Chancellor at the University of Wollongong has moved far beyond the traditional function of an independent presiding officer. The revised 2025 Council Handbook and the Chancellor’s own testimony show that the office now operates as an embedded executive position with direct control over governance processes, information flows and succession planning. This transformation is inconsistent with the University of Wollongong Act 1989 (NSW), the TEQSA Higher Education Standards Framework Domain 6, and the OECD Principles of Corporate Governance.

During the hearing on 17 December 2025, Chancellor Michael Still confirmed the extent of his operational involvement. When asked how many hours he spent on university administration, he stated, *“I think in the last couple of years I would have spent at least 40 hours a week”*

A commitment of this scale is indistinguishable from a full time executive role. It is not compatible with the orthodox conception of a Chancellor as a non-executive chair who safeguards process and independence.

The Chancellor recruitment panel evidence makes clear that this was not the intended design of the office. Deputy Chancellor Warwick Shanks AO told the Committee, *“I think we told Michael that it would be a one to two days a week role. It’s been clear from day one he’s put in much more hours than that.”* The difference between an expected one to two days and an admitted five days per week represents a structural change to the nature of the office. The Chancellor has assumed an executive workload without statutory authority and without the accountability framework that applies to the Vice Chancellor.

The 2025 Council Handbook highlights the entrenched shift. The earlier 2016 instrument described six responsibilities focused on chairing meetings, advising members and acting as a link with the Chief Executive Officer. The 2025 version expands the role to ten responsibilities and multiple assurance duties. The Chancellor must now ensure governance structures are fit for purpose, ensure the Vice Chancellor provides information to Council, chair the Nominations, Performance and Remuneration and Honorary Awards Committees, lead succession planning, act as a conduit with the Secretariat, and ensure that Council assures itself of academic governance, financial management and risk controls. A direct reporting line from the Secretary to Council to the Chancellor further consolidates this control.

These functions transfer core levers of governance to one individual. The Chancellor controls who joins Council, what information reaches Council, how the Vice Chancellor is performance managed and how Council business is administered. This configuration converts the office from an independent referee to an operational participant in governance. The evidence that the Chancellor works at least forty hours per week confirms that this is not merely theoretical but reflects day to day practice.

TEQSA Domain 6 requires that the governing body operates independently of management and that there is capacity for free and frank advice (TEQSA 2021, s6.1.3, s6.1.4). Academic governance must be independently assured and fiduciary responsibility rests with the Council collectively (TEQSA 2021, s6.3). A Chancellor embedded in the Executive Suite and exercising operational control over nominations, remuneration and information flows cannot meet the test of

independence. The model collapses the boundary between oversight and execution. It substitutes collective responsibility with personalised authority.

The OECD Principles of Corporate Governance warn against excessive influence by the chair and emphasise objective nominations processes and balanced distribution of powers (OECD 2023, Principles IV and VI). The 2025 arrangements create a Chancellor centric structure where the same individual shapes membership, chairs remuneration, directs the Secretariat and certifies assurance functions. This is the configuration the OECD identifies as high risk for groupthink and capture.

The transcript also reveals procedural practices that compound this risk. Evidence showed that the Chancellor convened meetings of independent members separately from elected members. Such practices undermine the collective nature of Council and diminish the voice of staff and student representatives. The revised Handbook provisions combined with these practices alter the character of Council from a plural governing body to an inner circle directed by the Chancellor.

The University of Wollongong Act 1989 establishes Council as the governing authority and the Vice Chancellor as the chief executive. The Act does not confer executive power on the Chancellor to manage governance architecture or direct succession. A handbook cannot expand statutory authority. The 2025 provisions therefore risk acting beyond power and eroding parliamentary intent. There is also no verifiable conferral of this power by Council as there is no evidence in public Council statements when this Handbook was approved. There is no version control highlighting how the document changed and the history of these decision.

This is not acceptable practice for a public university. The Chancellor is now both designer and adjudicator of governance. The role has moved from ensuring compliance with the Act to exercising executive control. The recruitment panel expected a limited commitment of one to two days per week, yet the Chancellor now performs a full working week. Such a model is incompatible with TEQSA Domain 6, OECD principles and NSW public sector governance norms.

The Committee should recommend immediate restoration of a non executive chair model consistent with the 2016 framework. The Chancellor should not chair Finance and Infrastructure, Nominations or Remuneration Committees. The Secretariat must be accountable to Council collectively. Information requirements should be set by Council as a body, not by the presiding officer. An external TEQSA aligned review should assess compliance with Domain 6 and report publicly.

Universities hold public trust, public funds and responsibility for academic freedom. Governance must be transparent, plural and contestable. The current model concentrates power in one office and diminishes the safeguards that protect staff, students and the Illawarra community. Reform is essential to restore lawful and ethical governance.

Committee Restructuring and Governance Capture

Even if robust performance criteria still existed, the current committee architecture is no longer capable of applying them. The revisions to the Council Handbook have transformed committees from instruments that advise and assist Council as a collective into bodies that merely advise. This subtle change has profound effect. Committees now predetermine decisions rather than support collective judgement, and the system advises itself on matters it is meant to scrutinise.

Structural changes to composition intensify this risk. The academic voice has been removed from the Finance Committee and the Performance and Remuneration Committee. External members, largely from finance and consulting backgrounds, dominate these powerful forums. Ministerial appointees are excluded from critical committees. Evidence confirmed that no elected staff or student members sit on the Performance and Remuneration Committee. Those most affected by Vice Chancellor performance are absent from the table where it is judged.

Procedural constraints compound the problem. Quorums as small as three or four members can make binding decisions. By the time matters come to Council the advice from the subcommittee is clear. The current Council Handbook promotes collegial working relationships and agility, as well as there being reduced emphasis on building and ensuring consensus. Overlapping memberships mean the same individuals appear across multiple committees, advising Council on the decisions they will later endorse. In March 2025 a mapping of the subcommittees showed three Council members being the consistent members on three critical bodies with their joint memberships meeting the quorum obligations of amended Terms of References. Ambiguous language about positive culture and leadership behaviours, as well as emphasis on confidentiality and speaking as one body, replaces concrete scrutiny obligations. The complete governance framework that once sat within the Handbook has been fragmented across external links, making transparency difficult.

TABLE 1: COMMITTEE STRUCTURE COMPARISON AND PARLIAMENTARY CONCERNS

2016 Structure	2025 Structure	Key Changes	Impact on Governance	Why Parliament Should Be Concerned
FINANCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE				
- Advised Council on financial and infrastructure matters - Standard practice included academic representation - No Executive Committee powers	Chair: External Council member Membership: VC + ≥2 external members + up to 2 external experts Academic members: ZERO (not specified as required) Elected staff: ZERO Ministerial appointees: Not required Quorum: 3 members Meetings: Minimum 4/year	REMOVED: Academic voice from financial decision-making ADDED: Executive Committee powers (Delegation 46.01) to act on behalf of Council on urgent matters between meetings ADDED: Authority to approve capital projects ≥\$5M (Delegation 3.11) REDUCED: Quorum to 3 enables tiny group control	Concentration of Power: Same 3 external members can approve major capital projects, urgent matters, and budget allocations without academic input Academic Exclusion: Financial decisions affecting academic programs, research priorities, and educational quality made without academic expertise Network Dominance: External members with consulting/infrastructure backgrounds dominate committee with no counterbalance	Saudi Arabia Decision: \$30-year commitment approved during "most dire financial period" without academic assessment of educational viability, staff welfare, or alignment with Illawarra mission Statutory Breach Risk: UOW Act s6(2)(a) requires "particular regard to needs of Illawarra region" but no mechanism ensures this in financial decisions Public Interest Void: Ministerial appointees (representing public ownership) excluded from major capital allocation decisions Taxpayer Risk: Public funds directed to high-risk international ventures without diverse oversight
PERFORMANCE AND REMUNERATION COMMITTEE				
- Monitored policies for recruitment and remuneration 2016 mandatory VC performance criteria included: staff/student welfare, collegial/ethical behaviour, employer of choice - Broader Council representation	Chair: CHANCELLOR Membership: Deputy Chancellors + ≥2 external members + up to 2 external experts Elected staff: ZERO Academic staff: ZERO Students: ZERO Ministerial appointees: Not required Quorum: 3 members Meetings: Minimum 2/year, though not on public schedule.	CRITICAL ROLE CHANGE: Chancellor now chairs committee that judges VC performance while working 40 hrs/week operationally with VC REMOVED: All stakeholder voices (staff, academics, students) from executive performance oversight ADDED: Authority to approve/terminate senior executive positions (Delegation 11.01/11.02) - transferred from VC in December 2023 TRANSFORMED: Mandatory VC performance criteria (welfare, ethics, employer of choice) became optional "examples that may be included" so actual criteria is opaque REDUCED: Meeting minimum to only 2/year for 9 major responsibilities	Conflict of Interest: Chancellor who works alongside VC 40 hrs/week judges VC's performance, determines VC's pay, controls VC's senior appointments Stakeholder Silencing: Those most affected (staff, students) have no voice in assessing those who make decisions affecting them Performance Manipulation: Optional criteria enable committee to reward growth/finance metrics while ignoring ethics, welfare, or service to region Executive Vulnerability: Senior executives cannot point to mandatory people-centered criteria when raising concerns—exposes them to being rated as "not aligned with growth agenda"	Timing of Delegation Change: Authority over senior executive positions transferred to this committee December 2023; VC resigned three weeks later—raises questions about executive destabilization WHS Liability: Officers (Council members) must ensure staff welfare under WHS Act s27, but committee can choose not to assess VC on welfare criteria – creates compliance gap Ethical Accountability Void: Deletion of mandatory "collegial and ethical behaviour" criterion means VC can bypass consultation (Academic Senate, WHS Committee) and still be rated as high-performing Illawarra Mission Drift: No mandatory criterion ensuring VC serves region (contrary to UOW Act s6(2)(a)) enables decisions like Saudi expansion that divert resources away from statutory purpose
RISK, AUDIT AND COMPLIANCE COMMITTEE				
Assisted Council in corporate governance oversight of risk, compliance, internal controls, and audit	Chair: External Council member (not staff/student) Membership: VC (ex officio) + 3 external members (≥1 with financial expertise) + 1 elected staff + 1 elected	EXPANDED SCOPE: Now responsible for 6 major functional areas with 43 distinct sub-responsibilities: - Risk & controls (10 items including cyber, fraud, WHS, business continuity) - Compliance (TEQSA, data protection, legal framework)	Workload Overload: 43 responsibilities across 6 domains with unspecified meeting frequency creates risk of superficial oversight Cyber Governance Gap: Cybersecurity is one item among 43, yet UOW operates internationally (Dubai, Hong Kong, Malaysia, India, Saudi Arabia) with	Saudi Arabia Risk Failure: RACC should have required consultative WHS Risk Assessment before approving 30-year Saudi commitment, but decision proceeded without it—demonstrates oversight collapse TEQSA Breach Risk: Domain 6.2.1 requires

2016 Structure	2025 Structure	Key Changes	Impact on Governance	Why Parliament Should Be Concerned
	academic OR Senate Chair + up to 2 external experts Quorum: 3 members Term: 2 years, staggered Meetings: Not specified (unlike FIC/Perf&Renum minimums)	3. Internal audit (10 items) 4. Controlled entities oversight (UOWGE, UOW Pulse) 5. External financial reporting (6 items) 6. External audit (7 items) PRESERVED: Some academic/staff representation (1 elected staff + 1 academic)	complex cyber risk profile Controlled Entity Risk: Annual reporting from UOWGE may be insufficient for early detection of problems in high-risk international operations Quorum Mismatch: 3-member quorum inadequate for complexity of oversight (can represent only 33-43% of membership)	"systematic corporate monitoring" but RACC attempting 43 responsibilities creates risk of non-systematic, reactive oversight Regulatory Exposure: If RACC cannot adequately monitor TEQSA compliance, cyber security, controlled entities, and fraud simultaneously, institution exposed to regulatory action across multiple domains Officer Liability: WHS Act s27 requires officers (Council members) ensure risk processes in place, if RACC too overloaded to ensure this, Council members personally liable
COUNCIL NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE				
- Selected candidates for Ministerial appointments - Recommended Council's own appointees - Considered reappointments - Details not fully specified in 2016 Handbook	Chair: Chancellor Functions: Unchanged—recommend candidates for Ministerial appointments, Council appointments, reappointments	CRITICAL POWER CONCENTRATION: Chancellor now chairs committee that selects who joins the Council that oversees the Chancellor COMBINED WITH: Chancellor also leads "succession planning" and "selection of new Council members" (per Chancellor role description)	Self-Perpetuation: Chancellor controls who joins Council, creates loyalty through selection process, can prioritize candidates aligned with current governance approach Accountability Void: Council cannot effectively oversee Chancellor if Chancellor determines Council's composition Network Reinforcement: Combined with Chancellor's professional networks and 40hr/week operational involvement, creates closed circle of like-minded appointees	Governance Capture: Public institution's governing body composition controlled by individual with vested interest in maintaining current power structure Public Interest Risk: No evidence Ministerial appointees (representing public ownership) included in or can influence candidate selection dominated by Chancellor Transparency Failure: No published criteria for "suitable" Council candidates, no skills matrix ensuring diverse expertise, no public disclosure of selection process—Parliament cannot verify merit-based appointments Statutory Intent: UOW Act establishes Council composition categories (ministerial, Council-appointed, elected) to ensure balance—Chancellor control over appointments undermines this design
COUNCIL PROGRAM CONTROL BOARD				
Did not exist	NEW COMMITTEE (2025) Purpose: "Oversight and guidance for UOW's transformation program. Ensures alignment of Council-initiated reviews, 2030 strategy development, and 2024 budget remediation efforts"	NEW GOVERNANCE LAYER: Established to manage financial crisis and institutional transformation TIMING: Created during "most dire financial period" (per Finance Committee May 2024 assessment)	Uncertain Authority: Unclear how PCB coordinates with Finance Committee (which has Executive powers) and Performance & Remuneration Committee (which controls executive appointments) Overlapping Membership Risk: If same external members sit on FIC, Perf&Renum, and PCB, they control crisis response, executive accountability, and strategic direction simultaneously Transformation During Crisis: Major governance restructuring (including Saudi expansion) occurring while institution in financial distress increases risk of capture by external interests	Financial Crisis Governance: Parliament should be concerned that during UOW's worst financial period, a new committee with undefined membership and unclear accountability is directing institutional transformation Saudi Arabia Context: PCB established same period as Saudi commitment—raises questions whether Saudi venture part of "transformation program" and whether PCB approved it. If not part of UOWs core transformation or activities then how could it be approved? Public Funds at Risk: Transformation programs during financial crisis typically involve

2016 Structure	2025 Structure	Key Changes	Impact on Governance	Why Parliament Should Be Concerned
				restructuring, redundancies, asset sales, or major investments—without transparency about PCB membership and decisions, Parliament cannot verify prudent use of public resources Accountability Gap: No evidence PCB reports publicly or to Parliament on transformation progress, budget remediation, or strategic alignment

Delegation changes in December 2023 illustrate the danger. Authority to establish and disestablish senior executive positions was moved from the Vice Chancellor to the Performance and Remuneration Committee, chaired by the Chancellor. This transferred a significant amount of power from management to a small committee with limited membership. Three weeks later the former Vice Chancellor resigned. The management arm of the University became destabilised while the Committee that now controlled executive appointments operated with a quorum of only three. This sequence demonstrates how structural design can predetermine outcomes.

These arrangements conflict with the OECD view that governance must provide balanced structures for directing and monitoring performance (OECD 2023). They also sit uneasily with TEQSA requirements for independent oversight and free exchange of views (TEQSA 2021, s6.1.4). When committees no longer assist Council as a collective, and when the same small group controls nominations, remuneration and delegations, independent assurance becomes impossible.

The intertwined backgrounds and interests of many Council members heighten the risk. With powerful committees chaired by the Chancellor and by partners of a major consulting firm, and with ministerial appointees excluded, the University has created a closed circle of decision making. Council now advises itself on the very matters it should test. Appropriate and essential scrutiny has been replaced by endorsement.

Taken together, these changes render the University incapable of meeting the intent of its legislative instrument. The University of Wollongong Act requires a governing body that exercises collective and independent judgement in the interests of the Illawarra. The current structure concentrates authority in a few hands, removes the academic voice, and allows binding decisions through tiny quorums. The Council can no longer demonstrate that it provides independent oversight of the executive, nor that it can assure compliance with TEQSA Domain 6.

This failure exposes the current executive team to significant risk. Decisions taken under a compromised governance model may lack proper authority. Staff and students cannot be confident that their interests are represented. The reputation of the University as a public asset is placed in jeopardy. Reform must restore committees to their original role of advising and assisting Council as a collective, expand quorums, include elected voices, and separate financial power from performance judgement.

Transformation of Vice Chancellor Performance Criteria

My submission to this Inquiry described a growing distance between the University of Wollongong and the people it was created to serve. The most visible expression of that distance is found in the changed language used to judge the performance of the Vice Chancellor. The 2016 Council Handbook set out firm and transparent criteria that reflected the human purpose of a public university. The 2025 Handbook removes those anchors and replaces them with optional examples. This change reshapes what leadership means at UOW.

The 2016 framework required that Vice Chancellor performance be assessed against obligations to staff and student welfare, promotion of collegial and ethical behaviour, and development of strategies to make the University an employer of choice. These clauses recognised that universities are communities before they are corporations. They provided Council with a clear lens through which to test decisions affecting the Illawarra region. In the 2025 document those commitments have disappeared. The text now states that “examples of performance indicators that may be included are as follows.” What was once mandatory has become discretionary.

This linguistic shift alters the balance of power. When performance criteria are optional, the executive can choose the measures that suit its preferred narrative. Staff are now described primarily as costs to be monitored and controlled. Alumni are listed before staff in stakeholder hierarchies. The Vice Chancellor is no longer described as a community leader. The Handbook speaks of reputation protection and risk management but is silent on care for people. These deletions tell a story about what the University now values.

The consequences can be seen in major strategic decisions. The move to establish a campus in Saudi Arabia was justified largely on financial opportunity while concerns about academic freedom and regional mission were marginalised. My evidence contends that there was significant contention to that decision and that governance processes within UOW Global Enterprises did not follow appropriate practice. Without clear and mandatory performance criteria linked to academic purpose, Council lacked the framework to test whether that decision served the Illawarra. The Handbook had already narrowed the questions that could be asked.

The removal of people centred language also conflicts with national standards. TEQSA Domain 6 requires governing bodies to ensure the wellbeing of the institution and to receive free and frank advice from staff and students (TEQSA 2021, s6.1.4, s6.3). A Vice Chancellor assessed against optional indicators and budget targets alone cannot meet that

expectation. The OECD principles similarly state that performance monitoring must align with the long term interests of all stakeholders (OECD 2023, Principle VI). The 2025 framework privileges short term financial metrics over the enduring health of the University.

My submission spoke of the human cost of these changes. Professional staff felt reduced to line items. Academics feared that ethical behaviour no longer mattered. Students experienced decisions that prioritised revenue over learning. The transformation of the performance criteria has given formal permission for those outcomes. Words in a handbook guide real choices about courses, jobs and futures. By erasing commitments to collegiality and welfare, the University has weakened the moral spine of its leadership.

Restoring integrity requires the reinstatement of fixed criteria grounded in people and purpose. Vice Chancellor monitoring must again include explicit obligations to staff and student welfare, ethical leadership, and the employer of choice commitment. Without such reform the performance framework will continue to drive decisions that damage the Illawarra's most important civic institution.

As it stands and as stated in my previous written submission, this current structure exposes the current Senior Executive at UOW to potential harm and consequences in the execution of their duties.

Conflicts of interest and governance integrity risks created by the Chancellor role change and committee structure

The governance changes reflected in the 2025 Council Handbook create a series of structural conflicts of interest and independence failures. These are not allegations about personal motives. They are predictable governance outcomes when one office controls nominations, performance oversight, information flow and committee leadership, while also operating in a de facto executive capacity. In a public university created by statute, this design undermines collective Council oversight, weakens transparency, increases the risk of capture by narrow networks, and creates material compliance exposure under TEQSA Domain 6 and basic public sector governance principles.

Conflict area	What changed between 2016 and 2025	Conflict or integrity risk created	Why this is inappropriate and why Parliament should be concerned
Chancellor shifts from independent presiding officer to embedded governance executive	Chancellor responsibilities expand materially, including explicit "ensure" obligations across assurance and governance, expanded committee chairing, succession planning, and direct influence over information flows. Evidence indicates the Chancellor is working at a full time level	Independence failure. The person meant to preside over deliberation becomes an operational actor who shapes what comes to Council, who sits at the table, and how performance is judged	TEQSA Domain 6 expects independent governance and free and frank advice. A Chancellor acting as both referee and participant undermines the separation of governance and management and increases the risk that dissent is suppressed or filtered
Chancellor chairs Performance and Remuneration Committee while working closely with the Vice Chancellor	Performance and Remuneration Committee chaired by the Chancellor, with small quorum and limited stakeholder representation	Structural conflict. The Chancellor becomes both the key partner of the Vice Chancellor operationally and the primary assessor of the Vice Chancellor's performance and remuneration	This configuration creates a real and perceived conflict because the assessment process can no longer be credibly independent. It also increases the risk that performance monitoring becomes an instrument of alignment rather than scrutiny
Performance criteria move from mandatory expectations to optional "examples"	2016 framed Vice Chancellor performance criteria more firmly. 2025 frames performance indicators as examples that "may be included"	Criteria manipulability. It becomes possible to select or emphasise criteria that suit a preferred agenda and omit people centred obligations such as staff welfare, collegiality, ethical behaviour and employer of choice	This weakens transparent accountability. It reduces the ability of Council, staff and Parliament to verify what standards the Vice Chancellor is actually being judged against. It also increases risk that decisions with high ethical or welfare stakes are not properly weighted
Transfer of power over senior executive establishment and disestablishment to Performance and Remuneration Committee	Delegation moved from Vice Chancellor to the committee, with small quorum	Concentration and coercive leverage risk. A small group gains direct power over executive structure and senior roles, creating vulnerability for executives who raise risk concerns or dissent	This elevates risk to the current executive team and to institutional integrity. It also increases the likelihood of organisational silence because raising concerns can be perceived as career limiting
Chancellor chairs Nominations and plays lead role in succession planning	Nominations Committee chaired by the Chancellor, combined with an expanded Chancellor remit in succession planning and selection participation	Self perpetuating governance risk. The person subject to governance oversight influences the selection pipeline of those who will oversee that office and its decisions	This undermines the checks and balances Parliament expects from statutory governance design. Even if appointments are lawful, the appearance and risk of capture is intensified

Conflict area	What changed between 2016 and 2025	Conflict or integrity risk created	Why this is inappropriate and why Parliament should be concerned
Direct reporting line from Secretary to Council to Chancellor	Secretary to Council has a direct reporting line to the Chancellor	Information gatekeeping risk. The chair gains structural control over agenda setting, minutes, information quality, and what is escalated to Council	When the secretariat is operationally aligned to one office rather than Council collectively, transparency risks increase. This is particularly serious where official records do not reflect dissent or lack recorded votes
Small committee quorums allow binding decisions by 3 to 4 people	Reduced quorum thresholds across key committees	Minority control risk. Decisions affecting thousands can be determined by a small group before full Council deliberation	This undermines collective governance. It also creates a pathway for pre decisioning and discourages dissent because outcomes can be settled outside full Council
Academic, staff and student voices reduced or removed from powerful committees	Key committees that drive finance and executive performance contain little or no elected academic, staff or student representation	Stakeholder exclusion risk. Those most affected by decisions have no role in scrutiny mechanisms	In a university, academic governance and student welfare are not optional. Removing these voices from decision critical committees weakens the institution's ability to test decisions against academic purpose and welfare obligations
Committees shift from "advise and assist Council" to "advise"	Language shifts reduce the explicit duty to support Council as a collective in deliberation	Committee capture and echo chamber risk. Committees can become decision engines rather than support bodies	This increases the risk that Council is presented with packaged decisions rather than properly contested options, undermining free and frank exchange and the integrity of collective fiduciary responsibility
Overlapping committee memberships create circular endorsement	The same individuals can sit across nominations, finance and performance functions	Reinforcing network risk. A small cohort can shape membership, control money, and judge executives	This is a classic governance capture vulnerability. Even absent wrongdoing, it creates an appearance problem that damages public trust and exposes the institution to regulatory scrutiny
Controlled entity oversight and offshore expansion risks are not demonstrably governed to a TEQSA standard	Offshore expansion pursued through UOW Global Enterprises with opaque approvals and limited visibility of risk and academic governance pathways	Corporate control and due diligence risk. The university may not be able to demonstrate effective monitoring and academic equivalence offshore	TEQSA expects effective corporate monitoring of controlled entities and equivalent academic governance offshore. If minutes, resolutions, risk assessments and academic approvals are not visible or verifiable, compliance cannot be demonstrated

Taken together, these changes create a governance design where power is concentrated, oversight is weakened, and accountability is difficult to verify. The risks are not hypothetical. They include failures to record dissent, limited visibility of formal approvals, weakened academic governance input into high impact decisions, and an executive environment where raising concerns may carry personal and professional consequence. This structure creates material compliance exposure under TEQSA Domain 6 and elevates risk for the current executive team who must operate within it.

Parliamentary Concern in the Context of Public Investment, Audit Integrity and the Saudi Arabia Decision

The governance of the University of Wollongong must be viewed through the same lens applied to any other steward of public wealth. National inquiries into auditing remind us that well designed corporate governance policies exist to protect households and communities who invest their savings through public institutions. These policies promote transparency and accountability of board members and executives so that stakeholders can assess the performance of management and those charged with governance (Commonwealth of Australia 2020, p7; p15). In the university sector the shareholders are the general public and local communities who invest their hard-earned tax dollars into education, research and regional development. The investment in New South Wales universities represents a significant annual commitment of public funds and a meaningful share of the state economy. When governance fails, the risk is borne by citizens rather than private investors.

The Regulation of Auditing in Australia inquiry emphasised the importance of independent opinions and reasonable assurance so that information asymmetry between management and stakeholders is reduced (Commonwealth of Australia 2020, p15; p22). It also highlighted the global concern about audit quality and the influence of major consulting firms, including evidence that former partners continued to receive payments from firms they were advising government to regulate (Commonwealth of Australia 2020, p17). These observations are directly relevant to UOW, where a network of individuals with deep links to large accounting and consulting firms now occupies the most powerful governance positions.

Publicly available evidence shows that members of UOW Council and UOW GE board share associations with one global consulting firm, known for their aggressive pursuit of those who question their interests, have overlapping board

memberships and personal and professional networks that intersect across four domains. This is more than a small regional connected community working for the future of the Illawarra region. These connections extend throughout the Sydney Basin and include two local area health services, Randwick Health and Innovation Precinct, Liverpool developments as well as two universities. These connections link over a growing period of time health development projects in NSW and our critical educational and research infrastructures. Where connected individuals hold positions on finance and infrastructure committees, board selection committees, and risk and audit committees. Where honorary doctorates, especially from University of New South Wales, social connections and activities documented in publications such as the Sydney Morning Herald or in biographical pieces of prominent actors, alumni events as well as connected working histories give rise to further questions of propriety. These overlapping and intersecting relationships are across critical public bodies in health and education, large infrastructure projects totalling billions of dollars and opaque financial interests of a connected cohort.

When you align these publicly discoverable facts, especially where pictures state a thousand words, academic and staff and student elected representation has been reduced while quorums of three or four members can make binding decisions affecting thousands and costing millions of dollars to the Australian public – this Inquiry could not have come soon enough. The dominance of council members with affiliations to corporate and consulting sectors has been described by Cortese as signalling a profound shift in the governance culture of New South Wales universities (Cortese 2025, p8). Such concentration would be concerning in any public entity entrusted with billions of dollars and with the future of a region, particularly where investments and UOW growth strategies are being channelled to Greater Western Sydney, overlapping the specific area the NSW Parliament charged Western Sydney University with, not the University of Wollongong.

These structural vulnerabilities become more critical when examining the decision to establish a campus in Saudi Arabia. The public record already shows a sequence of events that raises legitimate questions about process and assurance. On 29 February 2024 a document prepared by UOW Global Enterprises announced the Saudi licence but was not published in Australia. On 3 March 2024 the Saudi Ministries of Education and Investments granted an investment license to UOW as part of the Human Capability Initiative. Media reporting on 8 March 2024 described the proposal as hypocritical and mercenary, reflecting deep concern within the community. Further articles on 21 March and 7 May 2024 recorded ongoing distress about operating in an authoritarian context.

Given the Parliament's interest in how capacity as Chair of the WHS Committee intersects with these governance issues already before the Inquiry, it is important to include this example to highlight the interconnected issues. During 2024 and 2025, quite a number of staff disclosed to me confidentially in the first instances and then as information came into the public domain, more openly, the breadth and depth of concern regarding the proposed expansion to Saudi Arabia and the sense of organisational injustice felt across the University community. Some of these staff came to me as individuals and others came to me as representatives of a number of larger group of staff. Through those disclosures, the material now before the Parliament, and my further work in preparing my submission and responses to supplementary questions, the following matters have become apparent:

- The expansion of UOW to Saudi Arabia was announced prior to any clear evidence that the proposal had been formally approved by the appropriate governance committees in accordance with established delegations and processes.
- Senior executives raised questions about the timing, risk profile and academic implications of the proposal, and those concerns were not reflected in the subsequent course of decision making and were followed by the departure of key leaders from the University.
- The University Executive Board heard substantial dissent to the expansion proposal, yet that dissent was not carried forward into Council deliberations in any visible or recorded manner.
- Council deliberations contained significant dissent founded on legitimate governance and risk matters that did not alter the draft resolution or outcome before Council.
- There was no formal vote at the relevant Council meeting to approve the establishment of the Saudi Arabia campus, and the significant dissent and unresolved questions were not recorded in the official minutes.
- Concerns raised by the UOW community through formal governance and engagement bodies, including the Academic Senate and the WHS Committee, were unable to influence the process or address the academic and staff welfare issues identified.
- The criteria required by TEQSA for international operations do not appear to have been met, as proper academic governance, risk assessment and due diligence processes were not undertaken to a standard consistent with national expectations. Some risk processes were on the surface engaged with, but was not seriously included in the deliberations or had any bearing on the intent to establish a Saudi campus.

Specifically, whilst in early 2024 the UOW Senior Executive may have been aware that UOW Global Enterprises was exploring opportunities in Saudi Arabia, the partner information, conditions and formal approval were not provided to governance bodies prior to the March 2024 announcement by UOW Global Enterprises. There were no formal governance

committees that considered and approved this in line with the agreed accountabilities. Staff witnessing these actions were silenced and due to the nature of their positions have had to endure the organisational injustice of this decision being promoted as legitimate, sound academically and socially and have followed appropriate governance. This in tandem to sweeping organisational change and disruption.

Throughout 2024 and 2025, questions were raised a number of times at Academic Senate and through bodies such as the WHS Committee and still remain open, and staff continue to express concern for the future of this campus. Many are now required to make this venture work, in confidence and secret to not draw attention to the reality of the situation whilst still holding genuine fears and concerns, and having witnessed what they perceive as a disregard for established academic and corporate governance practices. There has been no visible accountability for those who engaged only at a surface level with critical governance and risk processes, despite the significant risk now carried by the University community. This is the very definition of a significant psychosocial risk where organisational injustice is not addressed and staff become saturated and are morally and psychologically injured.

Evidence from the Group Chief Executive Officer of UOW Global Enterprises on 17 December 2025 further illustrates this problem. She stated that the then Vice Chancellor “didn’t vote against it in the board meeting” and insisted “there wasn’t a dissension, so I would suggest she was supportive.” The absence of any recorded opposition is presented as consent, yet the minutes are not public and the surrounding circumstances are opaque. It is unclear how the exit of the former Vice Chancellor aligns with this decision making, particularly given the transfer of executive appointment powers to the Performance and Remuneration Committee only weeks earlier.

Financial context deepens the concern. On 29 May 2024 the Finance and Infrastructure Committee requested a rapid functional review to deliver medium- and long-term financial sustainability, citing that systems were not fit for purpose. At the same time the University was contemplating, and evidence shows committing to, a thirty-year commitment in Saudi Arabia during what has been described as the most dire period in UOW’s financial history. This also coinciding with an additional building at Liverpool being advocated for by investment partners with long term links to the new Chancellor. Decisions of this magnitude require the highest level of independent assurance, yet the governance structures were dominated by individuals with overlapping consulting and infrastructure backgrounds.

The history of UOW Global Enterprises demonstrates why clarity of purpose matters. When trading as the Illawarra Technology Corporation in the 1990s, annual reports explicitly linked commercial activities to returns for the University. Contributions in 1993 exceeded \$1.8 million and between 1996 and 1999 totalled more than \$6.29 million, with clear expectations that projects would generate future returns. The Managing Director stated in 1999 that ITC was an important financial contributor to all areas of the University. Commercial activity was justified by transparent benefit to education and research. The yearly dividend celebrated in its positive impact on the community.

The more recent record is less clear. Evidence presented to the Committee indicated that between 2016 and 2025 UOW Global Enterprises paid \$167 million in “gross dividends” to UOW. However \$124.92 million of this amount in 2021 and 2022 resulted from an IDP dividend, an aberration rather than normal operations. Excluding this payment, ordinary dividends totalled only \$42.08 million, an average of approximately \$4.2 million per year. As a percentage of UOW Global Enterprises revenue, dividends fell by half from a consistent five to seven percent before 2019 to two to three percent between 2020 and 2024, precisely when the University faced severe financial stress. The commercial rationale and positive link to the UOW community, especially those in the Illawarra region, for a risky international expansion is therefore not supported by consistent returns.

As started to be evident in the hearing of this inquiry on the 17th December, the public record is the just the very tip of the iceberg.

In the June 2025 meeting of the WHS committee, I led a discussion and submission to the UOW WHS Committee stemming from representations made to me by members of the UOW Pride Network, as well as numerous other colleagues across the breadth of the organisation expressed concerns about potential health and safety risks related to the Saudi enterprise. Specific, legitimate and detailed concerns raised with me included risks to staff whose identities or practices are prohibited under Saudi law such as those staff from the LGBTQIA+ community, non-islamic religions, those who are in certain relationship arrangements and those who have expressed political views not aligned with the Saudi government. These are not staff who were vying for headlines or negative publicity, but deeply committed academic and professional staff who work in areas where they are intimate with academic, international and governance matters and held persistent and pervasive concerns. This is a matter where the governance at UOW and its structures needed to work. In the meeting a formal request for a consultative WHS Risk Assessment to be completed to evaluate the risks and inform future engagement. Whilst commitments were made to have presentations from UOW GE to the Committee, no consultative WHS Risk Assessment was undertaken prior to my cessation as Chair of the UOW WHS Committee in early December 2025. As Chair of the WHS Committee, I would have been required to be consulted as well as the WHS

committee and staff working in areas impacted by these decisions. The absence of this action and the formal approval by UOW Council are an incredible portrait of how significant the governance issues really are and how they are truly impacting staff, are taking resources away from the student experience in Australia and pose a much more serious and important compliance beyond the Higher Education Standards to potential breaches of the Fair Work Act and WHS Act NSW are not a real priority for certain actors within UOW.

Compliance and Risk Implications

Parliament should be concerned because the governance framework has not provided the reasonable assurance expected of any steward of public funds, compliance with critical regulatory frameworks that ensure student, staff and the public interest is protected. The structure and functions of Council now protect private and opaque interests. Committees no longer advise and assist Council as a collective. Quorums to subcommittees are tiny and academic voices are absent. Ministerial appointees are excluded from key forums. Dissent has been minimised through ambiguous confidentiality clauses and the chilling effect of restructuring, and the exiting of critical expertise. These conditions mirror the concerns raised in national auditing inquiries about information asymmetry and the influence of large consulting firms.

Without appropriate accountability mechanisms, there is no way for Parliament or the public to interrogate the depth and competence of the decision making across the University's governance committees. Without subpoenas for those staff and executives now under deeds of release, the truth is unable to be told, and form part of the trust needed in public universities. Staff within the NSW university sector need the government bodies empowered by existing legislation such as Parliament, ICAC, Fair Work, Safe Work and even TEQSA to compel the truth to be told.

In the specific Saudi example, the criteria set out by TEQSA for international operations cannot be verified because the relevant minutes and evaluations are not available. Personal accounts from staff indicate that explicit concerns raised at an all staff town hall, the University Executive Board and Council were not considered by those who made the decision. Official minutes provided to the Committee do not record dissent and no vote was taken, failing to meet the standards expected of governance bodies. Unfortunately, based on the disclosures made to me over the past two years, I believe if there was a full interrogation of the facts in this case, the institution I love is grossly exposed.

The University of Wollongong is not a private corporation. It is a public asset owned by the public central to the success of the Illawarra region. When governance is shaped by intertwined networks and when major decisions such as the Saudi Arabia campus cannot be transparently interrogated, the risk extends beyond campus walls to the community that funds and depends upon it. Parliament has a responsibility to ensure that the structures directing this institution meet the same standards of integrity required of any entity managing public investment.

QUESTION: You were the Chair of the WHS Committee for some time. There has been an increase in the number of SafeWork notices to Universities around psychosocial safety. Can you tell us about the psychosocial risks at universities? What people might have raised with you as chair?

Workplace health and safety is a fundamental right. Workers should be able to go to work and return home to their families at the end of a day safe and well. The answer to this supplementary question feels like the culmination of five years of intensive study at the coalface of this very issue – trying to unpick, dig into and uncover the psychosocial risks at universities. It is my deep and extensively studied professional view with over two decades of experience in the university sector and with six of these serving on the UOW WHS Committee that every day the staff working in our universities are at extreme risk of harm. This sounds alarming – and it is. Almost every submission made to external inquiries by staff working in universities is evidence of it.

If the conditions currently in our New South Wales universities were in another context, it might be called coercive control, emotional, or financial abuse – behaviours that restrict agency, punish speaking up, and make livelihoods contingent on obedience rather than integrity. If reported to authorities and with the evidence before us, within an alternative context, there would be swift actions. There would in a lot of cases be evidence sufficient to warrant incarceration. However, even with the strengthening of external mandatory reporting through the Public Interest Disclosure Act, the resources are not there and agencies are not moving fast enough to prevent the harm from spreading and becoming irreversible.

Psychosocial safety is fundamentally about organisational justice

Psychosocial safety in universities is not simply about workload or individual behaviour. It is complex and requires high emotional intelligence, self-reflection, and a disciplined approach to how decisions are interpreted by those affected. The most complex and damaging risk is poor organisational justice - that is:

- **Procedural justice** – fairness of decision-making processes
- **Informational fairness** – transparency and honesty of communication
- **Interpersonal fairness** – dignity and respect in how people are treated

Organisational justice is the most complex psychosocial risk because it interacts with all other psychosocial hazards – demand, control, relationships, role clarity, and change. When accountability is patchy or inconsistent, each small failure becomes another cut. For many university staff, this is experienced as “death from a thousand cuts.” For many, small failures continue to build walls that then crush them unexpectedly.

If there is no accountability or patchy accountability, then the system is broken, as each minor offence or psychosocial risk playing out creates another wound. If you read posts from those leaving organisations or the university sector, or any of the many articles where academic staff are documenting the injustices and challenges they face, you will see this pattern is endemic. Whole university communities and subgroups of staff are no longer able to continue. For many working in the sector, we are not able to manage, execute our responsibilities and delegations, and are abandoned when we try to hold those causing harm to account.

Over the past 18 months I have grappled with the concept of organisational justice and how it causes harm. Almost every psychosocial injury at universities that I am aware of, and I have borne witness to countless over the years as a Delegate and Chair of the WHS Committee, is due to organisational injustice. Where unjust decisions, lack of consistent accountabilities, complete lack of interpersonal fairness all coupled with lack of informational fairness cause the harm. My submission discusses the disconnect between the academic tradition and the governance models implemented in universities – and this is the source of harm.

Our reliance on insecure work models further fuels the harm. The underpayments for academic staff widely reported and experienced, is only the surface of ongoing non-compliance with the Fair Work Act and Enterprise Agreements. Integrity in compliance, especially in my direct work experience in New South Wales is a clever game. For example, if UOW took its Fair Work undertakings seriously its compliance with other sections of the Fair Work Act would be much more proactive. However, even in the transformation process roles a large volume of roles were disestablished and staff made redundant for work that still exists. Technicalities of roles are poured over to manipulate the industrial landscape to force the change. However, technical word changes do not inherently change the fundamental work to be undertaken. This being procedural and interpersonal injustice. But for those staff who have no more room for cuts – or the wall has commenced falling down on them, getting out becomes about survival. So, we then participate in the organisational injustice ourselves. That is a burden we carry as we watch those who remain suffer.

The standards you walk past are the standards you accept

Lieutenant General David Morrison famously said: “The standard you walk past is the standard you accept.” This principle is fundamental to understanding psychosocial safety in universities. Similarly, in life you get what you tolerate.

What I observed as Chair of the UOW WHS Committee was systematic tolerance of behaviour that would not be acceptable in other professional contexts:

- I witnessed senior leaders and academic staff having tantrums I would not tolerate from my children.
- I saw manipulation of change processes to protect self-interest, at the expense of subordinates.
- Removal of support to address poor behaviour, and prevent psychosocial injury, to facilitate reprisals.
- Where junior members of staff are those who set the standard for behaviour and middle managers cause harm.
- I saw selective accountability that is routinely manipulated by self-interest, or political gain.
- Codes of Conduct, Policies and procedures are selectively applied to meet a particular ends.
- Personal relationships impact whether action is taken or staff are retained.

The workforce surveys document the impact of this decline in real time. Staff feeling positive about the organisation fell from 60% favourable to 37% favourable between 2022 and 2025. Confidence in executive leadership collapsed from 69% to 28%. These are not abstract numbers – they represent the documented failure of listening and accountability.

The listening thus far has not changed behaviour. The workforce surveys are simply documenting a decline. Work towards Values in Actions have no efficacy as there is no accountability. Staff are telling the institution what is wrong, repeatedly, and nothing changes. When groups of staff working on these critical projects are in unison stating that accountability is critical and no action has been taken.

In the past two years, people have witnessed time after time that when you report there are clear reprisals. They see their colleagues subjected to damaging processes only to see the circumstances or behaviours that required reporting still in existence. What staff in organisations are seeing is that that reporting makes no difference, that the standards walked past become the standards accepted, and if reported the reporter is damaged and they stop reporting. This is why under-reporting is even more entrenched, and injuries become commonplace and inevitable.

After attending the Inquiry on 17 December to provide evidence, the droves of UOW staff – past and present – who reached out to me was extensive. Many of these former colleagues were bound by deeds of release or professional privilege obligations, their simple thank you, highlights just how extensive the issue is. Even stemming from the 17 December – no consequences or tangible actions have been taken. This has demonstrated to the sector that the most Senior Governance officer of a public institution can seemingly remain in post after being recruited in unusual circumstances where previous relationships would have required a conflict-of-interest risk mitigation process to ensure there was not even the perception of a conflict. Or that providing conflicting accounts of events to Parliamentary bodies is acceptable of someone in such a senior position. In living memory, a Premier of New South Wales who neglected to declare a bottle of wine, admittedly it was an expensive \$3,000 bottle, when this fact was put to them by an ICAC investigation he immediately resigned. So how can a non-elected official of a public institution remain in their role given the misuse of governance processes to remove a Vice Chancellor, or even if that is an acceptable use of their position, provide differing evidence to different bodies without consequence? This is the very definition of high-risk psychosocial hazards.

The contrast with organisations that take psychosocial safety seriously

I now work at an organisation that takes psychosocial safety seriously, and the contrast is stark. In my short tenure I have been triggered by how seriously they take psychosocial risk. The difference is not in policy documents – it is in lived practice:

- Behavioural expectations are **for every person** – not selectively applied based on seniority or proximity to power.
- Where respectful dialogue and disagreement is the baseline.
- Mandatory training is **enforced** – it ensures that the organisation’s values and obligations for reporting are non-negotiable.
- Accountability is consistent – the same standards apply whether you are the most junior person or a senior executive. The examples shared by colleagues of real accountability is so refreshing.
- When behaviour falls short, it is addressed immediately – not tolerated, not explained away, not ignored.

This is what genuine organisational commitment to psychosocial safety looks like. It is not aspirational language in a strategic plan, or disconnected or unimplemented values and behaviour frameworks it is the daily, consistent

enforcement of standards. It is refusing to walk past behaviour that falls short. It is creating an environment where staff know that if they report harm, something will actually happen.

The contrast has been deeply affecting. It has shown me that the dysfunction I experienced and witnessed at UOW was not inevitable – it was a choice. It was the cumulative result of many senior staff and those in positions of authority walking past unacceptable behaviour, tolerating double standards, and failing to enforce the values the institution claimed to uphold.

The need for “truth-telling”

This conversation is challenging. But to address the issue honestly we cannot shy away from respectful truth-telling. The depth and breadth of organisational injustice at universities now constitutes, in my view, an extensive breach of the WHS Act duty of care to workers. Decisions have been implemented where "truth" has become how an idea is sold rather than an accurate account of risk, impact and purpose.

A clear example is the installation of UOW's current Chancellor. Those working at UOW all have colleagues who were directly impacted by this event. The public rhetoric used by senior governance officials has itself become a source of harm, because it denied the lived reality of staff and dismissed the psychosocial risks that had been formally identified.

This harm has been compounded by the repeated assertion that the event was "just like the installation of Robert Hope." That statement is factually incorrect. This event had never before been undertaken in this manner at UOW. Invoking the name of Robert Hope, who was widely known as a highly respected and kind gentleman, to legitimise a fundamentally different process has further enraged and distressed staff, because it misappropriates a cherished legacy to justify conduct that staff experienced as unsafe and coercive.

The harm was foreseeable and arose through the following WHS risk factors:

- **High work demand - breach of duty to manage workload**

Staff were required to deliver an out-of-sequence event at a time when those same roles were already critical to student services. The additional workload was imposed without assessment of capacity or risk controls, contrary to the obligation to provide a safe system of work.

- **High emotional demands - breach of duty to prevent psychological injury**

Aggressive approaches were taken to implement the event "at any cost". This caused confrontation, disciplinary threats to those attempting to protect staff wellbeing, and compelled participation in an activity many believed to be inappropriate. This is inconsistent with the requirement to eliminate or minimise psychosocial hazards so far as reasonably practicable.

- **Low control over job demands - breach of consultation obligations**

Staff were unable to schedule tasks to manage peak demand. Legitimate concerns were not accommodated and dissent carried a credible risk of reprisals and reputational damage. This contravenes WHS requirements for consultation and worker participation in managing risk.

- **Increased job insecurity - failure to prevent reprisals**

Staff who raised legitimate concerns were, in the short and longer term, pushed out of the organisation. A system that allows harm to follow reporting is incompatible with the primary duty of care.

- **Poor support and information - failure of safe system**

Information was insufficient, contradictory and delayed, further escalating workload and distress. The outsourcing of the event was a consequence of this organisational failure, not its justification.

- **Inadequate recognition and reward - punitive culture**

Those who delivered the event despite personal cost were later described on the parliamentary record as "difficult" or non-compliant. Written evidence shows expenses were approved at the highest levels while staff roles were simultaneously threatened. This represents psychological harm compounded by reputational injury.

- **Poor organisational justice - systemic disregard for community impact**

The needs of the UOW community were disregarded. Many staff refused to attend to avoid complicity; others were compelled to attend to fill seats. Public statements have obscured the decision-making, yet documentary evidence directly refutes the explanations provided to Parliament. The false comparison to Robert Hope's installation has deepened the sense of betrayal, because staff know from lived history that the two processes are not comparable.

I have been shown extensive evidence of these matters by colleagues at every level of the organisation. The emotional toll was real – I had many staff share their stories of the impact of this event with tears in their eyes – even recently. This is not staff "whinging about extra work." It is the manifestation of:

- unexpected and unplanned work demands,
- lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities,
- exposure to reprisals for raising safety concerns, and
- a governance culture that prioritised optics over worker safety.

If these conditions occurred in another setting they would be recognised as coercive control, emotional abuse and financial abuse-patterns where power is used to silence, isolate and make livelihoods contingent on obedience. Under New South Wales law this is now an illegal form of abuse. In the workplace this equates to a breach of the WHS Act obligation to provide a psychologically safe system of work.

The fact that such harm occurred in a publicly funded university makes the breach more serious, not less. However this one example, that has been captured in the debate is not the only one.

The specific psychosocial risks identified at universities

During my time as Chair of the UOW WHS Committee, psychosocial safety was consistently the central concern. It is the highest risk to staff at universities. It is the issue we as a committee spent most of our time on. The major risk factors repeatedly identified aligned directly with the SafeWork NSW Code of Practice: Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work, which identifies organisational justice, role clarity, change management, and leadership conduct as primary risk domains. These included:

Poor organisational justice

As outlined, staff felt that decisions affecting their work and careers were not procedurally fair, that information was routinely withheld or manipulated, and that outcomes were predetermined. The UOW Transformation Psychosocial Risk Assessment recognised this, identifying as major hazards:

- not consulting on changes;
- staff overwhelmed with change due to limited information communicated; and,
- inadequate mechanisms to resolve unacceptable behaviour.

Work intensification and constant change

Overlapping restructures without adequate controls were assessed as creating high psychosocial risk. The risk assessment documented "excessive demands, job demands exacerbated by staff attrition, and workload escalation through attrition".

Leadership behaviour

The most telling indicator in workforce surveys was the collapse of confidence in executive leadership. In response to the question "Executive Leadership Team behave in a way that is consistent with the values of UOW," favourable responses fell from 69% in 2022 to 28% in June 2025—significantly (27%) below the Australian and New Zealand benchmark. Similarly, when asked if they would "recommend UOW as a good place to work, favourable responses plummeted from 62% in June 2022 to 37% in June 2025.

These numbers document the lived reality: staff no longer trusted that leaders would behave consistently with stated values. This is the essence of organisational injustice.

When these facts were raised in the second half of 2025, the response from key leaders was fear that this community wide information framed in this way would lead to industrial issues or Safe Work involvement that would pose a political

inconvenience or reputational damage to UOW. The real issue here should have really been that despite the efforts undertaken by new leadership, staff were still experiencing or had a perception that there was still toxic and/or behaviour from the Executive Leadership Team that were inconsistent with the values of UOW. In an organisation that truly takes their responsibilities to staff and the law seriously, this should have been met with the full force of action. However, the Chancellor when these issues were raised in September with him refused that staff were impacted. What is also most alarming is that even after a number of representations through multiple P&C leaders and Chair of Academic Senate, a direct report of representation from the peak consultation committee of UOW relating to worker wellbeing and safety was never asked to provide any information to the People and Culture Committee, the Risk, Audit and Compliance Committee or Council itself. Even when the WHS committee was considered highly productive in consulting with and working with management on critical issues. It is really curious as to why the leadership of UOW Council were not interested in hearing directly from groups set up to comply with its obligations under the WHS Act. It seems like a fundamental disconnect.

Fear of reprisal

Staff reported that raising concerns led to marginalisation or exit, rather than resolution. Many were reluctant to lodge formal complaints because previous complainants had been marginalised.

I want to be unequivocal. This is not a failure of the dedicated staff working in WHS units. Throughout my time as Chair, I worked with WHS professionals of high integrity who tried, often with limited authority, within harsh processes to protect colleagues. The failure sits squarely with governance – with those who held power to act and chose not to.

My specific example is a poignant one to examine in this context. I was a long-term senior member of staff with extensive experience across the University, highly respected and able to work anywhere in the institution. My public reporting of organisational justice issues from February 2025, my subsequent ICAC submission – relied upon by mandatory senior reporters to present matters as a whole – and the clear reprisals that followed, have turned my story into a public warning to others:

Report, and you will be injured.

Speak, and you may end up outside the organisation you love.

Persist, and they will attempt to damage your reputation, say you did not follow process, or question your integrity.

I should have been protected as a whistleblower as I was granted whistleblower protections under the Public Interest Disclosure Act. I should have been protected under the Fair Work Act as a delegate for the Community and Public Service Association. I should have been protected under the WHS Act in raising legitimate safety issues. I was not safe under any of these three pieces of legislation. However, one only has to look across the NSW and ACT university sectors: those who have spoken out rarely remain at the institutions they were trying to protect. Many of us never intended to be whistleblowers; we simply fulfilled our duties under the WHS Act and the Public Interest framework. Yet we now carry the trauma and professional damage that follows truthful reporting.

My integrity was not for sale.

I do not know how those who participated in reprisals reconcile this with their own conscience. I hope that a public examination of these issues will cause people in positions of power to reflect honestly on the consequences of their behaviour and to ask whether self-interest was worth the extensive harm caused—and what responsibility they owe to those they injured.

My actions and continued engagement in these processes continue to be about accuracy and ensuring that the decimation being carried out in our public institutions, to our public assets ceases. I share these experiences, not to make waves, as it would pose a much less personal cost to just leave things as they are, but to ensure that no one has to ensure what I have been though. Though I know they already are. I am completely committed to trying to restore the conditions where staff can raise safety concerns without fear, where compliance to legislative obligations isn't lip service and where governance is measured not by optics but by its protection of people. It can be done – they just lack the will.

Erosion of reporting pathways

Compounding these issues are vacancies in integrity functions and interference in processes meant people no longer trusted internal systems. The Integrity Division had multiple vacancies and increasing workload, elevating safety concerns.

When complaints mechanisms are weak, hazards, grievances and ongoing issues reported through complaints systems remain unresolved, misconduct becomes normalised, people stop reporting, and injuries follow.

The external examination of UOW Complaints Process highlights that UOW has immature complaints management processes across the lifecycle. That resolutions to formal complaints do not yet meet appropriate standards. Many colleagues have seen how ineffective the complaints processes are, including now the public interest disclosure processes, and just tolerate the toxic culture or look for alternative employment. When you consider how the lack of reliable reporting and complaint pathways contribute even further to organisational injustice – the psychosocial hazards become suffocating.

What staff raised with me as WHS Chair

Staff came to me not with minor grievances but with patterns of harm. They described:

- Experiences of being strong-armed or intimidated when asking legitimate questions
- Exclusion from meetings and decision-making affecting their roles
- Legitimate safety reports being ignored or delayed, allowing behaviour to continue unchecked
- Coordinated resistance to lawful management directions and scapegoating of individuals for systemic failures
- Lack of transparency in senior decision-making and inconsistent application of policy
- Complaints processes that were slow, unsafe, or resulted in no meaningful action

In many circumstances I worked with a group of staff to formally lodge Safety reports into the UOW system. In these circumstances these staff felt that reporting would result in reprisals, and unfortunately it would have, or that the matter wouldn't be able to be managed effectively if one person raised the issue – and given that they had tried it wouldn't have been.

People often described feeling that the rules applied differently depending on proximity to power or their relationships with particular people. When internal processes failed to respond, the message received was that harm was tolerable if it served organisational convenience or particular individuals' personal agenda. That is the essence of psychosocial risk: not a single incident, but a climate where unfairness becomes normalised.

The Vice President (Strategy & Executive Affairs) SafetyNet report – a case study

As outlined in my previous submission, a clear example occurred in February 2025 when the establishment of the Vice President (Strategy & Executive Affairs) role was formally reported through SafetyNet as an identified psychosocial hazard. This was not a political complaint—it was a risk control action taken through the University's own WHS system because staff believed:

- The process bypassed normal governance checks
- It created role insecurity during a transformation already assessed as high risk
- It undermined trust in procedural fairness

The report documented:

- Perceived inequities in decision-making and lack of transparency
- Perceptions of favouritism, nepotism and bias in recruitment
- Exclusion from consultation required under WHS law and Enterprise Agreements
- Fear of reprisal for those who would report to or depend on the role

The impact was immediate – reduced trust in leadership, psychological distress, and inability for some staff to execute their delegations responsibly. The mood and morale on campus declined significantly. Following this report, large numbers of staff contacted me as Chair to describe fear, confusion, and distress about the direction of the institution.

At the March 2025 WHS meeting I reported that I could not underscore the impact that the release of the VP(S&EA) had on staff. The devastation was palpable. In that meeting I reported that I was convinced that poor organisational justice is our highest psychosocial hazard. The volume and seniority of staff who came forward was unprecedented. Importantly, staff began reporting hazards for the first time in decades – the system worked when used properly.

But what happened next illustrates the problem: nothing changed. The role proceeded as part of the change process and then was removed. The concerns were noted but not addressed. The actors behind the manipulation of governance processes and attempts to further undermine the Senior Executive capacity to manage the institution as established by

the UOW Act are still undertaking their roles uninhibited. This is what staff mean when they say the listening has not changed behaviour.

The problem of perceived conflicts of interest in academia

A critical contributor to organisational injustice is the handling of perceived conflicts of interest (COI). This represents a profound inconsistency in standards applied across the university.

Academic practice is rigorous.

As a clear example of this, Thesis examination standards require that there be 5 years between any project or publication before someone can examine a student's thesis of a colleague or associate. Even in small disciplines and specialisations, overlapping networks are treated as disqualifying to protect independence. The rigour of disciplines, academic governance of research and conferral of degrees is paramount.

Yet in university governance we routinely accept and subjected to:

- Overlapping board memberships
- Honorary doctorates awarded to contemporaries by other institutions
- Prior professional networks between decision-makers across organisations
- Publicly documented personal relationships
- Lower standards and definitions of conflicts of interest in our peak governance committee

These relationships would fail the thesis-examination conflict test that is required of every academic staff member and PhD candidate, yet are tolerated at the highest governance level. This creates completely inconsistent standards between the business interests of the governance elite and the academic tradition – between the rigorous COI standards that restrict academic freedom and the far narrower standard applied to those who exercise power over the university. This in turn completely undermines the academic tradition, integrity of academic governance and brings all of our universities in to disrepute.

The 2025 Council Handbook COI definition, appearing only on the final page, is in my view far too narrow and limited for a publicly funded institution. It does not adequately address perceived conflicts, cumulative relationships, or power asymmetry – the very concerns that are central to academic integrity. When staff see this double standard, organisational justice collapses. People conclude that the rules are different depending on power, and trust in governance is destroyed.

This is another example of the standard you walk past. When governance bodies tolerate in themselves what they would never accept from academics, they establish that accountability is selective, or completely non-existent – and selective accountability destroys trust.

Why Unchecked Organisational Injustice Is So Damaging

Universities rely on **academic freedom, collegial governance, and trust in process**. When those foundations are weakened, the damage is not abstract—it becomes operational, legal and human:

- Reporting mechanisms lose credibility, because staff see that speaking up leads to harm rather than protection
- Leaders are pressured to implement decisions they believe unsafe, eroding professional judgment
- Staff stop raising hazards, directly contradicting the consultation duties of the WHS Act
- Reprisals become normalised, turning safety systems into risk multipliers
- WHS committees can only treat symptoms, not causes
- SafeWork notices increase as external regulators are asked to do what governance would not
- Talented and experienced staff leave, often under confidentiality constraints
- Public confidence erodes in institutions meant to serve the common good.

As Chair, I observed that inaction after formal complaints and hazard reports entrenched a belief that harmful conduct was permissible. My own experience followed the same trajectory: from good-faith hazard identification to stalled grievance processes, to injury and exclusion when timely action did not occur. This is precisely what the SafeWork NSW Code of Practice identifies as a critical risk multiplier – where failure to respond to early warnings escalates harm rather than containing it. There is currently no accountability for this.

The NSW Public Sector governance principles require transparency, accountability and ethical leadership. When organisational justice collapses, those principles cannot be realised. Psychosocial harm then becomes **not an unfortunate by-product but a foreseeable outcome of governance failure – and therefore a breach of duty of care.**

The profound disconnects between Council and WHS processes

Despite escalating psychosocial risks, there was no structural engagement between University Council and the WHS Committee. This disconnect is critical to understanding how harm became embedded. In the five years I was Chair:

- The University Council and the more recent People & Culture Committee never sought a direct report, engagement, or advice from the peak consultation committee;
- The Risk, Audit & Compliance Committee never engaged with the WHS Committee;
- WHS advice remained peripheral to strategic decision-making; and.
- Major governance decisions proceeded outside the controls identified in psychosocial risk assessments.

This was not an oversight – it reflects a systemic failure to integrate workplace safety into governance. At the Federal Parliamentary Inquiry, the Chancellor scoffed at the idea that staff distress about the transformation was real. This attitude exemplifies the disconnect between lived experience and governance narratives, and demonstrates contempt for the regulatory framework that requires genuine consultation.

This is leadership walking past the standard. When the peak body responsible for governance oversight never engages with the peak body responsible for safety consultation, it sends a clear and evidenced message: **psychosocial safety is not a priority at the governance level.**

SafeWork NSW is ill-equipped for this complexity

The current SafeWork NSW model is designed for discrete hazards and identifiable incidents. It is not calibrated for the layered governance risks unique to universities:

- Conflicts between academic and corporate logics
- Cumulative impacts of repeated procedural unfairness
- Power asymmetry between staff and governing elites
- Harms that manifest over years rather than days
- Governance structures insulated from WHS processes

These dynamics do not fit neatly into existing regulatory categories. As a result, systemic organisational injustice often remains invisible to regulators while deeply visible to staff. The regulatory framework needs to evolve to address cumulative injustice and governance-level psychosocial risks.

The Transformation Risk Assessment – staff warnings ignored

The extensive UOW Transformation Psychosocial Risk Assessment was initiated by a highly committed WHS Committee and driven to its final format by me as Chair. I worked consultatively with staff to develop its structure and pressed relentlessly for its monitoring and adoption. Although supported by the WHS Manager and team, the work was largely sustained through personal insistence that these risks be formally acknowledged and documented. We had a team of committed Senior Leaders and WHS committee members set out to deliver the controls. The assessment identified the transformation as High risk and warned of:

- Overwhelming change with inadequate consultation;
- Workload escalation through attrition;
- Erosion of trust in decision-making; and
- Required controls including “systems in place to investigate occurrences of unacceptable behaviour and/or resolve grievances.”

Whilst there was a well-placed and highly committed group working on this, major governance decisions - such as the exclusions from the transformation process, proceeded outside those controls. The disconnect between risk assessment and decision-making meant the controls for the core contributors to harm creation existed on paper but not in practice. Staff within the Transformation Team and even Senior Executives were powerless to stop the impact of poor governance practices on the wider community. Unfortunately, this is an unavoidable consequence when there is a complete collapsing of the Governance arm into the Management arm of an organisation such as UOW.

Psychosocial safety is about trust

Psychosocial safety is fundamentally about trust – it is built or shattered in each interaction. We impact psychosocial safety by how we respect people, manage tricky issues, and navigate institutional politics. There is no central way to capture how these thousands of daily interactions either build safety or destroy it. This is why emotional intelligence, self-reflection, and a pragmatic, committed approach to understanding how actions are interpreted is essential.

When staff see one set of conflict rules applied rigorously to their academic work and a far more permissive set applied to governance elites; when they report hazards through proper channels and nothing happens; when they watch people who speak up be marginalised – trust is destroyed. Once trust is gone, no amount of policy documents or wellness programs can restore psychological safety. Only accountability to written standards will start to build trust again.

Under-reporting masks an epidemic

As WHS Officer for the CPSU UOW Branch, I witnessed many staff broken by organisational injustice. The under-reporting of injuries is extensive. I saw the same pattern repeatedly:

- Injuries not lodged for fear of career damage
- Complaints withdrawn after informal pressure
- Workers exiting rather than reporting

Under-reporting is therefore not evidence of safety—it is evidence of learned helplessness. Almost every person you speak to who works in a university in NSW either has their own story of damage or is close to someone who is damaged. This is extraordinary and unprecedented. Whole university communities and subgroups of staff are no longer able to continue.

Reprisals and threat of reprisals as a central mechanism of harm

Over my years as WHS Chair and CPSU WHS Officer, I came to understand that reprisals are the central mechanism by which organisational injustice is maintained. The most dangerous psychosocial risk is often not the original misconduct but what happens after someone raises it.

Staff repeatedly told me they could tolerate heavy workloads, imperfect systems, even poorly managed change. What they could not survive was:

- Being isolated after raising a concern
- Exclusion from meetings and information
- Negative performance management that appeared only after reporting
- Being labelled *difficult* or *not aligned to culture*;

These patterns are not random—they are predictable consequences of a governance model that treats dissent as disloyalty rather than as safety data.

My own experience as a typical case

The trajectory I experienced is, regrettably, textbook reprisal:

- I raised systemic psychosocial hazards through formal WHS channels, culminating in the SafetyNet report
- The report documented fears of reprisal among those likely to report into the new role and the exclusion of affected staff from consultation
- Immediately after the report, staff described increased anxiety, workload pressure and uncertainty
- Those who had been most vocal became the most exposed

What followed mirrored what I had seen in many others: questioning of motives rather than of the hazard; focus on the messenger rather than the message; and an implicit warning to others that reporting carries personal cost.

Confidentiality clauses as a silencing architecture

The most powerful instrument of reprisal is not overt punishment—it is the contractual gag applied at exit. Departing staff are routinely issued clauses stating that information relating to the business or affairs of the University, including any information the University considers to be Confidential Information, remains the sole property of the University and must not be divulged to any person or entity during or after employment. These clauses are:

- Broad and undefined – *Confidential Information* is not limited to trade secrets
- Perpetual – extending beyond employment

- Ambiguous about lawful disclosures such as to Parliament or regulators

For a frightened staff member, this reads as: “Silence or risk your livelihood.” It is highly likely that the large number of departing staff members in the latter part of 2025 received similar notices. The statement is ambiguous and provides no definition of “Confidential Information” nor any reference to an applicable policy.

I have spoken to dozens of colleagues who believed these clauses prevented them from:

- Making Public Interest Disclosures
- Providing evidence to inquiries
- Even seeking external support

This creates a chilling effect that SafeWork NSW frameworks do not currently recognise. Reprisals flourish where Council committees never engage directly with WHS, complaints systems are under-resourced, COI standards are weaker for governors than for academics, and major decisions proceed despite risk assessments.

When the Chancellor publicly dismissed staff distress as exaggerated, it signalled that speaking up would not be protected. The message received across the institution was clear. Reprisals do not look like dramatic events. They look like: a capable manager suddenly labelled uncooperative; a respected professional excluded from projects; a worker too frightened to attend meetings; careers quietly stalled. Each instance may appear minor; together they produce profound psychological injury.

What universities must do

To address psychosocial risk, universities need structural change, not aspirational statements:

- **Enforce behavioural standards consistently**—the same expectations must apply to senior leaders as to the most junior staff member. No more tolerance of tantrums, manipulation, or self-interested behaviour at senior levels.
- **Make mandatory training genuinely mandatory**—ensure that obligations for reporting and values are non-negotiable for every person in the organisation.
- Modern COI standards equivalent to academic assessment rules—addressing perceived as well as actual conflicts, and applied consistently to governance bodies
- Independent complaints mechanisms with guaranteed timeframes, insulated from executive influence, and with wellbeing monitoring
- Mandatory Risk Assessments including a consultative WHS assessment of major governance decisions before implementation
- Transparent consultation during change as required by WHS law
- Adequate resourcing of integrity functions to match demand
- Direct structural engagement between Council committees and WHS committees
- Prohibition of confidentiality clauses that restrict lawful disclosures
- Treatment of reprisals as serious misconduct with independent investigation
- Funded legal and wellbeing support for those who report hazards
- Transparent, data-driven decision-making that actually responds to workforce surveys and WHS reports
- Early action on SafetyNet reports with transparent timeframes and accountability

Most critically – stop walking past unacceptable behaviour. The standards you tolerate become the standards you accept. Universities must decide whether they will enforce their stated values or continue to document their decline in workforce surveys while doing nothing meaningful to change.

Conclusion

What people raised with me was not about personalities or resistance to change. It was about system failure—where inconsistent accountability, narrow COI definitions applied only at lower levels, weak complaints management, and governance structures insulated from WHS processes eroded organisational justice. When that occurs in a university, psychosocial harm becomes foreseeable and preventable, not accidental.

The issue is not that universities face conflict or change – those are inevitable. The issue is whether institutions have effective, independent and trusted mechanisms to resolve them, and whether they actually enforce the standards they claim to uphold. Without those:

- WHS committees are left monitoring symptoms rather than causes
- SafeWork notices increase
- Talented staff leave
- Public confidence erodes
- The listening continues to document decline without changing behaviour

From what was brought to me, the greatest risk was not individual personalities but the absence of timely intervention when harm was visible, and the systematic tolerance of behaviour that would not be acceptable in other professional contexts. The standard you walk past is the standard you accept. In life you get what you tolerate. Universities are currently tolerating organisational injustice at scale, and staff are paying the price with their psychological wellbeing.

Unchecked organisational injustice is, in my view, the most potent psychosocial hazard in modern universities. Until this is confronted directly at the governance level—until universities stop tolerating in their governance what they would never accept in their academic work – universities will remain fundamentally unsafe workplaces, and the principles they claim to uphold will ring hollow.

I did not set out to become a whistleblower. I set out to be a diligent WHS Chair of an engaged and productive committee. The response I experienced – and that so many colleagues experienced before me – demonstrates that reprisal is not an aberration but a governance technique. It is extensive and even when protected by three acts of Parliament, they are currently not worth the paper they are written on. This is the core psychosocial risk facing universities today. And it will continue until institutions, and inquiries like this one, decide that they will no longer walk past the unacceptable.

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