

NSW University Sector Inquiry – Supplementary Questions

Mr Warwick Shanks OAM, Deputy Chancellor, University of Wollongong

(1) You've been involved with the University of Wollongong Council for quite some time, can you tell us more about the role you played prior to your Ministerial Appointment in 2018?

My association with the University of Wollongong and its controlled entities dates back to when I moved to Wollongong in 1996 and includes professional engagements in my role with KPMG, and a range of voluntary and unpaid roles.

I was involved with KPMG's engagement as internal auditor of each of UOW's controlled entities from 1996 until my appointment to the University Council. I also provided some assurance, accounting and other advice to UOW Australia throughout that period. I removed myself from these roles when I was appointed to the Council and have had no further part in any KPMG engagements with UOW or any of its controlled entities.

I have also had the opportunity to work with UOW in several unpaid voluntary roles and have been a strong advocate for voluntary roles with university and in the community.

My first voluntary contribution was as a guest lecturer in accounting in the early 2000s, which I did for about six years. This led to my involvement in various panels with the careers team, including as a keynote speaker at the 2014 Career Accelerate launch event. I was on the Commerce Faculty Advisory Board as a board member from 2008 to 2010 and as Chair from 2011-2013. I was part of the 2009 Bachelor of Commerce Appraisal Committee and the 2011 External Curriculum Appraisal Committee for the new Bachelor of Economics and Finance degree. I also sat on several panels for the UOW Community Engagement Grant scheme and UOW Community Engagement Awards. Between 2010 and 2018 I was a member of the UOW Community Reference Group.

(2) How do you manage your conflict of interest as both Deputy Chancellor and as a business partner at KPMG?

Please refer to my evidence to the inquiry on 17 December 2025:

Thanks for the question. I suspected you might be interested in KPMG. The starting point is that "consultant" is a very broadly used term. In a couple of weeks time, I'll have been with KPMG for 35 years. I've been an audit partner for 25 years. I am an audit and assurance partner in our mid-market and private group, which means I do financial statement audits. I'm not a consultant. I don't consult to the sector. I work in an area of financial statement audits. My clients are predominantly not-for-profit clients and privately owned businesses.

When I joined council, we set up—both within KPMG and within the council—some very clear rules about the roles that I could not play and would not play and the information that I would be given. KPMG encourages and supports our partners and people to be involved in community and to contribute their time on boards and other roles. We have a database that records—we need approval to take on a

role, and we can only do it for not-for-profit organisations. We can't do it for for-profit organisations. We record those registers and it goes into our system so that as soon as anybody who was filling out the documentation within our system puts in a proposal for work with an entity—in our case, the university—it would flag my role at the university and remind them to have no correspondence or discussions with me about anything to do with the university.

Clearly, in the university environment, we've set very tight rules to make sure that I'm never involved in any selection decisions or others, or in a situation where KPMG would be reporting to me. As I said, I'm an audit partner. A natural role for audit partners is to sit on risk and audit committees. But, immediately, we always said that if there was an area where there might be work by KPMG that would come before a committee, that could well have been the audit and risk committee, so I have never sat on the audit and risk committee or been any part of that.

(3) How much work has KPMG done at UOW over the last decade?

I have been advised that KPMG fees over the last 10 years are approximately \$2.7 million, relating to internal audit, general tax and accounting advice, and project work.

(4) We've been advised that the University has had a substantial number of contracts with KPMG, how can you say that KPMG has not benefitted from your role on the Council?

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(5) I note that you took on notice the costs involved with Pitch@thePalace at UOW. Can you also provide any costs associated with all of former Prince Andrew's visits, including his visit to open one of the UOW Sydney Campuses.

(a) Was spending approved in or around 2017 to renovate a bathroom for approximately \$70,000. Can you provide more details on this renovation including who has access to the bathroom and who approved the spending?

(b) Who approved the spending for these visits?

(c) What role did former Deputy Vice Chancellor Alex Frino have in organising the visits, and proposing and approving associated costs?

(d) What conflicts of interest were noted by former Deputy Vice Chancellor Alex Frino given his role as a director of the company?

In September 2017, the former Duke of York launched the Pitch@Palace Australia program at UOW and also attended the opening of UOW's former Sydney CBD campus. The program provided entrepreneurs and businesses an opportunity to pitch their ideas and connect with stakeholders that could support them with its development.

I have sought advice from the university and am advised that the total costs associated with Pitch@Palace were approximately \$483,700 between 2017 and 2019 relating to event and promotional activities, student engagement, and travel for events. The initiative also generated approximately \$300,000 income, which offset some of the cost associated with the program.

In relation to the question regarding a bathroom renovation, I was not aware of this matter. I have sought advice from the university, and I am advised that despite best efforts to locate information or identify records relating to the matter in question, the university cannot find anything.

I am advised that the former Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Global Strategy) retained oversight and responsibility for matters relating to UOW's involvement with Pitch@Palace, including the approval of associated costs. It is worth noting that UOW's involvement in Pitch@Palace ceased more than six years ago and that the staff member in question has since left the University.

In relation to the question regarding declaration of conflicts, I have sought advice from the university and am advised that Professor Frino formally declared his association with Pitch@Palace.

(6) Was it ever brought to the attention of the UOW that former DVC Global Alex Frino used his delegations of authority to employ Jane Ferguson Luedecke (sister of then British Royal Sarah Ferguson) as a contractor after the Chief Operating Officer at the time did not agree to continue employing her on a level 10 IEC?

I was not aware of this matter and no record of Council being informed has been found.

(7) Was the University of Wollongong Council ever made aware of a phone bill of approximately 30K phone or internet bill accrued by Ex DVC Global Alex Frino on a personal trip to Malta?

I was not aware of this matter and to the best of my ability cannot recall it being raised at Council. I have sought advice from the university, which has advised that despite best efforts no record can be found relating to any such notification to Council.

(8) How much do you get paid as Deputy Chancellor? Do you receive reimbursements, or have any expenses, such as travel, paid for by the University?

All external UOW Council positions are unpaid, including the Chancellor and Deputy Chancellor.

There have been some occasions where university business has necessitated expense, which has been covered by the university. This includes accommodation expenses during regional graduations on the South Coast in early 2025, where I was presiding officer at ceremonies in Batemans Bay and Bega Valley, and attendance at Universities Australia conferences in Canberra.

(9) Are there decisions that University Council makes that directly effect UOW Global Enterprises? And vice versa?

Yes. Matters relating to UOWGE do come to UOW Council for oversight, consideration and decision. This includes matters relating to proposals to establish new campuses offshore.

(10) Are you on the Board of any UoW controlled entities?

No. I have never been on the Board of any UOW controlled entities.

(11) Do you agree that there is a potential financial conflict of interest when someone is a member of BOTH University Council members and UOW Global Enterprises?

In my experience it is very common for board members of parent entities to be board members of controlled entities, and I don't believe this in itself creates a conflict of interest. I am advised that UOWGE's Constitution and Board By-Laws specifically require the representation of UOW staff members including the UOW Vice-Chancellor and up to three members of the UOW Executive/Council on the Board of UOWGE Ltd.

(12) I note that the day prior to the hearing the University announced that once your current term on Council ends you will be appointed as one the University's first Pro Chancellors.

(a) Can you tell is what your role as Pro Chancellor will entail?

(b) Is this a paid role? Will you receive any payment, expenses or reimbursements?

(c) How were you selected for this role, was it an open application, did the Chancellor approach you?

Pro-Chancellor is a ceremonial position that may preside at graduation ceremonies and attend other official functions when the Chancellor is unavailable. The role is an honorary position, it is not remunerated and does not have authority to act on behalf of the University.

Pro-Chancellors are either former Chancellors or Deputy-Chancellors. When I advised the Chancellor that I was not seeking appointment for a further term on Council, he asked whether I would be interested in continuing to be involved in presiding over graduations, which is something I've always enjoyed. At the December Council meeting I was elected by the Council to the role of Pro-Chancellor, predominately to assist with presiding over future graduation ceremonies.

(13) What plans regarding the Saudia Arabia campus were put to Council?

(a) What was the record of the vote for and against the campus (including how Councillors voted)?

(b) Provide any information that was put to Council to enable it to consider the reasoning in favour of opening a campus in Saudia Arabia.

At its meeting on 21 October 2024, Council approved progressing the Saudi Arabia proposal following a detailed discussion on the opportunities and challenges without the need to proceed to a formal vote. Council's approval followed consideration and approval of the proposal by UOWGE Board. For more detail, I refer to the answers provided by Chancellor Michael Still in response to the supplementary questions put to him.

(14) 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?

My involvement in the transformation program has been as a Council member, and as a member of the Program Control Board during 2024. My primary responsibility in these roles was governance and oversight.

Council was acutely aware of the financial situation facing the university and the need to reduce costs and ensure a more financially sustainable path.

Throughout the transformation program, Council acted on the advice of management, which at times was supported by work undertaken by external consultants.