

NSW University Sector Inquiry – Supplementary Questions

Professor Nina Reynolds, Chair of Academic Senate, University of Wollongong

(1) I note that over the past three years the university has suspended or discontinued over 400 courses. What role does the Academic Senate play in determining courses to be suspended or discontinued?

Academic Senate had academic oversight and provided advice in the context of the workplace change that was being conducted. The Quality Assurance Review Group (QARG), which is a formally constituted committee of Academic Senate, chaired by the Chair of Academic Senate, reviews all proposals for new courses, majors and/or delivery locations, as well as discontinuations. Suspensions of courses are approved by the respective Faculty Education Committee (FEC). Courses are suspended for a range of reasons and in a number of circumstances these courses may be reactivated following review and revitalisation of the course.

The University reviews its suite of course offerings each year in response to student demand, changing employment trends, employer expectations and other market factors. It is not accurate to assume that all suspensions and discontinuations are indicative of entire courses being cancelled. Suspensions and discontinuations may be a result of course updates or structural changes, where old courses are discontinued and new ones created to replace them. As a result, any data may reflect administrative activity in the system, they should not be read as equivalent to the loss of courses from UOW's overall portfolio.

(2) Did you have any oversight in your role as either the Chair of the Academic Senate into the suspension or discontinuation of these courses? What was the threshold for determining that a course was not viable for teaching activity? Are you aware of what other consultation occurred with staff and students?

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The process for determining thresholds for viability was an operational decision and was not something that the Chair of Senate was involved in. I am aware that broader consultation occurred with staff throughout the workplace change process in line with the requirements of the university's enterprise agreements. As an individual staff member, I acted as a support person for two staff members impacted through the change process, which involved several consultation meetings.

(3) What was your role in the development of the Transformation Strategy that resulted in a large number of redundancies and course closures? On what advice did you act? What was the financial situation necessitating such a strategy?

As outlined in responses to questions one and two, my role was related to oversight, through both Academic Senate and on the University Council, where I am an ex-officio member due to my role as Chair of Academic Senate. The development of the change plan was an operational activity undertaken by university management.

Council was acutely aware of the financial situation facing the university and the need to reduce costs and ensure a more sustainable financial path for the university. The financial situation was communicated to the university community more broadly on several occasions throughout 2024 by the Interim Vice-Chancellor.

(4) In regards to the Ramsey Centre for Western Civilisation sponsored Bachelor of Western Civilisation, I note that this course had fewer enrolments than some courses which were cut through the Transformation Process. Why was this not subject to the same criteria for student number viability as other courses?

(a) Is this a model you think the University should support? Where the courses taught are based on private sponsorships?

As the Bachelor of Western Civilisation receives external funding and is subject to contractual obligations, it was not included in the change process. Since then, there has been some work undertaken to expand Liberal Arts educational offerings to a broader cohort of students at UOW.

There are several examples of this across our university, and indeed the sector, where external funds are used to support education activity. Providing we don't compromise on the quality of educational offerings and that academic integrity is not diminished, universities welcome external funding that benefits students. Other examples of this include postgraduate courses delivered upon request of external bodies, as well as graduate certificates funded by government partners.