

INQUIRY INTO NEW SOUTH WALES UNIVERSITY SECTOR

Hearing: 17 December 2025

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QUESTION DURING HEARINGS

List of subject areas that were targeted in the teaching and learning changes.

- Ancient History and Archaeology
- Architectural Engineering
- Cultural Studies
- Computer Engineering
- Earth Sciences
- Geography
- History
- Languages and Linguistics
- Physics
- Public Health
- Mathematics and Applied Statistics
- Material Engineering
- Mining Engineering
- Science & Technology Studies
- Telecommunications Engineering

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS

(1) Now that we've heard from the Federal report that they're recommending that the Act be improved what would be your number one wish for what is changed in the Act?

Improved transparency requirements such that universities have strong public reporting requirements – universities currently do not even have the same requirements as a publicly-listed corporation.

(2) Can you tell us more about the ongoing impact of the change program at UoW?

The Teaching and Learning change proposal resulted in a reduction of around 115 FTE academic staff. Whole programs were closed with no teach-out plan and inadequate support for impacted students. In many areas, academic staff are now suffering from overwork and exhaustion as a result of reduced staff in programs.

Academic workloads are currently subject to a range of intensification, which contra the Enterprise Agreement, have not been agreed to by staff. Academic staff struggle to respond to students who are telling us they are no longer enjoying their degrees and that they cannot get answers to questions about enrolment. Staff who were made redundant in some areas have been asked to teach 'voluntarily' in order to continue in their honorary positions. Newly de-casualised Level A academic staff, appointed to teaching-intensive positions:

- a. have not had proper inductions around university systems for both administration and teaching and learning;
- b. are being asked to undertake tasks that were previously undertaken by those at a Level B and above appointment levels; and
- c. have been given such excessive workloads in some areas that has produced unsafe work conditions and workers' compensation issues.

The first round of the professional staff change management process resulted in approximately 117 FTE redundancies at a cost to date of around \$11 million. The result of the process was that UOW is now in the midst of filling a total of 242 FTE professional staff vacancies. This demonstrates the chaos and anxiety produced by the way the restructuring was undertaken. There are, we understand, some staff being re-employed who had been made redundant during the COVID round of restructuring.

Leading up to the start of the first semester of 2026, quite a few UOW systems are not working, and others have not been updated to reflect the new management structures, so they cannot be used. The staff leave system, which we understand has cost \$20 million, is not functioning; the University is reverting to the old system (without having trained new staff in either the new or original systems). The University has acknowledged that the leave balances of many staff are incorrect in the new system. A number of staff are not being paid at their new classification, and we have heard about other pay errors. Staff have been asked by the person they thought was their line manager, if they knew who their manager now is. The subject outlines system was late in opening and is glitching; the travel approval system has incorrect approvers. And on it goes.

(3) Why do you think the University, and in particular the current Chancellor are immune from accountability?

Broadly, this reflects the way that, over time, vice chancellors and other senior managers have reduced the power of academic governance bodies, like academic senates. At the same time, many members of university councils lack university sector experience and expertise, which means they may not know the right questions to ask. University councils have applied a business mindset of growth and returns to a sector that has a public purpose and limited growth prospects, given the

number of universities in the country and the number of students available to enrol. They do not make detailed minutes available to staff; the confidentiality and secrecy requirements put on Council members are incongruent with the public nature of universities.

At UOW specifically, as per the evidence given to the Inquiry, the Chancellor appears to have been able to ensure the resignation of a Vice-Chancellor with input only from appointed members of Council, not elected ones. The inquiry submissions also noted how he centralised power in his office, including through chairing most of the University sub-committees. This is unusual for a university and not appropriate for an office designed to provide strategic oversight and ceremonial duties. This does not seem to be in line with the UOW Act (1989), which is a matter the Inquiry could consider referring to the NSW Attorney General.

The resignation of Vice Chancellor Davidson resulted in a range of other resignations to the point where most of the senior managers, including the Vice Chancellor, were acting or interim appointments. During this time, most executive staff avoided making decisions and deferred them to the acting Vice Chancellor or similar, or there were few decisions made on some topics. This further embedded the culture of unaccountability.

(4) Are there any governance or transparency issues you'd like to share with us?

Staff are still unclear about a range of issues, including:

- Whether the teaching and learning changes, governance transformation and the redundancies associated with them have been a net cost or benefit to the University;
- The nature of major financial decision and their impacts on teaching and research; and
- The reasons behind the sudden departures of senior executive staff over the past few years and the seeming inability to ensure a stable executive with clear decision-making delegations.