

NSW Legislative Council

Standing Committee on Social Issues

New South Wales university sector

Interim report:

University of Technology
Sydney,
University of Wollongong
and consultants

April 2026



Report 67

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Chair: Hon Dr Sarah Kaine MLC



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Table of contents

	Terms of reference	vi
	Committee details	viii
	Chair's foreword	ix
	Findings	xi
	Recommendations	xii
Chapter 1	Background	1
	How the inquiry started	1
	Tabled ePetition – 7 August 2025	1
	Inquiry launched – 18 August 2025	1
	Ministerial response to the ePetition – 8 September 2025	1
	Inquiry terms of reference	2
	Structure of the inquiry	2
	New South Wales university governance framework	3
	Background	3
	Individual Acts for each university	3
	Standard provisions for NSW university governing bodies	4
	Reporting and financial accountability requirements for NSW universities	5
	National frameworks	7
	<i>Higher Education Support Act 2003</i>	7
	<i>Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011</i> (Cth) and the Higher Education Standards Framework	7
	State vs Commonwealth roles	7
	State responsibilities (NSW) – governance	8
	Commonwealth responsibilities – funding, academic standards, research, policy	8
	Shared space	8
	Recent developments in Australian university governance	8
	Expert Council on University Governance	9
	Senate inquiry	9
Chapter 2	University of Technology Sydney	11
	Major restructure in 2025	11
	SafeWork NSW intervention	12
	Criticisms of reforms and process	13
	The revised proposal	14

	The UTS enabling legislation	15
	Objectives	15
	Functions	15
	Composition of the University Council	16
	Governance concerns	16
	Inadequate representation	16
	Sidelining of collegial governance processes	18
	Weak student representation and consultation	20
	Poor transparency	21
	Managerialism, rising workloads and casualisation	23
	Overuse of consultants	23
Chapter 3	University Of Wollongong	25
	Major restructure in 2025	25
	Criticisms of reforms and process	26
	The UOW enabling legislation	26
	Objectives	26
	Functions	27
	Section 21D Reports to Minister on commercial activities	27
	Composition of the University Council	28
	Governance concerns	29
	Inadequate representation	29
	Risks to regional role and public mission – UOW Global Enterprises	31
	Misalignment between the UOW Act and UOWGE's risk profile	33
	Transparency	33
	Sidelining of collegial governance processes	34
	Poor transparency	35
	Other concerns	36
Chapter 4	Governance and consultants	39
	Governance concerns across the sector	39
	University council composition and orientation	43
	Use of consultants	46
	Transparency of engagements and expenditure	46
	Further impacts	50
	Consultants' perspectives	51
	Committee comment	52
Appendix 1	Submissions	59
Appendix 2	Witnesses at hearings	62

Appendix 3 Minutes

67

Terms of reference

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

- (f) the ability for current legislative and governance arrangements to support the accessibility of university education and derive public benefit, in particular:
 - (i) supporting diversity, inclusion and access for disadvantaged groups
 - (ii) promotion of regional development, Indigenous engagement, and community partnerships
 - (iii) advancing public discourse and civic responsibility.
- (g) the reporting and oversight of controlled entities including international campuses
- (h) opportunities for legislative reform to strengthen governance, transparency and accountability considering, in particular:
 - (i) best practice governance arrangements for universities in other Australian jurisdictions and internationally
 - (ii) lessons from recent audits, inquiries and performance reviews of New South Wales universities.
- (i) any other related matters.

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

Committee details

Committee members

Hon Dr Sarah Kaine MLC	Australian Labor Party	<i>Chair</i>
Hon Sarah Mitchell MLC	The Nationals	<i>Deputy Chair</i>
Ms Abigail Boyd MLC*	The Greens	
Hon Anthony D'Adam MLC	Australian Labor Party	
Hon Taylor Martin MLC	Independent	
Hon Rachel Merton MLC	Liberal Party	
Hon Bob Nanva MLC	Australian Labor Party	
Hon Emily Suvaal MLC	Australian Labor Party	

Contact details

Website	www.parliament.nsw.gov.au
Email	Social.issues@parliament.nsw.gov.au
Telephone	(02) 9230 2895

* Ms Abigail Boyd MLC substituted for Dr Amanda Cohn MLC from 18 August 2025 for the duration of the inquiry.

Secretariat

Bridget Armstrong, Principal Council Officer
 Gerard Rajakariar, Senior Council Officer
 Margaret Pollard, Senior Council Officer
 James Ryan, Administration Officer
 Merrin Thompson, Director

Chair's foreword

Public universities play a critical role in the social, economic and civic life of New South Wales. They are entrusted with substantial public resources and responsibilities, including the provision of higher education, the advancement of research and innovation, and service to the broader community. Given this public purpose, it is essential that the governance arrangements which guide universities are robust, transparent and aligned with the long-term interests of students, staff and the people of New South Wales.

This interim report presents the first stage of the Standing Committee on Social Issues' inquiry into the New South Wales university sector. It presents two case studies: the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and the University of Wollongong (UOW), both of which had commenced or undertaken major restructures in the lead-up to the inquiry. In doing so, the report examines the operation of university governance especially through university councils, as well as on financial transparency and the burgeoning – and troubling – use of external consultants. The evidence before the committee is clear that current governance and reporting arrangements do not provide the level of transparency, accountability and assurance expected of the sector, particularly in relation to significant organisational and commercial decisions. In addition, the overuse of consultants weakens internal capability and risks universities fulfilling their public mission, therefore sacrificing fundamental social benefits in the pursuit of corporate outcomes.

University governance operates within a devolved and complex environment shaped by individual enabling Acts, Commonwealth regulatory and funding settings, and diverse institutional practices. Based on the evidence gathered by the committee to date, while institutional autonomy remains a defining feature of the sector, we are concerned that this fragmentation has diminished consistency, weakened oversight and reduced clarity in responsibility for the stewardship of public funds. The committee also heard evidence regarding the underrepresentation of elected academic and professional staff and students on university councils, and the growing prevalence of externally appointed members with corporate or consulting backgrounds. Witnesses raised concerns that these trends, together with increasing reliance on external consultants, risk eroding collegial governance, weakening internal capability, and prioritising managerial logic over universities' public mission.

Within this broader context, the committee considers that immediate and targeted action is warranted to improve governance, transparency and decision-making at both UTS and UOW. In the case of UTS, the committee was very troubled by evidence relating to council processes, the management of conflicts of interest, and the use of external consultants in workforce and performance decision-making. With respect to UOW, particular concern arose from the operation and oversight of UOW Global Enterprises, the financial and community risks associated with complex subsidiary arrangements, and the shift away from the university's legislated regional mission. The committee considers that focused interim action in relation to both universities is justified to strengthen accountability, restore public confidence and ensure closer alignment with their public mission while the inquiry continues. Accordingly, this report contains four

recommendations across both UTS and UOW that will enable greater transparency and accountability across the sector.

The committee will use the next phase of this inquiry to gather further evidence from across the sector and undertake detailed examination of governance arrangements at other individual universities. This work will inform our conclusions as to whether changes to governance practices, reporting requirements and/or legislative settings are necessary to strengthen accountability and alignment with the public purposes of higher education in New South Wales.

Whilst the committee continues its inquiry, I thank all those who have contributed to date through submissions and evidence at hearings. I also acknowledge the collaborative and thoughtful efforts of my committee colleagues and the professionalism and diligence of the secretariat. The committee looks forward to continuing its examination of these important matters and reporting further to the House in due course.

Hon Dr Sarah Kaine MLC
Committee Chair

Findings

- Finding 1** **55**
That existing internal governance and reporting mechanisms at New South Wales universities are not sufficient to ensure transparency, accountability and alignment with universities' public mission, particularly in relation to complex commercial activities and large-scale organisational decision-making.
- Finding 2** **56**
That section 21D of the *University of Wollongong Act 1989* provides an important and underutilised mechanism for ministerial oversight of university commercial activities, particularly where those activities are conducted through complex subsidiary structures such as University of Wollongong Global Enterprises.
- Finding 3** **57**
That existing annual reporting arrangements for New South Wales universities do not provide for clear, comparable or comprehensive disclosure of information about the use of consultants, thus limiting public transparency and accountability.
- Finding 4** **58**
That existing public information mechanisms, including contract registers maintained under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*, do not furnish reliable or comprehensive disclosure of universities' use of consultants, further undermining transparency and public confidence.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

55

That the NSW Auditor-General conduct a performance audit of the University of Technology, with a focus on governance integrity, financial management, the use of consultants in decision-making, workforce management, psychosocial risk oversight, and the governance of controlled entities.

Recommendation 3

56

That the Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education exercise the power under section 21D of the *University of Wollongong Act 1989* to request a report from the University of Wollongong Council on the commercial activities of the University of Wollongong and its related entities, including University of Wollongong Global Enterprises.

Recommendation 3

57

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

Recommendation 4

58

That the NSW Government review the application of the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* to universities, including:

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

Chapter 1 Background

This chapter explains why the inquiry into the New South Wales university sector was established and summarises the legislative and policy framework governing public universities in the state. It describes the ePetition that prompted the inquiry, the Government's response and the terms of reference adopted by the Legislative Council. The chapter also provides an overview of the broader policy context, including the division of responsibilities between New South Wales and the Commonwealth.

How the inquiry started

Tabled ePetition – 7 August 2025

- 1.1 On 7 August 2025 an ePetition titled '*Defend jobs, support staff and fix university governance*' was tabled in the Legislative Council. The petition, signed by 2,619 people, raised concerns about job losses, course cuts and governance practices across NSW universities.¹
- 1.2 Petitioners stated that universities were undergoing 'drastic restructures' that threatened more than 1,200 jobs and reduced course offerings. Concerns were also raised about heavy reliance on private consultancy firms and increased psychosocial risks for staff.² Petitioners called on the NSW Government to act quickly to protect jobs and maintain the quality of university education.

Inquiry launched – 18 August 2025

- 1.3 On 18 August 2025, following the tabling of the ePetition, the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues (the committee) resolved to conduct an inquiry into the matters raised.

Ministerial response to the ePetition – 8 September 2025

- 1.4 On 8 September 2025 the NSW Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education, the Hon Steve Whan MP, responded to the ePetition. The Minister acknowledged the issues raised and noted that public universities operate under their own establishing legislation. He observed that many restructures were influenced by financial pressures associated with Commonwealth policy settings.³
- 1.5 The Minister outlined the Government's engagement with university leadership and its support for nationally coordinated governance reforms.⁴ He confirmed the

¹ *ePetition*, NSW Legislative Council, 7 August 2025.

² *ePetition*, NSW Legislative Council, 7 August 2025.

³ *Government Response - Petition*, NSW Legislative Council, 8 September 2025.

⁴ *Government Response - Petition*, NSW Legislative Council, 8 September 2025.

Government's advocacy for the implementation of the Australian Universities Accord, including the proposed establishment of the Australian Tertiary Education Commission and an Expert Council on University Governance.⁵ The Minister also referred to related developments, including increased powers for the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) and ongoing governance consultations at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). He indicated that the Government would seek to coordinate with related state and Commonwealth inquiries.⁶

Inquiry terms of reference

- 1.6** The inquiry terms of reference set out that the committee will examine:
- the structure and powers of university councils under NSW legislation
 - differences in governance arrangements across universities
 - reporting obligations to Parliament and the Auditor-General
 - the role of governance in protecting academic freedom, research ethics and student welfare
 - the division of responsibilities between the State and the Commonwealth
 - options for legislative reform.⁷

Structure of the inquiry

- 1.7** The committee publicly advertised the inquiry and called for submissions, which closed on 17 October 2025. It received 105 submissions. Public submissions were published on the committee's [website](#).
- 1.8** The committee held three public hearings in Sydney on:
- Friday 7 November 2025
 - Wednesday 17 December 2025
 - Wednesday 18 February 2026.
- 1.9** Video recordings of the hearings appeared on the NSW Parliament YouTube channel.
- 1.10** The committee heard evidence from unions, student groups, academics, university leaders and private consultancy firms. Witnesses discussed council decision-making, financial transparency, use of private consultancy firms and workforce impacts.

⁵ *Government Response - Petition*, NSW Legislative Council, 8 September 2025.

⁶ *Government Response - Petition*, NSW Legislative Council, 8 September 2025.

⁷ *Terms of Reference*, NSW Legislative Council, 18 August 2025.

- 1.11** Hearing programs, Hansard transcripts, answers to question on notice, and other documents were published on the committee's [website](#).
- 1.12** Further hearings are planned to occur after the tabling of this interim report. This first report is focused on UTS, the University of Wollongong (UOW) and the use of private consultancy firms. Subsequent hearings will examine other universities. The committee will continue to explore university council decision-making, the adequacy of governance arrangements, financial transparency, the use of private consultancy firms and workforce impacts across the sector.

New South Wales university governance framework

- 1.13** This section describes the legislative framework for NSW public universities. It outlines the Acts that establish each university and set the standard rules for their governing bodies. It then summarises the reporting, financial and commercial activity requirements that apply to universities, including the Minister's specific powers. The section also explains the national frameworks that regulate higher education and sets out the respective roles of the State and the Commonwealth.

Background

- 1.14** New South Wales universities are created by individual Acts of state Parliament, which set out each institution's objects, functions and governance structure.
- 1.15** All ten public universities in New South Wales – Charles Sturt University, Macquarie University, Southern Cross University, the University of Newcastle, the University of New England, the University of New South Wales, the University of Sydney, UTS, UOW and Western Sydney University – are established under their own statute.⁸

Individual Acts for each university

- 1.16** The structure of the university Acts, and the bulk of their content, is consistent across each of the ten Acts, with minor variations that reflect universities' individual circumstances. Each of the universities' Acts include the following standard sections:
- constitution and functions of the university
 - the governing body, authorities and officers of the university
 - functions of the governing body
 - duties of governing body members

⁸ Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 1.

- provisions relating to governing body members and procedures of the governing body
- provisions governing how the university, though its Council, may manage, invest and pool the university's funds, including trust funds, while preserving the terms of any trusts (often contained in a Schedule).⁹

Standard provisions for NSW university governing bodies

1.17 The *Universities Governing Bodies Act 2011* introduced standard provisions applying to governing bodies across NSW public universities. University governing bodies are called such because universities have different names for their governing bodies.¹⁰

1.18 The standard governing body provisions establish that there is to be a governing body of each university and set out the following elements:

- the governing body has powers conferred on it under the university's Act
- provision for the size of the governing body, which can consist of a minimum of 11 members and a maximum of 22 members, to be decided by a resolution passed by at least two-thirds of the members of the governing body
- minimum requirements for the qualifications and expertise of members (that at least two members have financial expertise and one must have commercial expertise)
- that there are to be elected academic and non-academic staff members and elected student members, and that the constitution rules of each governing body determine how many members are in each category
- a requirement that at least one of the members be a graduate of the university
- the governing body may appoint a number of 'external' members
- the Minister may appoint between two and six external persons to a governing body, with the number of these external persons to be decided by each governing body in its constitution rules
- definitions of terms used in the governing body provisions, so these are consistent across universities.¹¹

1.19 University Acts contain standard provisions on the functions of governing bodies. While there are some variations in the language used, the Acts all prescribe the primary role of the governing body as being:

⁹ Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 1.

¹⁰ Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 1.

¹¹ Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 1.

(a) acts for and on behalf of the University in the exercise of the University's functions, and

(b) has the control and management of the affairs and concerns of the University, and

(c) may act in all matters concerning the University in such manner as appears to the Council to be best calculated to promote the object and interests of the University.¹²

Reporting and financial accountability requirements for NSW universities

1.20 All individual university Acts specify that universities are subject to Division 7.3 of the *Government Sector Finance Act 2018*, which regulates the provision of annual reporting information to the Minister and Parliament by the governing body and requires the governing body to report on a university's operations.¹³

1.21 All 10 NSW public universities are required to submit annual reports to the Minister no more than four months after the end of the calendar year (by the end of April). The reports must be tabled in Parliament within one month of receipt (by the end of May).¹⁴

1.22 The minimum content for NSW universities' financial statements, which are included in their annual reports, is set by the Commonwealth Department of Education. The financial statements also need to align with the Australian Accounting Standards.¹⁵

1.23 The NSW Auditor-General tables an annual report to Parliament on the NSW university sector, summarising the results of the financial audits. The report includes analysis, observations and recommendations relating to NSW universities' audit results, financial performance, internal controls and governance, teaching and enrolment outcomes and other key areas of focus that have been determined for the year.¹⁶

1.24 Also, the Minister can request a report from the university's governing body about any or all of its commercial activities. 'University commercial activity' is defined in the Acts as:

(a) any activity engaged in, by or on behalf of the University in the exercise of commercial functions of the University, and

¹² Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 2.

¹³ Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 2.

¹⁴ Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 2.

¹⁵ Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 2.

¹⁶ Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 2.

(b) any other activity comprising the promotion of, establishment of or participation in any partnership, trust, company or other incorporated body, or joint venture, by or on behalf of the University, that is for the time being declared by the Guidelines to be a University commercial activity.¹⁷

1.25 Under their Acts, universities may exercise commercial functions (as referenced in the above definition):

(a) the University may exercise commercial functions comprising the commercial exploitation or development, for the University's benefit, of any facility, resource or property of the University or in which the University has a right or interest (including, for example, study, research, knowledge and intellectual property and the practical application of study, research, knowledge and intellectual property), whether alone or with others,

(a1) without limiting paragraph (a), the University may generate revenue for the purpose of funding the promotion of its object and the carrying out of its principal functions.¹⁸

1.26 The Minister has the following explicit duties under each of the university Acts:

- appointment of between a minimum of two and a maximum of six external members to university governing bodies
- approving the sale or lease (if for a period of over 21 years) of land acquired by the university from the State for nominal or less than market value
- ability to acquire land in accordance with the provisions of the *Land Acquisition (Just Terms Compensation Act) 1991* and to convey or transfer land vested in the Minister to a university
- the Minister can request a copy of or extract from a governing body's Register of Commercial Activities at any time and the governing body must comply with this request
- the Minister can request a report from a governing body on university commercial activities
- the Minister can refer university commercial activities or any aspect of a university commercial activity to the Auditor-General for investigation and report or as a complaint to the Ombudsman.¹⁹

¹⁷ Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 2.

¹⁸ Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 2.

¹⁹ Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 3.

National frameworks

- 1.27** The Commonwealth government holds primary responsibility for university funding, regulation, policy and employment law through national frameworks, including the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA) and the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA).²⁰

Higher Education Support Act 2003

- 1.28** The HESA provides the legislative framework for funding universities and higher education providers across Australia. It determines important settings such as Commonwealth-supported student places and sets conditions for student loans, including HECS-HELP and FEE-HELP. HESA also governs funding eligibility for universities and compliance with reporting obligations.²¹

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 (Cth) and the Higher Education Standards Framework

- 1.29** The *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (Cth) (TEQSA Act) establishes TEQSA as the national regulator of higher education quality and compliance. TEQSA monitors and enforces the Higher Education Standards Framework, which covers teaching, research, governance, financial viability and student support.
- 1.30** Universities are required to submit regular reports on material changes, governance and quality assurance processes. TEQSA also has powers to investigate non-compliance and impose conditions, warnings or sanctions. There is currently a national reform agenda to improve the governance of Australian universities.²²
- 1.31** To assist in understanding the governance environment in which NSW university councils operate, the respective roles of the State and Commonwealth are summarised below.

State vs Commonwealth roles

- 1.32** Responsibility for higher education is shared between the states and territories and the Commonwealth. Since the mid-1970s, the Commonwealth has been the primary source of public funding for universities and has attached national policy and quality assurance requirements to that funding. States and territories

²⁰ Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 3.

²¹ Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 3.

²² Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 3.

retain responsibility for the legal establishment and governance frameworks of public universities.²³

State responsibilities (NSW) – governance

1.33 In New South Wales, the State government is responsible for the legal and governance foundations of public universities, including to:

- establish universities through legislation
- define the powers, composition and duties of university councils
- set requirements for commercial activities and controlled entities
- require reporting to Parliament, the Auditor-General and the NSW Department of Education
- oversee compliance with NSW governance laws.

Commonwealth responsibilities – funding, academic standards, research, policy

1.34 The Commonwealth's role centres on funding, national policy settings and quality assurance, including to:

- provide funding through grants and student support programs
- set national academic standards and undertake quality assurance processes for higher education providers through HESA and TEQSA
- develop national policy relating to research, equity and student protections
- assess financial sustainability and performance at a national level.

Shared space

1.35 Both levels of government influence university governance outcomes. New South Wales determines the statutory and accountability framework within which university councils operate, while the Commonwealth shapes behaviour through funding conditions, national standards and performance expectations. The extent to which these combined arrangements provide enough transparency and accountability is examined in chapter 4.

Recent developments in Australian university governance

1.36 There have been a number of recent developments relevant to university governance at the federal level, including the establishment of an expert advisory

²³ Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 3.

body, a federal parliamentary inquiry into university governance, and ministerial consideration of updated national governance principles.

Expert Council on University Governance

- 1.37** On 26 April 2024 the Education Ministers agreed to establish an Expert Council on University Governance to develop University Governance Principles and Guidelines.²⁴ The Council advises Ministers on strengthening governance across public universities and produce principles to improve transparency, accountability and representation in governing bodies.²⁵
- 1.38** On 17 October 2025 the Education Ministers discussed the University Governance Principles and recommendations developed by the Expert Council on University Governance. The Ministers noted that the Australian Government will commence embedding the University Governance Principles into the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Thresholds Standards) 2021* (Cth).²⁶

Senate inquiry

- 1.39** On 29 July 2025 the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee launched an inquiry into the *quality of governance in Australian higher education providers* (the Senate inquiry), which addressed similar matters to this inquiry such as transparency, remuneration and the powers of the TEQSA.
- 1.40** Evidence presented to the Senate inquiry called for more diverse representation on university governing bodies, including staff, students and members with higher education expertise.²⁷
- 1.41** The Senate committee tabled its:
- interim report on 19 September 2025
 - final report on 11 December 2025.
- 1.42** The Senate committee made eight recommendations in its final report, which in summary were that:
- state and territory governments should review university establishing Acts and governing body composition to ensure the primacy of public research and education

²⁴ Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 3.

²⁵ Australian Government Department of Education, *The Expert Council on University Governance*, <https://www.education.gov.au/Australian-universities-accord/accord-priority-actions/expert-council-university-governance>.

²⁶ Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 3.

²⁷ *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers*, Education and Employment Legislation Committee, 19 September 2025, list of recommendations.

- council member duties and council performance assessments should reflect responsibility for upholding education and research as a public good
- TEQSA should update guidance to support stronger university governance, compliance and workforce oversight, including in the context of the Expert Council on University Governance and including systems, worker voice, compliance structures and staff training
- the Department of Education should prioritise improved data collection and reporting on casual staff numbers (including headcounts and the proportion of teaching hours undertaken by casual staff) to increase workforce transparency
- the Higher Education Standards Framework (Thresholds Standards) 2021 should require annual academic board reviews of course staffing to ensure quality teaching, adequate oversight, appropriate staff balance, reliable access to individual student assistance, and sufficient placements for courses involving practicums or work-integrated learning
- TEQSA should establish an ongoing monitoring and reporting framework for course quality and staffing adequacy
- the Australian Government should strengthen TEQSA's powers by requiring consideration of student interests and Australia's higher education reputation, and by introducing a positive duty on providers to comply with standards
- TEQSA should develop a statement of expectations for academic governance covering staffing ratios, including the balance of continuing and casual staff, staff experience (including PhD candidates and subject coordinators) and regular reporting to governing bodies.²⁸

²⁸ *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers – final report*, Education and Employment Legislation Committee, 11 December 2025, list of recommendations, pp xi – xiii.

Chapter 2 University of Technology Sydney

This chapter uses the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) as a case study of rapid organisational change: how its 2025 restructure unfolded, how SafeWork NSW intervened, and what the events revealed about governance, consultation and psychosocial risk in a university within the current state and Commonwealth policy context.

It sets out the statutory framework under the *University of Technology Sydney Act 1989* and examines inquiry participant concerns about the University Council's composition and expertise, along with the transparency of its processes. The chapter also reviews the evidence the committee gathered about managerial practice, staff and student representation, consultation processes and the university's reliance on external consultants.

Major restructure in 2025

- 2.1** On 14 August 2025 the Vice-Chancellor and President of UTS, Professor Andrew Parfitt, emailed all staff with news that the Provost (the university's primary academic officer) had approved the temporary suspension until Autumn 2026 of new student intakes for 136 courses across seven faculties.²⁹ These suspensions formed the first major step in the Operational Sustainability Initiative (OSI), a university-wide cost-cutting program intended to stabilise UTS's finances and respond to a rapidly deteriorating operating environment.³⁰
- 2.2** The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) UTS Branch described the OSI's purpose plainly: 'to find savings of \$100 million, with the potential loss of up to 400 jobs'.³¹ The announcement marked the beginning of an extended and uncertain period of change for staff and students, marked by significant media attention.
- 2.3** Events accelerated on 17 September 2025 when UTS released its Academic Change Proposal (ACP), the first formal stage of the OSI.³² The ACP set out a sweeping restructure of academic activity. It aimed to standardise faculty structures and tighten the university's course profile to support improved student progression, elective choice and teaching coordination. It proposed discontinuing 167 courses and cutting approximately 134 full-time equivalent academic positions, alongside reduced reliance on casual staff.³³ These proposed

²⁹ Submission 31, NTEU UTS Branch, p 2.

³⁰ UTS, *Operational Sustainability Initiative*, <https://www.uts.edu.au/about/key-initiatives/operational-sustainability-initiative>.

³¹ Submission 31, NTEU Branch, p 2.

³² UTS, *Operational Sustainability Initiative*, <https://www.uts.edu.au/about/key-initiatives/operational-sustainability-initiative>.

³³ UTS, *Release of academic change proposal*, <https://www.uts.edu.au/news/2025/release-of-academic-change-proposal>.

cuts included entire programs in education and teacher training, public health, international studies, and several health-related degrees including palliative care, diabetes education and health services management.³⁴ The ACP confirmed what many staff had feared, the university was entering a period of deep structural upheaval.

- 2.4** Professor Parfitt characterised the proposal as necessary to 'achiev[e] a sustainable future' so that students 'can continue to get the quality of education they expect'.³⁵ Media analysis underscored the scale of the change, pointing to more than 1,100 subjects slated for removal, 167 course discontinuations, and a reduction in the number of schools from 24 to 15 across education, public health and international studies.³⁶
- 2.5** Media reports and independent commentary warned that job losses could be even higher – sometimes more than 160 positions – reflecting the confusion and anxiety that surrounded the change process.³⁷ A leaked NTEU survey of 380 academic and professional staff, reported by the ABC, found that 35 per cent of respondents experienced very high psychological distress linked to the change process as well as longer term erosion of workplace conditions.³⁸
- 2.6** UTS noted the reforms were driven by financial pressures, including policy limits on domestic and international student revenue. The university argued that significant cost reductions were necessary to return to surplus after several years of deficit and indicated that consultation would continue following publication of the proposal.³⁹

SafeWork NSW intervention

- 2.7** Uncertainty around the restructure intensified on 3 September 2025 when SafeWork NSW issued a prohibition notice that stopped parts of the change process. SafeWork found a 'serious and imminent risk of psychological harm' to staff arising from planned change meetings and UTS's proposed communication

³⁴ Submission 47, Dr Ruth French, p 3; Evidence, Professor Lynn Sinclair, Chair of Academic Board, and Council Member, Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) Faculty of Health, UTS, 7 November 2025, p 52.

³⁵ UTS, *Release of academic change proposal*, <https://www.uts.edu.au/news/2025/release-of-academic-change-proposal>.

³⁶ Miriah Davis and Gavin Coote, *UTS to axe 1,100 subjects across education and public health, cuts 134 full-time jobs*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-09-17/uts-cuts-subjects-job-cuts-restructure/105783978>.

³⁷ Paul Karp, *Law school merged, 160 jobs to go at UTS as major restructure revealed*, <https://www.afr.com/policy/health-and-education/law-school-merged-160-jobs-to-go-at-uts-as-major-restructure-revealed-20250917-p5mvo6>.

³⁸ Conor Duffy, *One third of UTS staff suffer psychological distress as hundreds of jobs set to be axed*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-07-03/university-technology-sydney-staff-jobs-redundancies/105485548>.

³⁹ UTS, *Release of academic change proposal*, <https://www.uts.edu.au/news/2025/release-of-academic-change-proposal>.

and consultation approach.⁴⁰ The notice paused the process and delayed release of the ACP.

- 2.8** SafeWork lifted the notice on 5 September 2025 after UTS agreed to change its communications strategy and consultation processes.
- 2.9** The period that followed became known within UTS as the Safety Intervention period (the term used in this chapter to avoid confusion with the Operational Sustainability Initiative).
- 2.10** Mr Vince Caughley, Secretary of the NTEU NSW Division, described the intervention as 'unprecedented' and told the committee that other unions contacted the NTEU to acknowledge its significance.⁴¹
- 2.11** After the notice was lifted, UTS released the ACP on 17 September 2025 and moved toward implementation in 2026. Submissions to the committee reported widespread concern among staff, students and unions throughout the Safety Intervention period about job losses, course reductions and the resulting uncertainty, continuing psychosocial risks and declining trust in the university's governance.⁴² In an NTEU media statement, Mr Caughley challenged the 'recklessness' of the cuts at UTS and pointed to a broader problem across the sector:

SafeWork NSW's intervention is a rare and damning rebuke, underlining just how reckless these cuts have been ... The public is entitled to ask whether those entrusted with running our universities are fit for the task.⁴³

Criticisms of reforms and process

- 2.12** The NTEU forcefully challenged the scale and process of the restructure, highlighting earlier course suspensions, limited engagement with academic governance bodies, and the role of external consultants such as KPMG in the scenario development and workforce analytics underpinning the proposal.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Hannah Wootton, *Safety watchdog's extraordinary intervention at UTS*, <https://www.afr.com/rear-window/safety-watchdog-s-extraordinary-intervention-at-uts-20250903-p5ms1x>.

⁴¹ Evidence, Mr Vince Caughley, Secretary, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division, 7 November 2025, p 10.

⁴² Submission 47, Dr Ruth French, p 4; Evidence, Dr Thomas Clarke, Visiting Professor, UTS, 7 November 2025, p 8; Evidence, Ms Mia Campbell, President, UTS Students' Association, 7 November 2025, p 57; Submission 31, NTEU UTS Branch, p 4; Submission 24, Members of the UTS Governance Project, p 20.

⁴³ NTEU, *UTS forced to urgently pause job cut plan after rare SafeWork NSW prohibition*, <https://newshub.medianet.com.au/2025/09/uts-forced-to-urgently-pause-job-cut-plan-after-rare-safework-nsw-prohibition/116739/>.

⁴⁴ Submission 31, NTEU UTS Branch, p 6.

- 2.13** Further strong concerns were raised through the document *Operational Sustainability at UTS: An Alternative Proposal*, submitted by senior accounting academics from the UTS Business School.⁴⁵ This document argued that UTS was not facing a financial crisis that necessitated large-scale redundancies and that the university could achieve improved financial outcomes without reducing academic or faculty-based professional staff.⁴⁶
- 2.14** The *Academic Change Proposal – Consolidated staff consultation feedback and the university's response (February 2026)*⁴⁷ provided to the committee by Professor Parfitt, demonstrated the depth of staff concern. Staff criticised the ACP for threatening academic quality, disciplinary identity, workloads, and the student experience, particularly for Higher Degree by Research candidates.⁴⁸ They also argued that the consultation process lacked transparency and relied too heavily on external consultants.⁴⁹

The revised proposal

- 2.15** After the committee's first hearing on 7 November 2025, and in response to extensive feedback from staff, students and other stakeholders, UTS announced an update to the ACP.⁵⁰
- 2.16** The university revised several aspects of the proposal, including by:
- preserving teacher education through redesigned degrees
 - retaining most postgraduate Public Health programs, including palliative care and diabetes education
 - deciding not to proceed with the proposed merger of the Faculty of Law, the Business School and the Transdisciplinary School
 - relying primarily on voluntary separations, resulting in slightly fewer academic staffing reductions.⁵¹
- 2.17** The final implementation plan, released on 12 February 2026, confirmed the reduced scope of the proposed course closures and job losses. The plan confirmed the retention of courses in key areas, including teacher education,

⁴⁵ Submission 70, Go6, p 2.

⁴⁶ Submission 70, Go6, p 2; Evidence, Professor Stephen Taylor, Distinguished Professor of Accounting, UTS, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan, 7 November 2025, p 31.

⁴⁷ Answers to questions on notice, UTS, p 1.

⁴⁸ Answers to questions on notice, UTS p 8.

⁴⁹ Answers to questions on notice, UTS, p 7.

⁵⁰ UTS, *Update to academic change proposal*, <https://www.uts.edu.au/2025/11/update-to-academic-change-proposal>, 26 November 2025.

⁵¹ UTS, *Update to academic change proposal*, <https://www.uts.edu.au/news/2025/11/update-to-academic-change-proposal>, 26 November 2025.

international studies and postgraduate health. It also confirmed a reduced number of job losses, to be achieved through voluntary separations.⁵²

The UTS enabling legislation

2.18 The concerns raised during the restructure about consultation, transparency, decision-making authority and the role of the University Council direct the committee to the statutory framework governing UTS.

Objectives

2.19 The objectives of the University, as stated in the *University of Technology Sydney Act 1989* (the Act), are the promotion, within the limits of the University's resources, of scholarship, research, free inquiry, the interaction of research and teaching, and academic excellence.⁵³

Functions

2.20 In order to fulfil its objectives, UTS's principal functions, as prescribed by the Act, are:

- provision of facilities for education and research of university standard
- encouragement of the dissemination, advancement, development and application of knowledge informed by free inquiry
- provision of courses and research across fields to meet community needs
- participation in public discourse
- conferral of degrees and other awards
- provision of teaching and learning that engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry
- development of governance, rules, admission policies, financial arrangements and quality-assurance processes sufficient to ensure academic integrity.⁵⁴

2.21 Consistent with the broader NSW university governance framework, the Act also authorises UTS to undertake commercial activities to support its objects and principal functions.⁵⁵

⁵² Answers to questions on notice, UTS, p 3; UTS, *Implementation of academic change plan*, <https://www.uts.edu.au/news/2026/02/implementation-of-academic-change-plan>.

⁵³ University of Technology Sydney Act 1989, s 6(1).

⁵⁴ University of Technology Sydney Act 1989, s 6(2).

⁵⁵ University of Technology Sydney Act 1989, s 6(3).

Composition of the University Council

- 2.22** As noted in Chapter 1, a university council is the governing authority of a university and has the functions conferred or imposed on it by or under the enabling legislation. Section 8B of the Act prescribes that the UTS Council must have a minimum of 11 and a maximum of 22 members, with the total number determined from time to time by a two-thirds majority of Council.⁵⁶ The Council must include official members, elected members, council-appointed members, and ministerially appointed members.⁵⁷ A majority of the total number must be external persons, and no single category may constitute a majority.⁵⁸ The Council must notify the Minister within seven days of any resolution under s 8B.⁵⁹
- 2.23** Public information as at mid-March 2026 states that the UTS University Council comprises:
- three official members (Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Chair of Academic Board)
 - 12 appointed members (10 council-appointed, two ministerially appointed)
 - five elected members (two academic staff, one professional staff, one postgraduate student, and one undergraduate student).⁶⁰

Governance concerns

- 2.24** Evidence to the inquiry converged on the following governance themes at UTS: inadequate representation, sidelining of academic governance processes, weak student representation and consultation, poor transparency, managerialism with an impact on workplace conditions, and reliance on consultants.

Inadequate representation

- 2.25** Some inquiry participants challenged whether the University Council's structure affords staff, students and other stakeholders sufficient influence over and engagement in decisions, given both staff and students' direct stake in the effective functioning of the university.
- 2.26** Professor Thalia Anthony, who serves as an elected academic staff member of the UTS Council, compared the composition of the UTS Council to that of the University of Sydney Senate, on which she previously served. The Senate had 14 elected fellows, constituting 64 per cent of that body. By contrast, the five elected

⁵⁶ University of Technology Sydney Act 1989, s 8B.

⁵⁷ University of Technology Sydney Act 1989, s 8B(3).

⁵⁸ University of Technology Sydney Act 1989, s 8B(6) and (7).

⁵⁹ University of Technology Sydney Act 1989, s 8B(8).

⁶⁰ UTS, *UTS Council*, <https://www.uts.edu.au/about/leadership-governance/governance/committees/uts-council>.

members of the UTS Council amount to only 28 per cent of the Council, and the remainder are predominantly external members appointed by Council itself.⁶¹ Professor Anthony went on to make a number of observations about the appointed membership:

They have all served as management executives. Their identification with management prevents a scrupulous check on university managers. External members lack professional experience with the university sector and rarely engage with staff or students to apprise themselves of the impact of their decisions.⁶²

- 2.27** Professor Anthony thus called for elected members to comprise at least 50 per cent of non-official Council members, and recommended that no more than 50 per cent of external members be appointed by Council, arguing that 'a greater number of elected members, including elected alumni, would enable council to better assess the risk of its decisions, including on the culture and reputation of the university'.⁶³ Consistent with this, Mr Caughley recommended that elected representation should increase to 'a minimum of 50 per cent elected representatives from the staff, student, and possibly, alumni cohort ... having people who have a very real stake and powerful interest in the success of the institution'.⁶⁴
- 2.28** Members of the staff-led UTS Governance Project highlighted the erosion of staff and student voices and unclear accountability structures in their submission, recommending legislative reform of Council composition along with greater transparency in appointments.⁶⁵
- 2.29** The NTEU UTS Branch also questioned whether appointment processes ensure Council members have the necessary qualifications and higher education governance experience. The Branch further argued that stronger elected representation is essential to restoring confidence in the Council and ensuring that decisions align with UTS's public mission.⁶⁶
- 2.30** With regard to Council processes, Professor Anthony noted that unlike the University of Sydney Senate, elected members have no capacity to put motions, to place items on the agenda, to sit on committees, to sit on selection panels for management, or to give input into university submissions on funding. Furthermore, she reported, 'There is no voting on council that I have ever seen and there is no noting of dissent by individual councillors'.⁶⁷

⁶¹ *In camera* evidence, Professor Thalia Anthony, Elected UTS Council Member (elected by and from the academic staff), University of Technology Sydney, 7 November 2025, p 1, published by resolution of the committee.

⁶² *In camera* evidence, Professor Anthony, 7 November 2025, p 1.

⁶³ *In camera* evidence, Professor Anthony, 7 November 2025, p 1.

⁶⁴ Evidence, Mr Caughley, 7 November 2025, p 16.

⁶⁵ Submission 24, Members of the UTS Governance Project, p 24.

⁶⁶ *In camera* evidence, Professor Anthony, 7 November 2025, p 1.

⁶⁷ *In camera* evidence, Professor Anthony, 7 November 2025, p 1.

- 2.31** Another elected Council member, Dr Robert Czernkowski, reported highly questionable engagement by external members:

My view of the way that council works ... Questioning and participation is perfunctory. They go through the motions but they nod their heads to whatever is presented in front of them ... members of Council, particularly external members, do not know what's going on.⁶⁸

- 2.32** The committee pursued the Council's in-built accountability in evidence with Professor Parfitt. He confirmed the composition of the 18 member UTS University Council: three official members, two being the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor; two ministerial appointments; five elected members, three being staff and two students; and the ten remaining members appointed by the Council itself. Challenged as to whether this might be construed as a 'self-perpetuating clique', whose accountability is structurally limited, Professor Parfitt responded that like other boards, Council members are chosen against a skills matrix and have fixed terms. Further questioned by the committee, Professor Parfitt acknowledged that unlike other boards, the Council does not have the accountability mechanism by which shareholders are able to spill their board if they lose confidence in its governance. He then pointed to the inbuilt accountability arising from member fixed terms, consideration of member performance and turnover in providing opportunities to refresh the board, before acknowledging that the Council itself presides over those appointments.⁶⁹

Sidelining of collegial governance processes

- 2.33** Beyond the University Council, the NTEU reported the sidelining of collegial governance, describing several instances where major structural and academic changes were approved through expedited processes, with consultation occurring only after key decisions had been made.⁷⁰ It went so far as to allege that course suspensions and restructure planning by senior management had breached the university's internal governance processes:

In making decisions to unilaterally 'suspend' courses, UTS senior management have breached internal governance processes, including the authority of the Course Planning Committee and Academic Board. Staff expertise has been sidelined while external consultants such as KPMG have been elevated as decisive voices ...

The unilateral course suspensions occurred without appropriate consultation with the relevant Schools or Faculties. This meant that rather than each course suspension going through due process with a business

⁶⁸ *In camera* evidence, Dr Robert Czernkowski, Elected UTS Council Member (elected by and from the academic staff), University of Technology Sydney, 7 November 2025, p 1, published by resolution of the committee.

⁶⁹ Evidence, Professor Andrew Parfitt, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Technology Sydney, 7 November 2025, pp 26-27.

⁷⁰ Submission 31, NTEU UTS Branch, p 6.

case within the respective faculty boards as required, all courses were part of one business case approved directly by the Provost, and these business cases were made after the announcement of course suspensions. This process clearly by-passed UTS' own internal academic governance processes, involving corporate-style snap decision-making that came as a shock to academics, professional staff and current students.⁷¹

2.34 Dr Thomas Clarke, Visiting Professor, UTS, spoke of the alarm that unfolded at the decision to suspend these courses:

I was shocked to discover that UTS was closing these courses because of lack of students and giving up. I just find it inconceivable that any university could make those decisions. If students aren't coming forward, you market, you offer bursaries, you offer scholarships, and you encourage people. Primary education is the critical moment in children's lives, and to neglect it as a university, I think, is almost criminal. Public health is what everyone would consider the most important thing going after the COVID crisis, and to walk away from that—it's inconceivable that the university has proposed this, and I hope that they withdraw the proposals very soon.⁷²

2.35 More broadly, academic witnesses observed that changes to university governance over time had enabled a shift away from the public purpose of institutions such as UTS. Dr Clarke argued that universities had enthusiastically adopted corporate governance models without recognising that many of these approaches were no longer regarded as best practice – even in the private sector. In this regard, he highlighted that universities had 'adopted practices that were abandoned by the private sector some decades ago'.⁷³

2.36 Echoing Professor Anthony's observations about UTS Council processes noted above (see paragraphs 2.26 and 2.30), Dr Clarke observed more broadly that university governance structures have become increasingly procedural rather than substantive. He highlighted:

What actually happens is that there is a coalition of the enlarging university executive with the external business representatives and others, which forms a natural majority on the university council. There is very little possibility of even any change to policies that are put forward by the executive, let alone rejection of those policies. Everything is manufactured and manicured to pass through what are becoming increasingly nominal procedures. This wasn't the case in the past.⁷⁴

2.37 Speaking before the announcement of the wound-back OSI, Dr Clarke emphasised that financial responsibility need not come at the expense of essential public functions. He argued that core areas such as teacher education

⁷¹ Submission 31, NTEU UTS Branch, pp 2-4.

⁷² Evidence, Dr Thomas Clarke, Visiting Professor, University of Technology Sydney, 7 November 2025, p 8.

⁷³ Evidence, Dr Clarke, 7 November 2025, p 4.

⁷⁴ Evidence, Dr Clarke, 7 November 2025, pp 4-5.

and public health could be maintained without compromising financial probity if governance arrangements were strengthened, concluding that 'there is a brighter and better future for New South Wales education if the governance of the universities can be revived and accountability to the wider community restored'.⁷⁵

- 2.38** The committee pursued matters relating to academic decision-making in its hearing with Professor Parfitt. Challenged as to whether his decision to abolish the role of the Provost (akin to the chief academic officer) served to further centralise control, Professor Parfitt insisted that the intention was 'actually to enable and empower areas across the university to exercise their responsibilities'.⁷⁶
- 2.39** The committee questioned Professor Parfitt as to how autonomous Deans really are when they no longer have the ability to return to an academic role, such that they might be less willing to make frank and fearless decisions. Additionally, the committee asked about the decision-making process for course suspensions, specifically informal accounts that Deans were required to sign centrally-written letters saying that they had approved and designed those suspensions. Professor Parfitt stated that UTS governance processes are intended to ensure that Deans do have the ability 'to contest, debate and challenge'. Asked whether they do have this ability, he responded, 'Of course they do'.⁷⁷

Weak student representation and consultation

- 2.40** Concerns about transparency and inclusiveness extended beyond staff and academic bodies. Student representatives advised the committee that significant decisions, particularly those related to the OSI, were made with limited consultation and insufficient regard for students' legislated role in university governance.
- 2.41** Student representatives advised the committee that mandated consultation processes were 'routinely sidestepped,' despite clear legislative requirements for student involvement and, as discussed further below, transparency. Ms Mia Campbell, President of the UTS Students' Association, cited the OSI processes as emblematic of how 'student interests are sidelined' in major university decisions at the university:

The recent Operational Sustainability Initiative exposed once again how student interests are sidelined to the financial interests of university leadership. There is no formal consultation process for students as the course cuts were described as a "staffing matter", and the change proposal wasn't even sent to the UTS Students' Association, the students on academic board or even the students on UTS Council.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Evidence, Dr Clarke, 7 November 2025, p 3.

⁷⁶ Evidence, Professor Parfitt, 7 November 2025, p 19.

⁷⁷ Evidence, Professor Parfitt, 7 November 2025, p 20.

⁷⁸ Evidence, Ms Mia Campbell, President, UTS Students' Association, 7 November 2025, p 57.

- 2.42** Evidence to the committee indicated that student members of the Council learned of course suspensions at the same time as the wider student cohort. This limited their ability to provide input before decisions were finalised and raised questions about the effectiveness of current representation arrangements.⁷⁹
- 2.43** Media reporting in September 2025 highlighted similar concerns, including students describing themselves as 'blindsided' by the proposed job and course cuts, and disputing assurances that existing students would not be affected.⁸⁰
- 2.44** Ms Campbell underscored the fundamental right of students to be genuinely engaged in university governance:

Ultimately, students are not passive consumers of education. We pay for, contribute to and uphold the public mission of our universities. We deserve genuine consultation, transparency and respect—not tokenistic engagement after decisions are already made.⁸¹

Poor transparency

- 2.45** Directly linked to the issues of representation, consultation and due process in governance, some inquiry participants also highlighted poor transparency in decision-making at UTS.
- 2.46** The UTS Governance Project reported that 95.86% of its 362 survey respondents considered current governance 'not fit for purpose', citing failures of consultation and 'an entrenched culture of secrecy'.⁸²
- 2.47** As noted above, evidence from elected UTS Council members described a pattern in which dissent is not recorded, minutes are published in limited form, and elected members have restricted opportunities to place items on agendas or sit on key committees. They alleged 'groupthink' and noted some external council members had little direct engagement with academic staff.⁸³
- 2.48** Clarity was sought from Professor Parfitt about the five-year extension to his contract at the three year point of his original five year term. Professor Parfitt confirmed that the decision was made the previous year in a conversation between the Chancellor and himself. Then asked whether the extension had been communicated to the wider UTS community, Professor Parfitt responded, 'I really don't recall, Chair. I'd have to say it isn't my responsibility to announce arrangements in terms of my appointment'.⁸⁴ He subsequently advised that:

⁷⁹ Evidence, Ms Campbell, 7 November 2025, p 57.

⁸⁰ Evidence, Ms Campbell, 7 November 2025, p 57.

⁸¹ Evidence, Ms Campbell, 7 November 2025, p 57.

⁸² Submission 24, Members of the UTS Governance Project, p 18.

⁸³ *In camera* evidence, Dr Czernkowski, 7 November 2025, p 5.

⁸⁴ Evidence, Professor Parfitt, 7 November 2025, pp 18-19.

In 2024 the UTS Council was mindful of the need for continuity in leadership with the Chancellor's term ending in 2025 and proposed extending the Vice Chancellor's contract. It was an oversight that this was not widely communicated at the time.⁸⁵

Proposed performance audit by the NSW Auditor-General

2.49 In this context, the committee heard evidence that existing internal governance and reporting mechanisms may be insufficient to address transparency concerns. Some inquiry participants argued that stronger external scrutiny is required. The NTEU submission therefore underscored the importance of independent external oversight, including the potential value of a performance audit of UTS by the NSW Auditor-General. The NTEU indicated that such an audit should examine:

- governance integrity
- workforce management
- consultant expenditure and usage in decision making
- psychosocial-risk oversight.⁸⁶

2.50 Mr Caughley explained that a performance audit would provide a comprehensive, system-level examination of university governance and financial practices, extending beyond compliance with annual reporting requirements to interrogate how resources are allocated and controlled across complex commercial structures:

[A] performance audit would be where we would start, because not only does it investigate and interrogate the aspects of the annual public reporting that is required but it can also go beyond that to a follow-the-money aspect that would look at the extensive controlled entities and the private and commercial investments of these institutions that have, in effect, just been allowed to develop. That, in turn, has skewed the culture of the institutions and the decision-making, and reinforced this very insular and corporate nature of the senior leaderships.⁸⁷

2.51 The committee notes that this evidence points to performance audits as a potentially important mechanism for restoring transparency and public confidence, particularly where university governance has become increasingly complex, commercialised and insulated from scrutiny. The committee returns to the question of external oversight and performance auditing in its concluding comments in chapter 4.

⁸⁵ Answers to questions on notice, Professor Andrew Parfitt, received 11 December 2025, p 2.

⁸⁶ Submission 31, NTEU UTS Branch, p 9.

⁸⁷ Evidence, Mr Caughley, 7 November 2025, p 12.

Managerialism, rising workloads and casualisation

- 2.52** Inquiry participants linked governance concerns to the day-to-day experience of academic staff over a significant period. Submissions described a shift toward managerialist practice that had increased workloads, expanded casualisation and, as noted above, diminished collegial academic governance.⁸⁸ The NTEU survey of 380 UTS staff referred to in paragraph 2.5 attributed the very high rate of psychological distress to uncertainty, inadequate communication and limited engagement in decisions affecting their work.⁸⁹
- 2.53** Professional commentary described the SafeWork intervention as a rare use of WHS powers in a managerial context, which reinforced the expectation that universities must consult effectively and mitigate risks arising from organisational change.⁹⁰

Overuse of consultants

- 2.54** The committee received extensive evidence about UTS's increasing reliance on external consultants, an issue examined across the sector in chapter 4. Witnesses expressed concern about both the scale of expenditure and the influence consultants exerted over major institutional decisions, including matters placed before the University Council.
- 2.55** Appearing before the committee at the first hearing, Vice-Chancellor Professor Andrew Parfitt acknowledged consultancy spending had become 'a contentious issue'. He advised that UTS allocates approximately \$40 million annually to consultancy services within an operating budget exceeding \$1 billion, noting that much of this expenditure relates to technical expertise not held within the university.⁹¹
- 2.56** Professor Parfitt further advised that, in response to concerns raised by staff and other stakeholders, UTS had commissioned an internal audit to examine its processes for engaging consultants.⁹²
- 2.57** In his submission, Professor Parfitt stated that UTS engages consultants only when specialised expertise is not available in-house and when the work involves complex, one-off or high-risk matters that would be impractical or uneconomical

⁸⁸ Submission 31, NTEU UTS Branch, p 2; Submission 69, Drs Jessica Harris, Dr Kathleen Smithers, Dr Sarah Gurr, 17 October 2025, p 2.

⁸⁹ Conor Duffy, One third of UTS staff suffer psychological distress as hundreds of jobs set to be axed, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-07-03/university-technology-sydney-staff-jobs-redundancies/105485548>.

⁹⁰ NTEU, *UTS forced to urgently pause job cut plan after rare SafeWork NSW prohibition*, <https://newshub.medianet.com.au/2025/09/uts-forced-to-urgently-pause-job-cut-plan-after-rare-safework-nsw-prohibition/116739/>.

⁹¹ Evidence, Professor Parfitt, 7 November 2025, p 24.

⁹² Evidence, Professor Parfitt, 7 November 2025, p 24.

to support internally.⁹³ He reported total consultancy expenditure in 2024 of approximately \$44 million.⁹⁴

- 2.58** The committee explored how notwithstanding this rationale, UTS commissioned KPMG to deliver the OSI through a \$7 million engagement extended multiple times. The pattern of a broader tendency for management to favour external consultants over internal academic expertise, even where the latter is substantial, is examined further in chapter 4.
- 2.59** The committee also heard concerns that consultant advice was at times afforded greater weight than the expertise of academic staff or, as discussed earlier, the established processes of the Academic Board. Dr Sarah Attfield, UTS Branch President, NTEU NSW Division, emphasised that universities already employ experts with deep institutional knowledge and long-term commitment – expertise not matched by external firms.⁹⁵
- 2.60** These concerns about transparency, consultation and the value placed on internal expertise were not unique to UTS. Staff and students at other NSW universities, including the University of Wollongong, gave similar evidence. Witnesses there described comparable problems in governance practice, communication and the management of organisational change. The next chapter examines these themes in the context of the University of Wollongong.

⁹³ Submission 25, UTS, 17 October 2025, p 20.

⁹⁴ Submission 25, UTS, 17 October 2025, p 20.

⁹⁵ Evidence, Dr Sarah Attfield, UTS Branch President, NTEU NSW Division, 7 November 2025, p 13.

Chapter 3 University Of Wollongong

As the second case study of this report, this chapter examines governance concerns specific to the University of Wollongong (UOW), focusing on the university's 2025 restructure, the composition and functioning of its council, and the governance risks now emerging. Key issues include the consolidation of faculties and schools with substantial staff cuts, reduced collegial decision-making, limited staff and student representation on the University Council, opaque reporting of consultant expenditure, consultant-driven reforms that adversely affected staff, and growing risks to UOW's regional role and public mission.

Major restructure in 2025

- 3.1** On 24 March 2025 UOW released its initial Draft Change Proposal. The proposal foreshadowed a reduction from four faculties to three and from 18 schools to 11, along with the introduction of a Provost as chief academic officer, and consolidation of shared corporate services. The anticipated impact was a reduction of approximately 155–185 full-time equivalent (FTE) roles.⁹⁶
- 3.2** After receiving more than 2,600 staff feedback submissions, UOW released its Revised Change Proposal in mid-July 2025. The proposal reduced the expected workforce impact to 100–124 FTE roles and kept the plan to move to a three-faculty model with a new Provost role to unify faculty leadership. It also introduced several adjustments shaped by staff input, including a reduction in senior (level 10) roles, retention of core library services, strengthened accreditation and curriculum support, and implementation of shared corporate services to streamline operations.⁹⁷
- 3.3** On 25 August 2025 UOW announced the finalised changes to services and operations (the Final Change Plan). The restructuring resulted in a reduction of 99.8 FTE positions. The Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor G. Q. Max Lu AO, emphasised the intent to streamline operations and position UOW for sustainable future growth.⁹⁸
- 3.4** Evidence to the inquiry indicated that the restructure also attracted significant media attention and sustained concern from staff and students, matters explored further below.

⁹⁶ UOW, *Draft Change Proposal for UOW Operations transformation announced*, <https://www.uow.edu.au/media/2025/draft-change-proposal-for-uow-operations-transformation-announced.php>.

⁹⁷ UOW, *Revised Change Proposal to support growth and operational efficiency*, <https://www.uow.edu/media/2025/revised-change-proposal-to-support-growth-and-operational-efficiency.php>.

⁹⁸ UOW, *UOW announces changes to services and operations*, <https://www.uow.edu/media/2025/uow-announces-changes-to-services-and-operations.php>.

Criticisms of reforms and process

- 3.5** Staff and academic submissions to this inquiry raised significant concerns about the restructure process, including the quality of consultation, transparency in governance, concentration of decision-making authority and the pace of organisational change. They also pointed to inconsistent communication with students and staff, loss of institutional knowledge, and ongoing staff distress reported throughout 2025.⁹⁹
- 3.6** Students raised significant concerns about governance practice at UOW. Representatives of the Wollongong Undergraduate Students' Association (WUSA) described longstanding gaps in accountability, transparency, and the university's handling of student consultation. They reported repeated instances of obstruction, inconsistent or misleading advice, and delay on the part of UOW's governance. This included in relation to compliance with the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) 2025 Transition Plan¹⁰⁰ and efforts to update WUSA's constitution. Student leaders argued that these actions have undermined student trust and further weakened student voice within UOW governance.¹⁰¹
- 3.7** These issues draw attention to the legislative and governance framework that underpins the UOW. To understand how these concerns arose, and whether the current framework provides adequate safeguards and accountability, the chapter now outlines the objectives and functions established under the university's enabling legislation.

The UOW enabling legislation

- 3.8** The concerns raised during the restructure about consultation, transparency, decision-making authority and the role of the University Council direct the committee to the statutory framework governing UOW.

Objectives

- 3.9** The objectives of the University, as stated in the *University of Wollongong Act 1989* (the Act), are the promotion, within the limits of the University's resources, of scholarship, research, free inquiry, the interaction of research and teaching, and academic excellence.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Submission 103, Ms Lisa Simmons, p 12; Submission 71, Dr Adam Lucas and Professor James Guthrie, p 6; Evidence, Dr Susan Engel, Associate Professor, Politics and International Studies, UOW, and Branch President, National Tertiary Education Union, UOW, 17 December 2025, p 9.

¹⁰⁰ Australian Government Department of Education, *Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) Transition Plan Template*, <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-loan-program/resources/student-services-and-amenities-fee-ssaf-transition-plan-template>.

¹⁰¹ Submission 36, Wollongong Undergraduate Students' Association (WUSA), p 1; Evidence, Mr Hanzel-Jude Pador, President (outgoing) – General Secretary (incoming), WUSA, 17 December 2025, pp 15-18.

¹⁰² University of Wollongong Act 1989, s 6(1).

Functions

- 3.10** To fulfil its objectives, UOW's principal functions, as prescribed by the Act, include:
- provision of facilities for education and research of university standard, **having particular regard to the needs of the Illawarra region**
 - encouragement of the dissemination, advancement, development and application of knowledge informed by free inquiry
 - provision of courses and research across fields to meet community needs
 - participation in public discourse
 - conferral of degrees and other awards
 - provision of teaching and learning that engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry
 - development of governance, rules, admission policies, financial arrangements and quality-assurance processes sufficient to ensure academic integrity.¹⁰³
- 3.11** Unlike some other universities, UOW's functions include an explicit obligation to have particular regard to the needs of the Illawarra region.
- 3.12** Consistent with the broader New South Wales university governance framework, the Act also authorises UOW to undertake commercial activities to support its objects and principal functions.¹⁰⁴ The meaning of 'university commercial activity' is set out in Chapter 1 at paragraph 1.24 and is defined in section 21A of the Act.
- 3.13** Section 21A of the Act provides the statutory basis for university commercial activities, including activities undertaken in the exercise of the university's commercial functions and participation in partnerships, trusts, companies, other incorporated bodies, or joint ventures that are declared by the guidelines to be university commercial activities.¹⁰⁵

Section 21D Reports to Minister on commercial activities

- 3.14** Section 21D of the Act allows the Minister to request a report from the University Council in relation to university commercial activities, including any particular commercial activity or aspect of such activities. The University Council must provide a report to the Minister in accordance with the Minister's request.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ University of Wollongong Act 1989, s 6(2).

¹⁰⁴ University of Wollongong Act 1989, s 6(3).

¹⁰⁵ University of Wollongong Act 1989, s 21A.

¹⁰⁶ University of Wollongong Act 1989, s 21D.

3.15 As outlined later in this chapter, evidence before the committee raised questions about the governance and oversight of certain university commercial activities, highlighting the relevance of this reporting mechanism.

Composition of the University Council

3.16 Section 8B prescribes that the UOW Council must have a minimum of 11 and a maximum of 22 members, with the total number determined from time to time by a two-thirds majority of Council.¹⁰⁷ The Council must include official members, elected members, council-appointed members, and ministerially appointed members.¹⁰⁸ A majority of the total number must be external persons, and no single category may constitute a majority.¹⁰⁹ The council must notify the Minister within seven days of any resolution under s 8B.¹¹⁰

3.17 As at mid-March 2026, public information by UOW states that its University Council has 13 members:

- three official members (the Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor and President, and the Chair of Academic Board)
- six appointed members (five council-appointed, one ministerially appointed)
- four elected members (two academic staff, one professional staff and one postgraduate student).¹¹¹

3.18 At the second university sector hearing on 17 December 2025 (the second hearing), Professor Lu stated that the University Council had 17 members, including five elected members – two students and three staff – plus the Chair of the Academic Board, whom he also described as elected.¹¹²

3.19 Since that hearing, UOW's published information indicates that the University Council comprises 13 members, including one ministerially appointed member and no undergraduate student representative, reflecting a reduction in elected student participation.

¹⁰⁷ University of Wollongong Act 1989, s 8B.

¹⁰⁸ University of Wollongong Act 1989, s 8B(3).

¹⁰⁹ University of Wollongong Act 1989, ss 8B(6) and (7).

¹¹⁰ University of Wollongong Act 1989, s 8B(8).

¹¹¹ UOW, *University Council*, <https://www.uow.edu.au/about/governance/governance-structure/university-council/>.

¹¹² Evidence, Professor G. Q. Max Lu AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, UOW, 17 December 2025, p 55.

- 3.20** Although the Act identifies serving the Illawarra region as one of UOW's functions, it does not require council members to be from the Illawarra, nor does it mandate any form of regional representation on the University Council.¹¹³

Governance concerns

- 3.21** This section examines concerns raised during the inquiry about the composition of the University Council, including issues of representation and balance.

Inadequate representation

- 3.22** Inquiry participants highlighted concerns that appointed external members may constitute a majority of the UOW Council. Dr Adam Lucas, Honorary Senior Fellow at UOW, explained that to his understanding, this is in breach of the council's membership requirements:

Last time we looked at the council make-up on the university's website, there appeared to be, I think, six or seven external appointments. If one group is not supposed to form a majority, I'm pretty sure, if that council make-up is still the case, that there's a breach, because that external group of appointed members is over – is a majority.¹¹⁴

- 3.23** Dr Lucas also emphasised the importance of elected council members and cautioned against councils being dominated by appointed representatives:

Councils dominated by appointed members are vulnerable to homogenous thinking, and this is something that certainly all of us who have served on councils have seen happening. It also makes them vulnerable to consultant influence, not having enough democratic representation on them.¹¹⁵

- 3.24** Ms Lisa Simmons, Former Executive Manager of Faculty Research Operations and Chair of the WHS Committee, told the committee that new council members receive no guidance on the university's objectives and are not encouraged to consider the public interest as an overriding factor. She observed that, as a result, the council lacks a shared understanding of the university's purpose and its broader public responsibilities.¹¹⁶

- 3.25** Witnesses also confirmed that although UOW has a statutory function to serve the Illawarra, the legislation does not require any council member to come from the region, with the implication that this absence of a regional requirement limits

¹¹³ Evidence, Dr Adam Lucas, Honorary Senior Fellow, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, UOW, 17 December 2025, p 6.

¹¹⁴ Evidence, Dr Lucas, 17 December 2025, p 4.

¹¹⁵ Evidence, Dr Lucas, 17 December 2025, p 5.

¹¹⁶ Evidence, Ms Lisa Simmons, Former Executive Manager, Faculty Research Operations and Chair, WHS Committee, UOW, 17 December 2025, p 27.

local representation in governance.¹¹⁷ During the second hearing, the UOW Chancellor (since 9 December 2023), Mr Michael Still, acknowledged that he does not 'have any real connection in the Illawarra', and he understood that interim Vice-Chancellor Professor John Dewar AO also lacked such a connection.¹¹⁸ Evidence to the inquiry suggested that limited regional connection among senior office-holders may affect the council's understanding of local impacts. In this context, Dr Susan Engel, Associate Professor, Politics and International Studies, UOW and Branch President, National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), UOW observed:

I've always been surprised that our last chancellors and deputy chancellors have mostly had very little connection to the Illawarra region. They're often fly in, fly out ... I've certainly felt that lack of connection has been a part of some of the poor decision-making and not understanding how much those decisions impact the region.¹¹⁹

- 3.26** Evidence to the inquiry also raised questions about the process by which Mr Still was appointed as Chancellor. At the second hearing, Mr Still confirmed that he was first approached about the role by Mr David Gonski AC (the former Chancellor of the University of New South Wales). Mr Still advised that while Mr Gonski was not formally a member of the selection panel, he was present for part of the interview process.¹²⁰ Inquiry participants argued that this involvement, combined with Mr Still's lack of connection to the Illawarra, reinforced concerns about opaque appointment practices and the limited consideration given to regional and other representation and in senior governance roles.¹²¹
- 3.27** Dr Lucas recommended amending the UOW enabling legislation to set a statutory minimum of 40 per cent elected members – staff and students combined – on the University Council. He made the case that this change would strengthen democratic oversight and ensure that those affected by council decisions have a meaningful voice in them. Dr Lucas also called for the publication of competency matrices and appointment rationales for all externally appointed members, arguing that transparency in council appointments is essential to accountable governance.¹²²
- 3.28** In light of these governance concerns, the next section examines UOW Global Enterprises (UOWGE) – a wholly owned subsidiary responsible for operating the university's offshore campuses – and considers how its activities may pose risks to the UOW's legislated public mission as well as its obligations to the Illawarra

¹¹⁷ Evidence, Dr Lucas, 17 December 2025, p 6.

¹¹⁸ Evidence, Mr Michael Still, Chancellor, UOW, 17 December 2025, p 47.

¹¹⁹ Evidence, Dr Engel, 17 December 2025, p 14.

¹²⁰ Evidence, Mr Still, 17 December 2025, p 48.

¹²¹ Evidence, Dr Engel, 17 December 2025, p 14.

¹²² Submission 71, Dr Lucas and Professor Guthrie, p 36; Evidence, Dr Lucas, 17 December 2025, pp 4-5.

region.¹²³ These issues also raise questions about whether existing statutory oversight mechanisms are being used to their full extent, a matter the committee returns to in its conclusions in chapter 4.

Risks to regional role and public mission – UOW Global Enterprises

- 3.29** UOWGE owns and operates overseas campuses in Dubai, Hong Kong, Malaysia and India, as well as the UOW College Australia.¹²⁴ UOW is also progressing plans to establish a new international campus in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.¹²⁵
- 3.30** Public information shows that UOWGE operates as a commercial education provider guided by six 'corporate values'.¹²⁶ UOWGE describes itself as a self-sustaining subsidiary aligned with UOW's international student growth strategy. It employs more than 1,500 staff and delivers over 200 programs to nearly 18,000 students annually.¹²⁷
- 3.31** The UOWGE Board oversees these entities and reports through the university's governance framework to the University Council. Evidence to the inquiry indicated that the council retains delegated authority over UOWGE's major strategic decisions, including the establishment of new campuses and controlled entities. Ms Marissa Mastroianni, Group Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director of UOWGE, advised the committee that:
- As a wholly-owned operation and a subsidiary of the University of Wollongong, council holds the delegation for a number of things, including opening a campus in another location and including if you want to start up another company of any sort or any other controlled entity of any sort. The decision to both explore and to actually open a campus in another location requires the express approval of council.¹²⁸
- 3.32** The UOWGE budget is approved by the UOW Global Enterprises Board (the Board). The Board states that it is an independent governing body comprising independent directors, University Council members and UOW executives.¹²⁹
- 3.33** As at mid-March 2026, one official University Council member (Professor Lu) and one appointed University Council member (Mr Greg West, chartered accountant)

¹²³ Evidence, Ms Marissa Mastroianni, Group CEO and Managing Director, UOWGE, 17 December 2025, p 28; Submission 68, UOW, p 2.

¹²⁴ UOW Global Enterprises, *Locations*, <https://www.uowglobalenterprises.com.au>.

¹²⁵ Evidence, Ms Mastroianni, 17 December 2025, p 33.

¹²⁶ UOW Global Enterprises, *About UOW Global Enterprises*, <https://www.uowglobalenterprises.com.au/about-us/>.

¹²⁷ UOW Global Enterprises, *About UOW Global Enterprises*, <https://www.uowglobalenterprises.com.au/about-us/>.

¹²⁸ Evidence, Ms Mastroianni, 17 December 2025, p 32.

¹²⁹ UOW Global Enterprises, *Board*, <https://www.uowglobalenterprises.com.au/about-us/our-people/board/>.

sit on the Board as Directors.¹³⁰ This structure creates a hybrid governance model that blends university oversight with commercial board membership. Ms Mastroianni confirmed in evidence that the Board is structured 'as what would be more typically known as a corporate entity'.¹³¹

- 3.34** Inquiry participants raised concerns about undeclared commercial interests held by members of the University Council connected to UOWGE's offshore entities. Dr Lucas told the inquiry that a whistleblower had alleged that two members of the University Council – who also served as directors of one of UOW's overseas campuses – were each receiving approximately \$50,000 in salaries that had not been declared to the council, nor publicly recorded. In his view this presented 'an example of a conflict of interest that was being covered up,' in that the individuals concerned were both financially benefiting from their directorships and participating in council decisions regarding the ongoing status of the overseas campus. When asked whether the individuals remained on the University Council, Dr Lucas stated, 'As far as I know, yes, they are'.¹³²
- 3.35** Academic witnesses expressed concern that UOWGE's international expansion priorities may be in tension with UOW's legislated regional mission. Dr Fiona Probyn-Rapsey, Former NTEU Branch President, UOW, questioned whether offshore expansion was occurring at the expense of domestic teaching and research, particularly in the Illawarra and South Coast:

While UOW in the Illawarra and South Coast shrinks its offerings, it opens yet another overseas campus. Of all New South Wales universities, UOW operates the most overseas-controlled entities. Through a subsidiary called UOWGE, it runs campuses in Dubai, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, India, and it recently announced plans to open a campus in Saudi Arabia, much to the surprise of many. Does the Illawarra really benefit from opening a UOW campus in Saudi Arabia, where Human Rights Watch reports an increase in rights violations? How does UOWGE justify spending money on a campus in Saudi Arabia and not use that money to support the public mission of the university, as stated in the UOW Act, to provide research and education with "having particular regard to the needs of the Illawarra region"?¹³³

- 3.36** Dr Engel also expressed concern that 'most international partnerships are in countries where human rights issues are growing'.¹³⁴ This could expose the university to ethical or reputational risks that may sit uneasily with UOW's public mission under the Act.

¹³⁰ Answers to supplementary questions, Ms Marissa Mastroianni, Group CEO and Managing Director, UOWGE, 1 February 2026, pp 8-9.

¹³¹ Evidence, Ms Mastroianni, 17 December 2025, p 37.

¹³² Evidence, Dr Lucas, 17 December 2025, p 7.

¹³³ Evidence, Professor Fiona Probyn-Rapsey, Former NTEU Branch President, UOW, 17 December 2025, p 8.

¹³⁴ Evidence, Dr Engel, 17 December 2025, p 14.

3.37 The committee also received evidence of strong opposition among staff to the decision to open the Saudi Arabia campus. Dr Jonathon Mackay, Senior Lecturer, School of Business, Faculty of Arts, Business and Society, UOW, advised that he had resigned as Chair of the UOW Pride Network due to his 'perception of value inconsistencies with UOW's LGBTIQA+ positioning locally and this decision'.¹³⁵

Misalignment between the UOW Act and UOWGE's risk profile

3.38 The committee heard that UOWGE's governance and operating model resembles that of a private corporation rather than a public university. Ms Mastroianni's statement that the board is structured as a 'corporate entity' reinforces this point. Witnesses suggested that this introduces a different risk profile – one shaped by commercial expansion and offshore markets – rather than the regional and public-good priorities set out in the UOW Act¹³⁶ creating a structural misalignment:

- The UOW Act requires the university to focus on meeting the Illawarra region's educational and research needs.¹³⁷
- UOWGE prioritises international growth and global market positioning, which can place commercial incentives in tension with legislative obligations.

3.39 Ms Mastroianni advised the committee that UOW's financial exposure is deliberately minimal. UOW holds \$2 in share capital and has provided a \$30 million loan facility, which is recorded as a receivable. The UOW does not provide balance sheet support, guarantees or underwriting of subsidiary operations. Ms Mastroianni noted that the only exception is UOW India, which is a branch campus of the university, not a subsidiary. The India campus is legally part of UOW and operates within UOW's own balance sheet.¹³⁸ In this context, the committee considered whether greater transparency and formal reporting of university commercial activities may be necessary to ensure alignment with the university's statutory public mission. We return to this issue in chapter 4.

3.40 Under further questioning, Ms Mastroianni acknowledged that neither the India enterprise nor Hong Kong are making a profit.¹³⁹

Transparency

3.41 In order to better understand the complex financial arrangements of UOWGE and the nature of its relationship with the university, the committee questioned Ms

¹³⁵ Email from Dr. Jonathon Mackay, Senior Lecturer, School of Business, Faculty of Arts, Business and Society, University of Wollongong, to committee, 16 February 2026.

¹³⁶ Evidence, Professor Probyn-Rapsey, 17 December 2025, p 8.

¹³⁷ University of Wollongong Act 1989, s 6(2)(a).

¹³⁸ Answers to questions on notice, Ms Mastroianni, 1 February 2026, p 3.

¹³⁹ Evidence, Ms Mastroianni, 17 December 2025, p 34.

Mastroianni extensively about the enterprise's financial arrangements, governance and accountability structures as a 'self-funding institution'.¹⁴⁰ Ms Mastroianni insisted that the enterprise meets all of its accountability requirements.¹⁴¹

- 3.42** The committee also questioned Ms Mastroianni about her salary. After initially seeking to take the question on notice, she provided a broad estimate stating that, 'my salary would be in the range of \$600,000'.¹⁴² When subsequently asked, through supplementary questions, to provide the specific salary ranges for the senior executive roles at UOWGE, Ms Mastroianni did not directly respond. Instead, she noted:

Individual remuneration information constitutes personal information under the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* (PPIPA). PPIPA provides for disclosure when authorised by law or supported by an individual's consent. This framework guides the stewardship of personal remuneration information relating to UOWGE executives and directors, ensuring alignment with privacy requirements and supporting the University's legal responsibilities.

Employment contracts and associated confidentiality arrangements also provide obligations that guide UOWGE in safeguarding personal and commercially sensitive information.

Within these legislative, privacy and confidentiality parameters, UOWGE has made comprehensive aggregated remuneration information publicly available through its audited financial statements. UOWGE remains fully willing to support the Committee with any further information that these frameworks allow.¹⁴³

Sidelining of collegial governance processes

- 3.43** On the basis of the governance concerns documented above, this next section examines how this structural shift affects internal decision-making within the university.
- 3.44** Some witnesses described a clear decline in collegial governance at UOW. They argued that academic and professional staff now have limited opportunities to contribute to major institutional decisions. Committees that once enabled routine staff input have been reduced in scope or bypassed through executive-driven processes. This has created a perception that key decisions—particularly those affecting academic structures, staffing, and teaching quality—are made without meaningful consultation.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Evidence, Ms Mastroianni, 17 December 2025, p 28.

¹⁴¹ Evidence, Ms Mastroianni, 17 December 2025, p 29.

¹⁴² Evidence, Ms Mastroianni, 17 December 2025, p 30.

¹⁴³ Answers to questions on notice, Ms Mastroianni, 1 February 2026, pp 21-22.

¹⁴⁴ Evidence, Dr Lucas, 17 December 2025, p 2.

3.45 Staff also reported that their views are often sought late in the decision cycle, after options have been narrowed or a preferred direction has already been developed by senior executives or external consultants. This approach has contributed to reduced trust and a sense that university-wide expertise is no longer being used to inform planning or operational changes.¹⁴⁵

3.46 Dr Engel highlighted some of the expertise available among UOW academics and in doing so pointed to the practical value of applying their knowledge of the university context:

There is internal expertise that the university could draw on to do a number of the roles that it has brought consultants in for, whether that's for training of board members or for input into restructuring. We have a whole business and economics faculty that have great expertise in those areas but that actually understands how universities work in some detail.¹⁴⁶

3.47 Dr Engel's evidence to the inquiry suggested that these concerns indicate that the university's governance culture is shifting away from the collegial model typically associated with public universities.¹⁴⁷ This shift has significant implications for transparency, academic independence, and the quality of decision-making.

Poor transparency

3.48 Evidence from Professor Corinne Cortese, Professor of Accounting at the UOW, indicated that spending on consultants is difficult to identify in the university's financial reporting. Professor Cortese advised that these costs are often aggregated within the 'other expenses' category. As a result, staff, students and members of the public may have limited visibility of the scale, purpose and value of consultant engagements. This reporting approach may also limit understanding of how external advice informs internal decision-making.¹⁴⁸

3.49 The scale of consultant expenditure and the difficulty of identifying such costs in financial reports was illustrated at the second hearing. Mr Still confirmed that UOW paid KordaMentha \$2.94 million for its engagement as part of the university's transformation strategy. He advised that this amount represented the full extent of KordaMentha's work.¹⁴⁹

3.50 Evidence to the committee also placed consultant expenditure within a broader context of poor financial transparency at the UOW. Dr Lucas referred to a 2021 finding by the NSW Auditor-General requiring the university to revise its 2020

¹⁴⁵ Evidence, Dr Engel, 17 December 2025, p 13.

¹⁴⁶ Evidence, Dr Engel, 17 December 2025, p 13.

¹⁴⁷ Evidence, Dr Engel, 17 December 2025, p 11.

¹⁴⁸ Submission 35, Professor Corinne Cortese, p 6.

¹⁴⁹ Evidence, Mr Still, 17 December 2025, p 39.

financial statements to include a previously undisclosed \$169 million expense arising from the UOW's withdrawal from a public-private partnership to build and operate new student accommodation.¹⁵⁰

- 3.51** During questioning by the committee, Dr Lucas explained that the expense reflected borrowings by UOW to terminate its contract with the private provider after declining student occupancy rendered the arrangement financially unsustainable, a situation he attributed to inadequate risk assessment of the project. According to Dr Lucas, the UOW had been paying the partner 'a few million dollars a week' in compensation to cover revenue shortfalls before ultimately borrowing the \$169 million to exit the arrangement.¹⁵¹
- 3.52** Dr Lucas further advised that the financial impact of this decision remains ongoing, with the university continuing to service interest costs of approximately \$21 million per annum.¹⁵²
- 3.53** In this context, Dr Lucas also drew attention to the involvement of external consultants in university governance. He noted that KPMG acted as UOW's internal auditor and provider of professional services during this period, held senior governance roles while a long-serving KPMG partner, including membership of the University Council and its Finance and Infrastructure Committee. Dr Lucas observed that the cost of these services was not disclosed in publicly available records.¹⁵³
- 3.54** Several witnesses expressed concern that this lack of transparency in consult expenditure restricts scrutiny of whether such spending aligns with the university's public mission or diverts resources from teaching, research, or regional priorities.¹⁵⁴ These impacts are explored further below.

Other concerns

- 3.55** Witnesses highlighted to the committee that the UOW restructure developed with significant input from consultants has resulted in adverse impacts on staff. These impacts include increased workloads, reduced job security, loss of institutional knowledge and uncertainty about future roles.¹⁵⁵
- 3.56** Senior-level departures during this period also raised concerns among inquiry participants and the UOW community about the nature and circumstances of executive turnover. At the second hearing, Mr Still, the UOW Chancellor, confirmed that he had initiated discussions with former Vice-Chancellor Professor Patricia

¹⁵⁰ Evidence, Dr Lucas, 17 December 2025, p 4.

¹⁵¹ Evidence, Dr Lucas, 17 December 2025, p 4.

¹⁵² Evidence, Dr Lucas, 17 December 2025, p 4.

¹⁵³ Evidence, Dr Lucas, 17 December 2025, pp 3-4.

¹⁵⁴ Evidence, Professor Probyn-Rapsey, 17 December 2025, p 8.

¹⁵⁵ Evidence, Dr Engel, 17 December 2025, p 9.

Davidson that included the possibility of her resigning, despite public reporting at the time that framed her resignation as unexpected.¹⁵⁶ Ms Simmons observed that this suggested a pressured departure during the transformation period.¹⁵⁷

- 3.57** Additional governance concerns arose from the interim appointment on 30 June 2024 of Professor John Dewar AO, who at the time was a business partner at KordaMentha. This occurred while KordaMentha was preparing to begin major restructuring work for UOW on 22 July 2024.¹⁵⁸ Mr Still told the committee that Professor Dewar had 'stepped back' from his role at KordaMentha, but also acknowledged, 'I have no doubt that he was in touch with them'. He confirmed that Professor Dewar continued to spend one day per fortnight on KordaMentha-related work while working nine days per fortnight for UOW. When asked whether Professor Dewar continued to benefit financially from KordaMentha's consultancy work at UOW, Mr Still replied, 'Possibly. I don't know'.¹⁵⁹
- 3.58** Evidence from the hearing raised questions about whether appropriate safeguards, probity processes and internal oversight were in place to ensure that consultant involvement did not unduly influence strategic decisions, senior appointments, or the direction of the restructure.
- 3.59** Participants expressed concern that appointing a KordaMentha partner as interim Vice-Chancellor during an active and high-value consultancy created at minimum a perception of conflict of interest, and at worst a structural weakness in governance separation.¹⁶⁰ The committee also heard that the Chancellor relied on external advice, including from the Vice-Chancellor of the University of New South Wales, when assessing Professor Dewar's suitability for the interim role.¹⁶¹
- 3.60** The following chapter examines these governance issues in greater detail, with a particular focus on the expanding role of major consultancy firms such as Nous Group, KPMG, and Deloitte across the university sector. It considers how their advice has shaped institutional strategy, financial reporting, and organisational design, and assesses whether current oversight mechanisms are sufficient to ensure that external influence supports – rather than supplants – the university's public mission.

¹⁵⁶ Evidence, Mr Still, 17 December 2025, p 41.

¹⁵⁷ Evidence, Ms Simmons, 17 December 2025, p 26.

¹⁵⁸ Evidence, Mr Still, 17 December 2025, p 40.

¹⁵⁹ Evidence, Mr Still, 17 December 2025, p 39.

¹⁶⁰ Evidence, Professor Probyn-Rapsey, 17 December 2025, p 8.

¹⁶¹ Evidence, Mr Still, 17 December 2025, p 39.

Chapter 4 Governance and consultants

Throughout this first half of the inquiry, participants consistently raised concerns about the composition and operation of university councils, the transparency of consultant engagements and expenditure, and the influence of consultant-led processes on decision-making and collegial governance. This chapter examines these issues in detail, drawing on evidence presented at the 18 February 2026 hearing (the third hearing) and submissions to the inquiry.

The chapter begins by summarising the governance concerns across the sector and examining university council composition and orientation. It then considers the use of consultants, including transparency and disclosure practices relating to consultant expenditure, before touching on the perspectives of consultants from Nous Group, KPMG and Deloitte. The chapter concludes with interim findings and recommendations before flagging a number of critical issues to be pursued in the remainder of the inquiry.

Governance concerns across the sector

- 4.1** Several themes emerged from the case studies of the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) and the University of Wollongong (UOW) presented in the previous two chapters:
- university leaders' launch of extensive restructures, substantially assisted by consultants, which were then scaled back in the face of significant staff and public concern, both about the nature and extent of the reforms and about the decision-making process
 - reduced representation of elected staff and student members on university councils, matched with the ascendancy of externally appointed members with corporate credentials but limited experience of the university sector
 - the sidelining of collegial governance processes that have traditionally enabled valuable academic and professional staff engagement in institutional decision making
 - issues with student consultation and representation in decision making
 - poor transparency in governance and cultures of secrecy and defensiveness, with the impact of eroding trust
 - entrenchment of a culture of corporate managerialism that has weakened working conditions
 - extensive use of consultants working hand in glove with the corporatised boards, again with poor transparency as to costs
 - the perception of conflicts of interest among council members
 - profound risks to the universities' long-term effectiveness through the loss of institutional knowledge.

- 4.2** It will be important to monitor these themes, and to make further observations, as the inquiry continues through hearings focusing on each of the universities around the state.
- 4.3** In further considering these matters in this chapter, the committee notes broader policy developments and expert commentary on system-wide accountability in university governance. Significantly, following the handing down of the Senate inquiry report (see chapter 1) in September 2025, the NSW Department of Education advised our committee that Australian Education Ministers had considered the Senate inquiry's recommendations and agreed on the need to strengthen transparency and accountability in university governance.¹⁶² These developments provide important context for the evidence received by the committee regarding the operation of university councils and the use of consultants.
- 4.4** Concerns about governance effectiveness are further underscored by recent findings of the Audit Office of New South Wales. In the *Universities 2024* financial audit report, the NSW Auditor-General observed that a significant proportion of governance and control deficiencies identified across the university sector had been previously reported and remained unresolved. The Auditor-General highlighted: 'In 2024, there were 98 audit findings identified across the ten NSW universities ... We identified 38 repeat findings in 2024'.¹⁶³ This was despite the Auditor-General recommending in 2023 that, with respect to internal controls and governance, 'Universities should ensure repeat findings on internal control deficiencies are addressed in a timely manner, particularly those that have been repeat findings for a number of years'.¹⁶⁴
- 4.5** In commenting on these repeat findings, Mr Vince Caughley, Secretary, National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) NSW Division, noted the consequences of recurring governance failures for public trust and institutional accountability:

University councils were made aware of issues year after year and simply did nothing. The risk and the impacts are real. Thousands of people are being damaged and public confidence in universities, especially in our regional areas and cities, is being hugely eroded. We urgently need reforms that balance institutional autonomy with representative, transparent decision-making, strong external oversight and legislation clearly aligned with the public purpose. Good governance isn't just about principles. It determines whether universities are stable and whether they are trusted and capable of delivering the knowledge, teaching and community benefit

¹⁶² Submission 51, NSW Department of Education, p 3.

¹⁶³ Audit Office of New South Wales, *Universities 2024*, NSW Auditor-General's Report, 5 June 2025, p 40.

¹⁶⁴ Audit Office of New South Wales, *Universities 2024*, NSW Auditor-General's Report, 5 June 2025, Appendix 1, p 62.

that New South Wales depends on. Strengthening governance now protects the future of one of the State's most important public assets.¹⁶⁵

- 4.6** More broadly, the committee received extensive evidence questioning the extent to which contemporary university governance arrangements remain aligned with universities' legislated public mission of education, research and service. Inquiry participants described a shift away from collegial, academically informed governance toward corporate-style management models, with decision-making increasingly shaped by financial, risk and commercial imperatives. Witnesses argued that this corporatisation has altered how authority is exercised within universities, often at the expense of transparency, internal capability and meaningful academic participation.¹⁶⁶
- 4.7** In evidence to the inquiry, Mr Jack Thrower, Senior Economist at the Australia Institute, noted that these changes reflect a deeper re-orientation of universities away from their traditional public-good missions of education and research toward enhancing institutional prestige, executive management interests and private revenue generation. He observed an increasing emphasis on large capital projects, the conditions and remuneration of senior management, and the maximisation of income from private sources such as student fees and commercial engagements. Mr Thrower attributed this re-orientation to several factors, including changes in the composition of university governing bodies, and the entrenchment of 'managerialism' within university governance frameworks.¹⁶⁷
- 4.8** A consistent theme in the evidence was the growing misalignment between universities' public purposes and governance frameworks that increasingly mirror private-sector corporate models. Participants expressed great concern at the application of governance practices designed for commercial entities to the tertiary education sector, despite its fundamentally different objectives, accountability obligations and stakeholder relationships. This shift was said to privilege efficiency, benchmarking and market positioning over educational quality, academic freedom and long-term public value.¹⁶⁸ Within this context, money has become the proxy for success¹⁶⁹ and according to John Quiggin, Professor of Economics, University of Queensland, 'university managers, who typically refer to themselves as the universities, see themselves as the chief

¹⁶⁵ Evidence, Mr Vince Caughley, Secretary, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division, 7 November 2025, p 10.

¹⁶⁶ Submission 31, National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) UTS Branch, p 2.

¹⁶⁷ Answers to questions on notice, Mr Jack Thrower, Senior Economist, The Australia Institute, 16 March 2026, p 4.

¹⁶⁸ Evidence, Professor Fiona Probyn-Rapsey, Former NTEU Branch President, UOW, 17 December 2025, p 8.

¹⁶⁹ Evidence, Professor Katie Barclay, Australian Research Council future Fellow and Professor in History, Macquarie University, 7 November 2025, p 2.

executive officers of corporations which are in competition with each other in a market for education'.¹⁷⁰

- 4.9** The concern about the ascendancy of financial imperatives over universities' public mission was articulated by Professor Katie Barclay, ARC Future Fellow and Professor in History, Macquarie University, who highlighted the risks that flow from the profound conflict between the corporate model and the public mission of universities:

The problem with university governance is that it has placed money as the governing logic of the institution, overriding its fundamental mission. Along the way, that universities should also preserve knowledge has been missed. World-changing research is dropped; valuable archives and biological samples are binned; and experts, whose skills and knowledge have been built over years, are made redundant overnight. Research-led teaching drawing on that expertise has been replaced with large, generic courses that can be taught by anyone in a subject area, a decision that undermines the maintenance of knowledge over generations. That universities safeguard democracy and act as the nation's critical friend through the production of active and engaged citizens has been downplayed for utilitarian training. University governing bodies make no effort to consider what is lost in these processes or to reflect on the bigger picture of what is needed to ensure that Australia has a rich storehouse of knowledge and expertise, ready to be drawn on when it is needed in a rapidly changing and unstable world.¹⁷¹

- 4.10** As noted in both the UTS and UOW case study chapters, inquiry participants also pointed to the transparency deficits associated with these governance trends. These deficits include limited visibility of council deliberations, inconsistent financial reporting practices, and insufficient disclosure of consultant engagements and expenditure.¹⁷²
- 4.11** Concerns about accountability and transparency were reflected in expert evidence presented at the inquiry. At the first hearing, Professor Quiggin questioned the increasing corporatisation of university councils, warning that councils risk becoming 'just an echo chamber' for executive decision-making in the absence of robust accountability mechanisms.¹⁷³
- 4.12** Consistent with the case studies of UTS and UOW in the previous chapters, the committee further heard that across the sector, changes in council composition have reinforced these dynamics. This is explored in detail below.

¹⁷⁰ Evidence, Professor John Quiggin, Professor of Economics, University of Queensland, 7 November 2025, p 3.

¹⁷¹ Evidence, Professor Barclay, 7 November 2025, p 2.

¹⁷² Submission 35, Professor Corinne Cortese, pp 6-10.

¹⁷³ Evidence, Professor Quiggin, 7 November 2025, p 4.

University council composition and orientation

- 4.13** Evidence pointed to an increasing predominance of externally appointed members with corporate, financial or consulting backgrounds, onto university councils, alongside a reduced presence of elected academic staff, professional staff and students. Participants argued that this imbalance has weakened academic voice within governance structures and contributed to greater reliance on executive-led decision-making, including the routine use of external consultants to inform or implement major institutional decisions.¹⁷⁴
- 4.14** These matters are examined in detail below, beginning with the composition and orientation of university councils.
- 4.15** Professor Corinne Cortese, a Professor of Accounting from UOW, advised the committee that governance across NSW universities has become increasingly similar, driven by uniform legislation, similarly structured councils and a shared pool of council members drawn largely from corporate and consulting backgrounds. Professor Cortese said this environment, combined with heavy spending on external consultants and limited transparency about their use, pushes universities toward the same governance practices and decision-making approaches. She warned that this convergence reduces institutional diversity and weakens genuine collegial oversight.¹⁷⁵
- 4.16** Professor Cortese shared with the committee her analysis of the 2024 council membership across New South Wales universities (177 members across 10 institutions). She found that while 18 per cent of members were elected staff (academic and professional), some 46 per cent were externally appointed, and 54 per cent of this group showed corporate, consulting or industry affiliations. Professor Cortese argued that this profile risks entrenching a decision-making orientation more aligned with private sector practices than with universities' public mission.¹⁷⁶
- 4.17** Figure 1 in Professor Cortese's submission depicts the composition of each NSW University Council for 2024 and illustrates that while a majority of members are external, staff and student representation (green and purple) is comparatively small:¹⁷⁷

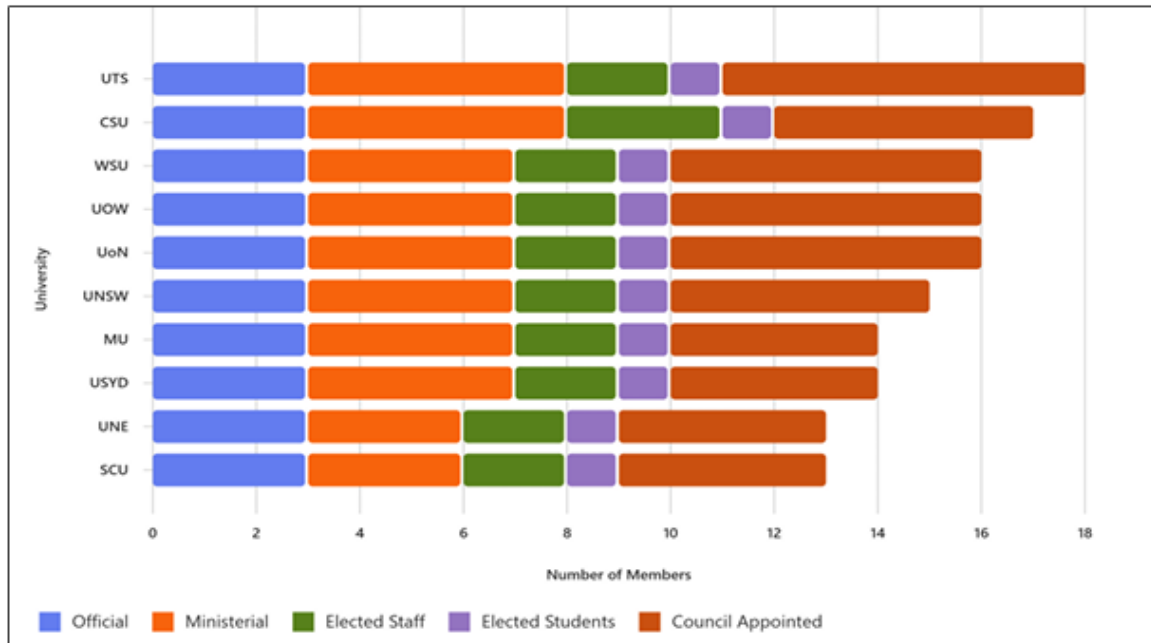
¹⁷⁴ Submission 35, Professor Cortese, p 5.

¹⁷⁵ Submission 35, Professor Cortese, pp 2-10.

¹⁷⁶ Submission 35, Professor Cortese, pp 3-4; Evidence, Professor Corinne Cortese, Professor of Accounting, UOW, 18 February 2026, p 2.

¹⁷⁷ Submission 35, Professor Cortese, pp 3-4.

Figure 1 Composition of councils of NSW universities, according to 2024 annual reports



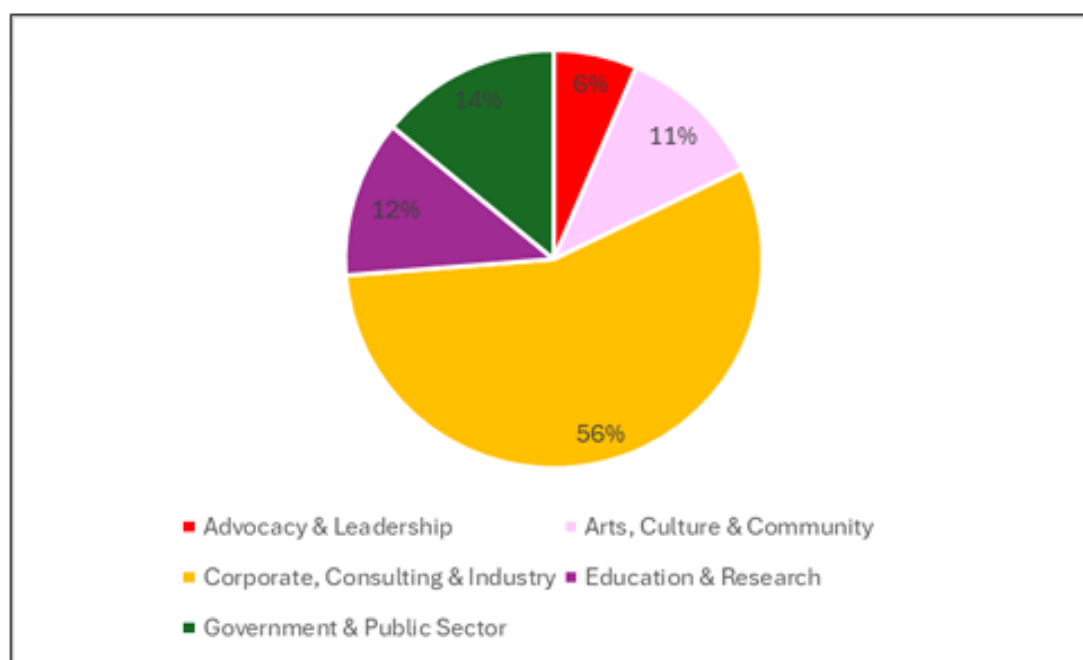
4.18 Figure 2 in Professor Cortese's submission presents an analysis of the professional profiles of university council members, with a particular focus on externally appointed members and chancellors. This stage of her analysis encompassed 84 council members who collectively held 263 professional affiliations. These affiliations were classified into the following categories:

- advocacy and leadership
- arts, culture and community
- corporate, consulting and industry
- education and research
- government and public sector.¹⁷⁸

4.19 Professor Cortese's analysis demonstrated a clear predominance of corporate-linked backgrounds among externally appointed council members and chancellors. Affiliations within the corporate, consulting and industry category accounted for 56 per cent of all identified connections, compared with 12 per cent for education and research and 14 per cent for government and the public sector. She noted that these corporate-oriented affiliations included board roles or professional ties with major companies and private consulting firms such as KPMG, PwC and KordaMentha:¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Submission 35, Professor Cortese, p 4.

¹⁷⁹ Submission 35, Professor Cortese, p 5.

Figure 2 Classification of council member affiliations

- 4.20** Committee members questioned Professor Cortese as to her views on whether the current balance of university councils reflects the skills and perspectives required for effective governance. Professor Cortese made the case that the present composition does not provide a balanced mix, particularly given the comparatively limited number of staff and student representatives. She further cautioned that existing appointment pathways may draw heavily on closed corporate networks, reinforcing homogeneity and restricting diversity of viewpoint.¹⁸⁰
- 4.21** With regard to universities' extensive use of consultants, as highlighted in both the UTS and UOW case studies, Professor Cortese characterised the overlap between council membership and the consulting sector as a driver of 'normalised' outsourcing. She explained, 'Having a majority of council members that have a corporate orientation creates this kind of groupthink where it's normal to seek consulting services.'¹⁸¹
- 4.22** Others who observed how corporatised council structures entrench executive dominance and marginalise alternative perspectives included Dr Thomas Clarke, Visiting Professor, UTS, who observed that:

What actually happens is that there is a coalition of the enlarging university executive with the external business representatives and others, which forms a natural majority on the university council. There is

¹⁸⁰ Evidence, Professor Cortese, 18 February 2025, p 4.

¹⁸¹ Evidence, Professor Cortese, 18 February 2025, p 3.

very little possibility of even any change to policies that are put forward by the executive, let alone rejection of those policies.¹⁸²

- 4.23** Similar concerns were raised in submissions to the inquiry. National analysis by the NTEU NSW Division describes the 'corporatisation of university governance' as a 'process through which decision-making has become increasingly centralised and executive driven, eroding traditional forms of staff and student participation'.¹⁸³
- 4.24** Echoing other inquiry participants cited earlier in this chapter, Professor Cortese warned that managerial imperatives imported from the corporate sphere may displace deep sector expertise, institutional memory and context-informed decision making. While she emphasised that this is less about individual consultants and more about structural incentives that shape governance culture, she nonetheless argued that 'managerial and market imperatives that drive consultants ... do not align with the public mission of universities'.¹⁸⁴

Use of consultants

- 4.25** The evidence before the committee raised questions about how universities use consultants and how consulting frameworks themselves shape governance and strategic decisions across the sector. This section examines the transparency around how universities engage and report on the use of consultants, reflecting on further impacts and including the consultants' perspectives.

Transparency of engagements and expenditure

- 4.26** In addition to the concerns about the growing corporate dominance on university councils, and their propensity towards the use of external consultants, the committee received extensive evidence about the limited transparency of the financial dimensions of consultant involvement in the sector, and how universities procure, report on and oversee consultant engagements. This section examines these transparency issues, including regarding the scale of consultant expenditure and the clarity of associated public disclosures.
- 4.27** Based on their annual reports, Professor Cortese estimated that NSW universities spent approximately \$641 million on consultants in 2024. She observed that many institutions embedded consultant expenditure within 'other expenses' and used a range of labels, for example, 'consultants' and 'contractors', 'contract services including consultants', or 'consulting and professional fees'. She noted that these practices hinder comparability and scrutiny.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Evidence, Dr Thomas Clarke, Visiting Professor, University of Technology Sydney, 7 November 2025, p 4.

¹⁸³ Submission 41, NTEU NSW Division, p 1.

¹⁸⁴ Evidence, Professor Cortese, 18 February 2026, p 2.

¹⁸⁵ Submission 35, Professor Cortese, p 6; Evidence, Professor Cortese, 18 February 2026, p 3.

4.28 Professor Cortese explained that calculating the total consulting spend required specialist accounting expertise and careful interrogation of inconsistent disclosures across the ten institutions. She advised that, even with over two decades of professional and teaching experience in financial accounting, it was 'very difficult [for her] to determine what the amounts actually represent'.¹⁸⁶ In evidence, Professor Cortese described consultant reporting practices as 'a mess', citing inconsistent categorisation and a lack of uniform disclosure:

It's a mess, frankly, the reporting on consultants ... There's nothing uniform ... Some universities disclose as a line item; others bury it in "other expenses" and then call it different things. It's very difficult to discern what we're seeing.¹⁸⁷

4.29 Professor Cortese's description readily demonstrated that these disclosures are not reasonably accessible to staff, students, parliamentarians or the public.

4.30 The following table from Professor Cortese's submission summarises the consulting-related expenditure reported in the 2024 annual reports of NSW universities:¹⁸⁸

Figure 3 Consultant spending by NSW universities in 2024

NSW Universities	2024 consultant spending
Charles Sturt University (CSU)	\$14,508,000
Macquarie University (MU)	\$64,672,000
Southern Cross University (SCU)	\$25,398,000
University of New England (UNE)	\$27,985,000
University of New South Wales (UNSW)	\$307,023,000
University of Newcastle (UoN)	\$71,906,000
University of Sydney (USYD)	\$18,000,000
University of Technology Sydney (UTS)	\$32,247,000
University of Wollongong (UOW)	\$16,519,000
Western Sydney University (WSU)	\$62,336,000
Total	\$640,594,000

4.31 Professor Cortese advised that a reporting directive recently handed down by NSW Treasury may improve transparency from this reporting year but cautioned that universities may still seek exemptions. She noted:

There is, hopefully, from this reporting year, a [new] Treasurer's reporting directive. That will ask universities to report their engagements more clearly. So that might help. But there is a possibility for exemptions to be

¹⁸⁶ Answers to questions on notice, Professor Corinne Cortese, Professor of Accounting, University of Wollongong, 2 March 2026, p 1.

¹⁸⁷ Evidence, Professor Cortese, 18 February 2026, p 4.

¹⁸⁸ Submission 35, Professor Cortese, p 6.

sought. Let's see what happens there. But I think part of the reason we don't have good reporting is because universities haven't needed to report.¹⁸⁹

4.32 Professor Cortese made the case that these inconsistencies have substantive consequences for governance. She warned that accountability is undermined where oversight bodies cannot readily scrutinise whether consulting expenditures are justified or efficient. She further noted that the absence of uniform categorisation prevents meaningful comparison across institutions and over time, weakening sector-wide analysis. In her view, opacity also erodes public trust in publicly funded institutions and limits governments' capacity to design evidence-based policy responses to assess and, where necessary, constrain reliance on external consultants.¹⁹⁰

4.33 Consistent with Professor Cortese's evidence regarding poor transparency in universities' use of consultants, Dr David Bond, Director of Online Programs at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Business School, told the committee that while university annual reports are publicly available and generally consistent in structure, they provide little clarity about consultant spending. He emphasised that transparency diminishes once expenditure is absorbed into broad 'other expenses' categories or detailed notes.¹⁹¹

4.34 Dr Bond explained that in 2024 only two NSW universities disclosed consultant spending as a separate line item in their income statements. All other universities placed their consultant expenditure in note disclosures under 'other expenses', using varied terms such as 'consultants', 'consultancy', 'professional services', 'contracts', or 'contract services'. He further stated that he had no assurance that these labels referred to the same types of work, making it 'quite difficult' for the public to understand what universities spend on consultants:

To the extent that I have any assurance about whether that line within other expenses is saying the same thing, I don't. It does go to a number of other expenses listed where it's actually, from an outside observer, quite difficult to understand what that necessarily pertains to.¹⁹²

4.35 By contrast to the New South Wales situation, Professor Cortese pointed to the approach taken in Victoria under Financial Reporting Direction 22 (FRD 22), which requires Victorian universities to define 'consultancy', apply reporting thresholds, and disclose both the total value and number of engagements, with supporting detail made publicly available on institutional websites. She characterised this framework as a more accessible and verifiable model that could be further strengthened through consistent sector-wide definitions and the removal of disclosure exemptions.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Evidence, Professor Cortese, 18 February 2026, p 4.

¹⁹⁰ Answers to questions on notice, Professor Cortese, 2 March 2026, pp 3-4.

¹⁹¹ Evidence, Dr David Bond, Director of Online Programs, UNSW Business School, 18 February 2026, p 8.

¹⁹² Evidence, Dr Bond, 18 February 2026, p 8.

¹⁹³ Answers to questions on notice, Professor Cortese, 2 March 2026, p 5.

4.36 Dr Bond pointed to enhancements to an existing NSW government mechanism as providing a way forward to improve transparency: the NSW Treasury Policy and Guidelines (TPG) framework for financial and annual reporting, which sits under the statutory power of the *Government Sector Finance Act 2018*.¹⁹⁴ Specifically, subsection 7.11(2)(a) allows regulations or Treasurer's directions to make provision for the preparation, content and presentation of annual reporting information.¹⁹⁵

4.37 However, universities are currently provided an express exemption whereby a 'Council of a university' is not required to disclose consultant expenditure in its annual reports.¹⁹⁶ Section 2.6 of the TPG 25 requires that, in respect of the engagement during the annual reporting period of a consultant by or on behalf of the agency (other than the NSW Trustee or the Senate, Board of Governors or Council of a university), agencies must include the following information in their annual reporting information:

In respect of the engagement during the annual reporting period of a consultant by or on behalf of the agency (**other than** the NSW Trustee or the Senate, Board of Governors or **Council of a university**), a group 1 agency must include the following information in its annual reporting information:

- For each engagement costing equal to or greater than \$50,000:
 - name of consultant
 - title of project (shown in a way that identifies the nature of the work)
 - actual costs.
- For engagements costing less than \$50,000:
 - total number of engagements
 - total cost.
- Or a statement that consultants were not used during the reporting period.

Disclosures on consultant expenditure must include all expenditure on consultants in accordance with the thresholds, regardless of whether the engagement is expensed or capitalised for accounting purposes.

Agencies must apply the definition of consultancy in PBD-2023-05 Engagement of professional services suppliers. Agencies should include this definition in their annual reporting information, as well as any other relevant information that explains the services that have/have not been included in the annual reporting information.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Evidence, Dr Bond, 18 February 2026, p 9.

¹⁹⁵ Evidence, Dr Bond, 18 February 2026, p 9; Answers to questions on notice, Dr David Bond, Director of Online Programs, UNSW Business School, p 3.

¹⁹⁶ Evidence, Dr Bond, 18 February 2026, p 9.

¹⁹⁷ NSW Treasury, *Group 1 - Annual Report (TPG25-10a)*, section 2.6 (Consultants), p 16.

- 4.38** Interestingly, Dr Bond noted that UTS was the only university to provide detailed consultant disclosures under the TPG framework in 2024, despite this exemption.¹⁹⁸ He went on to highlight that UTS's voluntary disclosures revealed that it spent \$41.44 million on consultants in 2024, but that only about \$32 million of this amount was expensed. The remainder was capitalised and therefore did not appear in the income statement.¹⁹⁹
- 4.39** Dr Bond recommended that to improve transparency, the exemption in TPG 25-10a be removed so that universities are required to disclose this detailed information about consultant spend.²⁰⁰
- 4.40** Beyond annual reports, Professor Cortese documented further transparency gaps in respect of universities' use of consultants. She identified inconsistent and incomplete contract registers under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* (GIPA Act), including exemptions that allow some engagements to be withheld. For example, she noted that only 20 per cent of universities complied with GIPA requirements in the Information and Privacy Commission audit.²⁰¹ She also told the committee that searches of contract registers for major consulting firms often returned 'no results' even where annual reports disclosed significant consultant expenditure, raising concerns about the accuracy and completeness of public information.²⁰²
- 4.41** To address these gaps under the GIPA regime, Professor Cortese recommended removing the exemption that permits non-disclosure of consulting engagements commissioned by university governing bodies and reviewing the application of s 32 of the GIPA Act to ensure that commercial-in-confidence claims genuinely satisfy the public-interest test. She advised that these steps would materially improve the completeness and reliability of public information about consultant engagements.²⁰³

Further impacts

- 4.42** Beyond concerns about financial transparency, and the propensity for corporate-dominated governance bodies to engage consultants, witnesses raised concerns about how consultant use in turn affects university governance. The committee heard evidence that consultant-driven processes increasingly shape institutional decision-making, weaken collegial structures and contribute to the 'drift' away from universities' public mission. Mr Jack Thrower, Senior Economist at The Australia Institute suggested that universities frequently engage consultants to support decisions already favoured by management, rather than

¹⁹⁸ Evidence, Dr Bond, 18 February 2026, p 9.

¹⁹⁹ Evidence, Dr Bond, 18 February 2026, p 9.

²⁰⁰ Answers to questions on notice, Dr Bond, p 3.

²⁰¹ Submission 35, Professor Cortese, p 7.

²⁰² Submission 35, Professor Cortese, p 7.

²⁰³ Answers to questions on notice, Professor Cortese, 2 March 2026, p 4.

to test or inform those decisions. He further contended that benchmarking tools used by consultants to promote uniform approaches across institutions serve to reduce critical scrutiny and attention to local context. Mr Thrower thus recommended mandatory, itemised disclosure of consultant engagements (similar to requirements in Victoria) and stronger collegial governance arrangements.²⁰⁴

Consultants' perspectives

- 4.43** Given the significant role consultants play in shaping university decision-making, the committee also examined evidence from consulting firms operating in the sector. This section sets out consultants' own perspectives on their role and independence, and considers examples raised during the inquiry to assess how consulting methodologies operate in practice and interact with university governance arrangements.
- 4.44** Consulting firms appearing before the inquiry asserted their independence and underscored the value they add to universities. They also acknowledged that they are deeply embedded across the higher education sector.
- 4.45** Nous Group, an international management consultancy firm founded and owned in Australia, responded to questions about its UniForum product, which it described as a 'benchmarking program' that has been used by 75 universities around the world'.²⁰⁵ The product draws data from subscribing universities to inform their decision making by enabling them 'to see the way their administrative services are organised compared to others'.²⁰⁶ Nous advised that client confidentiality and intellectual property protections limit disclosures of the methodology and its outputs and costs.²⁰⁷ It did disclose total aggregate revenue from NSW universities as follows:
- 1 July 2021 to 18 February 2026 (approximately five years) – \$14.5 million
 - 1 July 2016 to 18 February 2026 (approximately ten years) – \$25.7 million.²⁰⁸
- 4.46** KPMG gave evidence about its role in the University of Technology Sydney's Operational Sustainability Initiative (the restructure discussed in detail in chapter 2) and later advised that it was engaged by UTS under a \$7 million

²⁰⁴ Evidence, Mr Thrower, 18 February 2026, p 9.

²⁰⁵ Evidence, Mr Timothy Orton, Managing Principal and Chief Executive Officer, Nous Group, 18 February 2026, p 16.

²⁰⁶ Evidence, Mr Orton, 18 February 2026, p 25.

²⁰⁷ Evidence, Mr Orton, 18 February 2026, pp 22-23.

²⁰⁸ Answers to supplementary questions, Question 4, Nous group, received 12 March 2026, p 4. These figures were noted as approximate and as excluding GST.

contract, including extensions of up to \$180,000 per week.²⁰⁹ At any time, between five and 25 KPMG staff worked on the engagement.²¹⁰

- 4.47** KPMG confirmed that as part of its work for UTS the consultancy produced a spreadsheet ranking academics by research metrics, and that a senior UTS executive later halted the analysis after identifying concerns about data accuracy. Committee members questioned KPMG about its responsibility for how such analysis might be used in practice.²¹¹ Mr Chris Matthews, National Sector Lead Partner – Education at KPMG, acknowledged that 'the data that had been provided ... was not reflective or not accurate' but that 'to the best of my knowledge, the spreadsheet was not used for any redundancy purposes'.²¹²
- 4.48** Ms Claire McGuinness, NSW Government Lead Partner, KPMG, stated that, 'Decisions about staffing, academic structures and organisational changes were ultimately and appropriately matters for UTS leadership'.²¹³
- 4.49** KPMG advised that four of the 25 consultants working on the UTS project had prior direct experience working within a university and that the majority of the team had experience working with the higher education sector through previous consulting engagements.²¹⁴
- 4.50** Deloitte similarly advised that its project teams 'may' include partners and staff with prior experience working in the university sector, however, such experience is not a requirement. Although asked, Deloitte did not specify the extent of its staff's university experience.²¹⁵
- 4.51** Deloitte outlined its work in the higher education sector as focusing on technology and cybersecurity, improving financial sustainability, modernising student services and capability transfer. Deloitte, like other consultancy witnesses, emphasised that responsibility for decision-making rests with university leadership.²¹⁶

Committee comment

- 4.52** The intention of this interim report is to commence the close examination of the governance, financial transparency, and decision-making practices of New South Wales universities, in order to better understand the current state of governance

²⁰⁹ Answers to questions on notice, KPMG, 12 March 2026, p 2.

²¹⁰ Answers to questions on notice, KPMG, 12 March 2026, p 3.

²¹¹ Evidence, Mr Chris Matthews, National Sector Lead Partner – Education, KPMG, 18 February 2026, pp 29-31.

²¹² Evidence, Mr Matthews, 18 February 2026, pp 30-31.

²¹³ Evidence, Ms Claire McGuinness, NSW Government Lead Partner, KPMG, 18 February 2026, p 27.

²¹⁴ Answers to questions on notice, KPMG, 12 March 2026, p 3.

²¹⁵ Answers to questions on notice, Deloitte, 12 March 2026, p 2.

²¹⁶ Evidence, Mr Allan Mills, NSW Government and Public Service Team Lead Partner, Deloitte, February 2026, p 41.

across the sector. Throughout this inquiry, the committee has received extensive evidence from academics, staff, governance experts, researchers, university leaders, and consulting firms. The committee notes that university governance operates within a devolved and highly complex framework, shaped by individual enabling Acts, Commonwealth funding and regulatory structures, and diverse institutional practices. While this fragmented environment reflects the scale and autonomy of universities, it also diminishes consistency, oversight, and accountability.

- 4.53** Within this context, the committee heard detailed evidence on the roles and responsibilities of university councils, academic boards, and management teams. Submissions and witnesses revealed significant variability in practice across institutions, particularly regarding council composition, the representativeness of governance bodies, and the use of private consultants for core functions. The committee also acknowledges the evidence provided by staff and experts regarding the erosion of collegial governance, the limited influence of elected staff and students, and the increasing prevalence of corporate and consulting backgrounds among external appointees to councils.
- 4.54** With regard to university council composition, the committee received compelling evidence of the predominance of externally appointed members with corporate, governance or consulting backgrounds. While the committee recognises the importance of financial, commercial and risk expertise on councils, it is deeply troubled by the substantiated pattern of underrepresentation of elected academic staff, professional staff, and students. Witnesses expressed dismay and profound concern that this imbalance has led to governance cultures that prioritise managerial and financial logics over academic expertise, institutional memory, and public purpose values.
- 4.55** The committee shares the strong view of participants documented in chapters 2 and 3 that academic and other staff, students and alumni all have the right to be represented on university councils, and that the governance of universities will be better for it. Moreover, we were deeply troubled by reports of undemocratic and untransparent processes on the UTS Council and conflicts of interest among UOW council members.
- 4.56** Additionally, we recognise that the present governance imbalance has further practical consequences. The evidence suggests that the composition of university councils is contributing to a growing reliance on external consultants, particularly for organisational restructures, workforce planning, performance modelling, and strategic redesign. The committee was again deeply troubled by the example raised at UTS, where consultants produced a spreadsheet ranking academics by selective research metrics, which was later found to be inaccurate. More broadly, the committee is concerned that consultant-led benchmarking and restructuring tools are promoting a 'one size fits all' approach across institutions that inevitably weakens internal capability. Within this context, there is a heightened risk that individual New South Wales universities fail to

adequately consider their respective public missions, thus sacrificing fundamental social benefits in the pursuit of corporate outcomes.

- 4.57** The committee further notes that, in years involving substantial restructuring or transformation activity, universities' accounting of consultant spending within 'other expenses' masks not only the extent of spending on them, but also the role that consultant expenditure has played in shaping institutional outcomes. The committee considers that this undermines transparency and erodes trust.
- 4.58** In addition, evidence to the inquiry indicated that compliance with formal reporting requirements does not necessarily equate to meaningful transparency for staff, students or the wider public.
- 4.59** In considering these issues, the committee notes the first recommendation of the Senate Inquiry in its final report, dated 11 December 2025, which drew a direct line between the public purpose of universities and the composition of their councils, whilst flagging action by state and territory governments:

The [Senate] committee recommends that state and territory governments review the establishing Acts of universities to ensure the primacy of public research and education in their objects and functions, and consider the composition of members on governing bodies that ensure this can be achieved.²¹⁷

- 4.60** At this interim report stage, the committee considers this recommendation to be a sensible and constructive approach. The evidence before this inquiry strongly aligns with the concerns raised at the federal level regarding the clarity of university purposes, the balance of expertise on governing bodies, and the extent to which governance structures support universities' public mission of education, research and service.
- 4.61** While the enabling Acts for New South Wales universities are broadly consistent in their articulation of core functions and governance frameworks, there are some variations in emphasis, including requirements relating to regional engagement. In particular, the *University of Wollongong Act 1989* includes an explicit obligation to have regard to the needs of the Illawarra region, reflecting the university's local focus.
- 4.62** At this stage of the inquiry, with the limited evidence we have received, the committee considers that a broader review of the enabling legislation, aimed at strengthening the primacy of public education, research, and service to the community, has merit.
- 4.63** However, the committee also recognises that making specific recommendations about revising university enabling Acts requires a more comprehensive and detailed examination than is possible at this stage of the inquiry. While the

²¹⁷ *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers – final report*, Education and Employment Legislation Committee, 11 December 2025, list of recommendations, p xi.

evidence we have gathered to date illuminates a number of systemic issues and potential remedies, further examination of other NSW universities is necessary before the appropriate conclusions can be settled. The committee therefore considers it essential to continue gathering evidence from universities, staff, students, governance experts, and peak bodies before we offer specific recommendations about how the universities' enabling acts should be revised.

- 4.64** We are convinced, however, that immediate action can and should be taken with regard to both UTS and UOW. On the basis of the evidence to date, the committee makes the following interim findings and recommendations.
- 4.65** The committee considers that existing internal governance and reporting mechanisms at New South Wales universities are not sufficient to ensure transparency, accountability and alignment with universities' public mission, particularly in relation to complex commercial activities and large-scale organisational decision-making.

Finding 1

That existing internal governance and reporting mechanisms at New South Wales universities are not sufficient to ensure transparency, accountability and alignment with universities' public mission, particularly in relation to complex commercial activities and large-scale organisational decision-making.

- 4.66** Specifically with regard to UTS, notwithstanding the evidence we have received that universities do not act on the findings of performance audits, we agree with the NTEU that such audits remain an important vehicle of external accountability. We consider that there is sufficient evidence to warrant, as a priority, a performance audit with a focus on governance integrity, financial management, the use of consultants in decision-making, workforce management, psychosocial risk oversight, and the governance of controlled entities.

Recommendation 1

That the NSW Auditor-General conduct a performance audit of the University of Technology, with a focus on governance integrity, financial management, the use of consultants in decision-making, workforce management, psychosocial risk oversight, and the governance of controlled entities.

- 4.67** Turning to UOW, the committee was very concerned by the evidence we received regarding the operations of University of Wollongong Global Enterprises (UOWGE) and the financial and community risks that flow from the commercial entity. We recognise section 21D of the *University of Wollongong Act 1989* as a valuable mechanism for external accountability in respect of the university's commercial

activities. Accordingly, the committee recommends that the Minister exercise their power under section 21D of the *University of Wollongong Act 1989* to request a report from the University Council on the commercial activities of the UOWGE.

Finding 2

That section 21D of the *University of Wollongong Act 1989* provides an important and underutilised mechanism for ministerial oversight of university commercial activities, particularly where those activities are conducted through complex subsidiary structures such as University of Wollongong Global Enterprises.

Recommendation 3

That the Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education exercise the power under section 21D of the *University of Wollongong Act 1989* to request a report from the University of Wollongong Council on the commercial activities of the University of Wollongong and its related entities, including University of Wollongong Global Enterprises.

- 4.68** In considering appropriate interim action towards greater transparency and accountability, the committee has also examined the regulatory framework governing financial and annual reporting under the remit of the NSW Treasury. In the committee's view, this points to a potential regulatory solution that does not require amendment of individual university enabling Acts. As noted above, Treasury Policy and Guidelines already govern annual reporting requirements for NSW public sector agencies and may be amended through Treasurer's directions under the *Government Sector Finance Act 2018*.
- 4.69** The committee was concerned to learn that the 2025 Treasury Policy and Guidelines (TPG25-10a) contain detailed and prescriptive requirements for the disclosure of consultant expenditure that expressly do not apply to a Council of a university.²¹⁸ The committee was very concerned that only one university chose not to rely on this exemption, and made disclosures.
- 4.70** We consider that existing annual reporting arrangements for New South Wales universities do not provide for nearly adequate disclosure of the use of consultants, thus limiting public transparency and accountability.

²¹⁸ NSW Treasury, *TPG25-10a Group 1 – Annual Report*, September 2025, p 16.

Finding 3

That existing annual reporting arrangements for New South Wales universities do not provide for clear, comparable or comprehensive disclosure of information about the use of consultants, thus limiting public transparency and accountability.

- 4.71** In the committee's view, removal of the exclusion provision would provide a clear and simple solution to enhance transparency. We thus recommend that the NSW Treasury remove the exemption for a council of a university from disclosing consultant expenditure in its annual reporting information and take explicit action to ensure consistent application and compliance by all NSW universities, to materially improve transparency and comparability across the sector. This approach would align universities with other public sector agencies, would operate within the existing legislative framework and would not diminish institutional autonomy.
-

Recommendation 3

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

- 4.72** In addition, the committee concludes that existing public information mechanisms, including contract registers maintained under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*, do not furnish reliable or comprehensive disclosure of universities' use of consultants. This further diminishes transparency and public confidence. We thus support Professor Cortese's recommendation to review the application of the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* to universities. It is essential that such a review consider the removal or narrowing of exemptions that permit non-disclosure of consulting engagements commissioned by university governing bodies and of mechanisms to strengthen oversight of contract register compliance to ensure that claims of commercial-in-confidence are applied consistently and satisfy the public interest test.

Finding 4

That existing public information mechanisms, including contract registers maintained under the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*, do not furnish reliable or comprehensive disclosure of universities' use of consultants, further undermining transparency and public confidence.

Recommendation 4

That the NSW Government review the application of the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009* to universities, including:

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

4.73 The committee will use the next phase of this inquiry to further analyse the governance frameworks of individual New South Wales universities, the practical effects of existing legislative provisions, and the potential impacts of changes to council composition, institutional objects, and reporting requirements. This work will allow the committee to form a clearer view of whether revisions to enabling Acts are necessary, and if so, what form they should take to enhance accountability, collegiality, and alignment with the public purposes of higher education.

4.74 The committee will return to these matters in its final report, with detailed findings and, where appropriate, specific recommendations on governance reform, legislative amendment, and sector-wide oversight arrangements.

Appendix 1 Submissions

No.	Author
1	Name suppressed
2	Jason Stanley
3	Public Universities Australia
4	Professor John Quiggin
6	Name suppressed
7	Dr Raffaele Ciriello
8	Name suppressed
9	University of Sydney Association of Professors (USAP)
10	Name suppressed
11	Name suppressed
12	Professor Hans Zoellner
13	Australian Association of University Professors (AAUP)
14	Name suppressed
15	Name suppressed
16	Professor Katie Barclay
17	Ms Sarah Sheets
18	Dr Peter Chen
19	Dr Taflaga, Dr Francis, and Professor Dowding
20	Professor Manuel Graeber
21	Ms Zoe O'Loughlin
23	Professor Shumi Akhtar
24	Members of the UTS Governance Project
25	University of Technology Sydney
26	Ms Judith King
27	NTEU members in the Faculty of Law, UTS
28	Miss Ruby Buckeridge
29	Name suppressed
30	NSW International Student Representative Committee
31	University of Technology Sydney (UTS) Branch of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU)
32	Bachelor of International Studies team, UTS
33	Mr Gus Stephen

No.	Author
34	Name suppressed
35	Professor Corinne Cortese
36	Wollongong Undergraduate Students' Association
37	Public Service Association of NSW
38	Professionals Australia
39	Universities Australia
40	People with Disability Australia
41	National Tertiary Education Union (NSW Division)
42	Young Labor Left NSW
43	UNSW branch of the NTEU
44	The University of New South Wales
45	The University of Newcastle
46	National Tertiary Education Union CSU Branch
47	Dr Ruth French
48	Audit Office of New South Wales
50	The University of Sydney
51	NSW Department of Education
52	Prof Raewyn Connell and Prof Michael Fine
53	Independent Scholars Association of Australia Inc
54	National students with disability leadership collective
55	Independent Education Union of Australia (NSW and ACT Branch)
56	Western Sydney University
57	NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee
58	Universities Australia
59	Professor Thomas Clarke
61	Dr Philip Lee
62	Name suppressed
63	Name suppressed
64	Name suppressed
65	Professor Luke Beck
66	Charles Sturt University
67	National Union of Students
68	University of Wollongong
69	Dr Jessica Harris, Dr Kathleen Smithers, Dr Sarah Gurr
70	Go6

No.	Author
71	Dr Adam Lucas and Professor James Guthrie
72	Ms Swikriti Bhandari
73	Mr Hugh Bright
74	Name suppressed
75	Name suppressed
76	Name suppressed
77	Name suppressed
78	Mrs Imelda Gilmore
79	Name suppressed
80	Mr James Butler
83	Unions NSW
84	The National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), Macquarie University Branch
85	Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA)
86	State Our Rights Campaign, the National Union of Students (NUS), the Australian Medical Students Association (AMSA), the Australian Law Students Association (ALSA)
87	Professor John Buchanan
88	Disability Entrepreneurship and Innovation Australia
89	Name suppressed
90	Name suppressed
91	Grant Wilson
92	Name suppressed
93	Alex Simpson
94	Australian Dental Association NSW Branch
95	Name suppressed
95a	Name suppressed
96	Name suppressed
97	Name suppressed
98	Name suppressed
99	Mr John Taylor
100	Dr Robin Fitzsimons AM
103	Lisa Simmons
104	Colette Geier
105	Name suppressed

Appendix 2 Witnesses at hearings

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
Friday, 7 November 2025 Macquarie Room Parliament House, Sydney	Professor John Quiggin	Professor of Economics, University of Queensland
	Professor Katie Barclay	Australian Research Council Future Fellow and Professor in History, Macquarie University
	Dr Thomas Clarke	Visiting Professor, University of Technology Sydney
	Mr Vince Caughley	Secretary, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division
	Dr Sarah Attfield	University of Technology Sydney Branch President, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division
	Dr Fiona Probyn-Rapsey	University of Wollongong Former Branch President, National Tertiary Education Union Division
	Associate Professor Peter Docherty	Associate Professor in Economics, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
	Professor Stephen Taylor	Distinguished Professor of Accounting, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
	Professor David Brown	Acting Head Accounting Discipline Group, UTS Business School, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Professor Martin Bugeja	Professor of Accounting, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
	Professor Sue Wright	Professor of Accounting, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
	Dr Robert Czernkowski	Senior Lecturer, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
	Ms Anne O'Driscoll FAICD FCA	UTS Council Member (appointed by Council), University of Technology Sydney
	Dr Lisa O'Brien AM	UTS Council Member (appointed by Council), University of Technology Sydney
	Professor Lynn Sinclair	Chair of Academic Board, UTS Council Member, and Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning), Faculty of Health, University of Technology Sydney
	Mr Richard Fleming	UTS Council Member (appointed by Council), and Chair, Infrastructure Committee, University of Technology Sydney
	Dr Jack Steele	UTS Council Member (appointed by Council), and Chair, Audit and Risk Committee, University of Technology Sydney
	Dr John F Laker AO	Deputy Chancellor, and UTS Council Member (appointed by Council), University of Technology Sydney

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Mr Richard Howes	UTS Council Member (Appointed by Council), University of Technology Sydney
	Witness A	
	Ms Thalia Anthony	Professor of Law, University of Technology Sydney
	Dr Robert Czernkowski	Senior Lecturer, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
	Ms Mia Campbell	President, UTS Students' Association
	Ms Neeve Nagle	Welfare Officer, UTS Students' Association
	Ms Salma Elmubasher	Ethnocultural Officer, UTS Students' Association.
Date	Name	Position and Organisation
Wednesday, 17 December 2025	Dr Adam Lucas	Honorary Senior Fellow, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Wollongong
Jubilee Room	Professor Fiona Probyn-Rapsey	Professor Fiona Probyn-Rapsey
Parliament House, Sydney	Dr Susan Engel	Associate Professor, Politics and International Studies, University of Wollongong, and Branch President, National Tertiary Education Union, University of Wollongong
	Dr Hanzel-Jude Pador	Outgoing President and Incoming General Secretary, Wollongong University Students' Association
	Ms Caitlin Veigel	Outgoing General Secretary and Incoming President, Wollongong University Students' Association

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Ms Alexia Chipperfield	2025/2026 Women's Representative, Wollongong University Students' Association
	Witness B	
	Ms Lisa Simmons	Former Executive Manager, Faculty of Research Operations and Chair, WHS Committee, University of Wollongong
	Ms Marissa Mastroianni	Group CEO and Managing Director, University of Wollongong, Global Enterprises
	Mr Michael Still	Chancellor, University of Wollongong
	Professor G. Q. Max Lu AO	Vice Chancellor and President, University of Wollongong
	Mr Warwick Shanks OAM	Deputy Chancellor, University of Wollongong
	Professor Nina Reynolds	Chair of Academic Senate, University of Wollongong

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
Wednesday, 18 February 2026 Jubilee Room Parliament House, Sydney	Professor Corinne Cortese	Professor of Accounting, University of Wollongong
	Dr David Bond	Director of Online Programs, UNSW Business School
	Mr Jack Thrower	Senior Economist, The Australia Institute
	Mr Timothy Orton	Managing Principal and Chief Executive Officer, Nous Group
	Mr Paul Taylor	Principal, Nous Group
	Ms Claire McGuinness	NSW Government Lead Partner, KPMG
	Mr Chris Matthews	National Sector Lead Partner – Education, KPMG

Date	Name	Position and Organisation
	Mr Allan Mills	Lead Partner, NSW Government and Public Sector, Deloitte
	Ms Lucy Mannering	Partner, Cyber and National Privacy Lead, Deloitte.

Appendix 3 Minutes

Minutes no. 21

Monday 18 August 2025

Standing Committee on Social Issues

Room 1043, Parliament House, Sydney at 1.31 pm

1. Members present

Dr Kaine, *Chair* (via videoconference)
 Mrs Mitchell, *Deputy Chair* (via videoconference)
 Dr Cohn (via videoconference)
 Mr D'Adam (via videoconference)
 Mr Martin (via videoconference)
 Ms Merton
 Mr Nanva (via videoconference) (until 1.35 pm)
 Ms Suvaal (via videoconference) (until 1.35 pm)

2. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 15 August 2025 – Letter from Hon Sarah Kaine MLC, Hon Taylor Martin MLC and Hon Amanda Cohn MLC requesting a meeting of the Standing Committee on Social Issues to consider a proposed self-reference into university governance.

3. Consideration of the terms of reference

The Chair tabled letter dated 15 August 2025 proposing the following self-reference:

- That the Standing Committee on Social Issues inquire into and report on the crisis in the New South Wales University sector, as raised by the petition to the Legislative Council, and in particular:
 - The current legislative governance frameworks that regulate Universities in New South Wales, in particular:
 - The structure, powers and responsibilities of university councils as defined in each university's enabling Act
 - Alignment of governance practices with the objects and functions outlined in each university's Act
 - Reporting obligations to the NSW Parliament, Department of Education and NSW Auditor General under the Acts, including compliance with these reporting obligations
 - The powers granted to universities under their Acts to engage in commercial activities and manage controlled entities
 - Powers and responsibilities of the Minister under the Acts
 - The delineation of responsibilities between the State and Federal jurisdiction for the regulation and oversight of Universities
 - The role of governance structures in safeguarding the public mission of universities, academic freedom, research ethics, student welfare, and social outcomes
 - The accountability of University Councils, in particular:
 - The qualifications, experience and appointment processes for council members, including elected staff, student and graduate representatives
 - Mechanisms for dismissal, remuneration, and conflict of interest management as

permitted under the Acts

- iii. The extent to which councils reflect contemporary governance standards and stakeholder representation
- iv. Public access to council decisions, strategic plans, and financial reports
- e. The ability for current legislative and governance arrangements to provide oversight of University staffing, financial management, and use of external consultants
- f. The ability for current legislative and governance arrangements to support the accessibility of university education and derive public benefit, in particular:
 - i. Supporting diversity, inclusion and access for disadvantaged groups
 - ii. Promotion of regional development, Indigenous engagement, and community partnerships
 - iii. Advancing public discourse and civic responsibility
- g. The reporting and oversight of controlled entities including international campuses
- h. Opportunities for legislative reform to strengthen governance, transparency and accountability considering, in particular:
 - i. Best practice governance arrangements for universities in other Australian jurisdictions and internationally
 - ii. Lessons from recent audits, inquiries and performance reviews of NSW universities
- i. Any other related matters.

Mr Nanva and Ms Suvaal left the meeting.

Resolved, on the motion of Dr Cohn: That:

- the terms of reference be amended by inserting the words 'from 2,619 petitioners of New South Wales dated 7 August 2025' after 'as raised by the petition'.
- the committee adopt the terms of reference as amended.

4. Conduct of the inquiry into university governance

4.1 Proposed timeline

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee adopt the following timeline for the administration of the inquiry:

- submissions close - Friday 17 October 2025
- first hearing - early November 2025.

4.2 Stakeholder list

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That:

- the secretariat circulate to members the Chair's proposed list of stakeholders to be invited to make a submission
- members have two days from when the Chair's proposed list is circulated to make amendments or nominate additional stakeholders
- the committee agree to the stakeholder list by email, unless a meeting of the committee is required to resolve any disagreement.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 1.40 pm until 9.00 am Thursday 8 October 2025 (report deliberative – impacts of harmful pornography).

Talina Drabsch
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 23

Friday, 7 November 2025

Standing Committee on Social Issues

Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 9.45 am

1. Members present

Dr Kaine, *Chair*

Mrs Mitchell, *Deputy Chair* (via videoconference)

Ms Boyd (substituting for Dr Cohn for the duration of the inquiry into the New South Wales university sector) (via videoconference)

Mr D'Adam

Mrs Merton

Mr Nanva (via videoconference)

Ms Suvaal

2. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That draft minutes nos. 21 and 22 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 17 October 2025 – Email from Mr Rob O'Brien, individual, to secretariat, expressing interest to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the New South Wales university sector
- 25 October 2025 – Email from Dr Susan Barrell AO, Council Member, University of Technology Sydney, declining an invitation to appear at the university sector hearing on 7 November 2025
- 26 October 2025 – Email from Ms Dianne Hill, Council Member, University of Technology Sydney, declining an invitation to appear at the university sector hearing on 7 November 2025
- 27 October 2025 – Email exchange between secretariat and Ms Danielle Woolley, Head of Government Relations and Policy, UTS, requesting that Chancellor Catherine Livingstone AC appear alongside Vice-Chancellor Andrew Parfitt, at the university sector hearing on 7 November, and advising the Chancellor's term ends on 30 November 2025
- 27 October 2025 – Email from Ms Kim McKay AO, Council Member, University of Technology Sydney, declining an invitation to appear at the university sector hearing on 7 November 2025
- 28 October 2025 – Email from individual, declining an invitation to appear at the university sector hearing on 7 November 2025
- 29 October 2025 – Email from Mr Antony Riordan, Council Member, University of Technology Sydney, declining an invitation to appear at the university sector hearing on 7 November 2025
- 29 October 2025 – Email from Ms Shumi Aktar to the secretariat, requesting to appear at a hearing of the university sector inquiry
- 29 October 2025 – Email from Mr John Karmas advocating for an inquiry into NSW housing policies and processes and its impact on homelessness and individuals with mental health challenges
- 31 October 2025 – Email from individual, author of submission 63, offering to appear at a hearing of the university sector inquiry to give evidence of criminal conduct
- 31 October 2025 – Email from an individual declining an invitation to appear at the university sector hearing on 7 November 2025
- 31 October 2025 – Email from Mary Russell, Chief Executive Officer, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, informing the secretariat that the agency will need to seek permission from the Federal Education Minister to appear at the 7 November university sector hearing

- 3 November 2025 - Email from members of the UTS Governance Project providing their submission and offering to appear in camera at the hearing of the university sector inquiry on 26 November 2025
- 4 November 2025 - Email from the Jasmine Johnston, Executive Officer, Expert Council on University Governance, advising Ms Cilento, Chair, is unable to appear at the university sector hearing on 7 November
- 5 November 2025 - Email from Dhamendra Unka, Director Executive Office and Strategic Delivery, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, declining an invitation to appear at the hearing of the inquiry into the NSW university sector on 7 November and providing a copy of the TEQSA submission to the Senate inquiry into university governance.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam:

- That the committee keep the correspondence from an individual, declining to appear at the hearing on 7 November, dated 28 October 2025, confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat, as it contains identifying information
- That the committee keep the correspondence from the author of submission 63, dated 31 October, confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat, as it contains identifying information
- That the committee keep the correspondence from an individual, declining to appear at the hearing on 7 November, dated 31 October 2025, confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat, as it contains identifying information.

4. Inquiry into NSW university sector

4.1 Public submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos. 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 13, 16 - 19, 21, 23-28, 30, 31, 33, 35 - 48, 50-53, 55-59, 61, 65-73, 78, 80, 83.

4.2 Partially confidential submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were partially published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submissions nos. 1, 6, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 29, 34, 62, 64, 74-77, 79.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Merton: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the request of the author: names and/or identifying and sensitive information in submissions nos. 1, 6, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 29, 34, 62, 64, 74-77, 79.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Merton: That the committee authorise the publication of submission no. 32, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information which is to remain confidential, as per the request of the author.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva:

- That the committee authorise the publication of submission nos. 12 and 20 with the exception of potential adverse mention which is to remain confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat
- That the committee authorise the publication of submission 63 with the exception of adverse mention which is to remain confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat and identifying information, which is to remain confidential, as per the request of the author.

4.3 Confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee keep submission nos. 5, 22, 49, 54, 60, 62a, 81, 82 confidential, as per the request of the author as they contain identifying and/or sensitive information.

4.4 Hearing dates in 2025

The committee noted that it agreed via email to the following hearing dates:

- 26 November, Macquarie Room
- 17 December, Jubilee Room.

4.5 Declaration of interests

Ms Suvaal made a declaration that her staffer would be attending the public hearing as a witness for the UTS Students' Association and that she would not be present for the duration of the staffer's evidence. Ms Suvaal also made a declaration that she is currently a student at the University of Newcastle.

The Chair made a declaration that she was previously an Academic Councillor at the University of Technology Sydney.

4.6 Public hearing

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Professor John Quiggin, Professor of Economics, University of Queensland (via videoconference)
- Professor Katie Barclay, Australian Research Council Future Fellow and Professor in History, Macquarie University
- Dr Thomas Clarke, Visiting Professor, University of Technology Sydney.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Vince Caughley, Secretary, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division
- Dr Sarah Attfield, University of Technology Sydney Branch President, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division
- Dr Fiona Probyn-Rapsey, University of Wollongong Former Branch President, National Tertiary Education Union Division.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Associate Professor Peter Docherty, Associate Professor in Economics, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
- Professor Stephen Taylor, Distinguished Professor of Accounting, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
- Professor David Brown, Acting Head Accounting Discipline Group, UTS Business School, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
- Professor Martin Bugeja, Professor of Accounting, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
- Professor Sue Wright, Professor of Accounting, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan
- Dr Robert Czernkowski, Senior Lecturer, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Anne O'Driscoll FAICD FCA, UTS Council Member (appointed by Council), University of Technology Sydney.
- Dr Lisa O'Brien AM, UTS Council Member (appointed by Council), University of Technology Sydney.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Professor Lynn Sinclair, Chair of Academic Board, UTS Council Member, and Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning), Faculty of Health, University of Technology Sydney
- Mr Richard Fleming, UTS Council Member (appointed by Council), and Chair, Infrastructure Committee, University of Technology Sydney
- Dr Jack Steele, UTS Council Member (appointed by Council), and Chair, Audit and Risk Committee, University of Technology Sydney
- Dr John F Laker AO, Deputy Chancellor, and UTS Council Member (appointed by Council), University of Technology Sydney
- Mr Richard Howes, UTS Council Member (Appointed by Council), University of Technology Sydney

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public and the media withdrew.

Having previously agreed via email on 22 October 2025 to conduct an *in camera* hearing with certain individuals, the committee proceeded to take *in camera* evidence.

Persons present other than the committee: committee secretariat, Hansard reporters and audiovisual and broadcast staff.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Witness A
- Ms Thalia Anthony, Professor of Law, University of Technology Sydney
- Dr Robert Czernkowski, Senior Lecturer, UTS Business School, University of Technology Sydney, and author of the UTS Alternative Plan.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

Witnesses, the public and the media were admitted.

Ms Suvaal left the meeting.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Mia Campbell, President, UTS Students' Association
- Ms Neeve Nagle, Welfare Officer, UTS Students' Association
- Ms Salma Elmubasher, Ethnocultural Officer, UTS Students' Association.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 5.30 pm. The public and the media withdrew.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 5.31 pm until Wednesday 26 November 2025.

Sarah Newlands
Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 24

Wednesday, 17 December 2025

Standing Committee on Social Issues

Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 9.01 am

1. Members presentDr Kaine, *Chair*Mrs Mitchell, *Deputy Chair* (via videoconference)

Ms Boyd

Mr D'Adam

Mrs Merton

Mr Nanva (via videoconference)

Ms Suvaal

2. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That draft minutes no. 23 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 31 October 2025 - Letter from Stephanie Gotlib, Executive Director, All Means All, to Chair, endorsing State Our Rights' submission to the university sector inquiry
- 4 November 2025 - Email from an individual, to Chair, providing context for their submission to the inquiry into the university sector and requesting to appear at a private hearing
- 4 November 2025 - Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting that certain organisations be invited to appear at a private hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 7 November 2025 - Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting that another individual be invited to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 7 November 2025 - Email from an individual, to the secretariat, detailing their experience and requesting to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 7 November 2025 - Email from an individual, to the secretariat, providing further information relating to their appearance at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector, attaching the UTS Student Representative submission against the Change Proposal, requesting that it be kept confidential
- 13 November 2025 - Email from an individual, to Chair, indicating that members of the Australian Association of University Professors are open to being invited to appear at a public hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 18 November 2025 - Email from Ms Joy Misrachi, to Chair, about her experience with Metropolitan Memorial Parks in respect of her late mother's grave
- 24 November 2025 - Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting that their sections of the *in camera* transcript of 7 November 2025 for the inquiry into the university sector remain confidential
- 27 November 2025 - Email from Mr Robert Czernkowski, UTS Council Member, to the secretariat, requesting that specific sections of his *in camera* transcript of 7 November 2025 for the inquiry into the university sector be redacted and the remainder published
- 27 November 2025 - Email from an individual to the secretariat, providing an overview of their submission and expressing interest in giving *in camera* evidence for the inquiry into the university sector
- 1 December 2025 - Email from an individual, to the secretariat, agreeing to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector if compelled by the committee
- 1 December 2025 - Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting to give evidence *in camera* for the university sector inquiry
- 1 December 2025 - Email from Mark Pietsch, Vice-President of Physical Disability Australia, to the secretariat, requesting to give evidence to the inquiry into the university sector

- 3 December 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting Mark Pietsch, disability advocate, give evidence at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 8 December 2025 – Email from Professor Corinne Cortese, Associate Dean - Higher Degree Research, Faculty of Business and Law, University of Wollongong, to the secretariat, declining to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 8 December 2025 – Email from Danielle Woolley, Head of Government Relations and Policy, Office of the Vice-Chancellor, University of Technology Sydney, to the secretariat, seeking guidance from the committee about a question taken on notice during the hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 8 December 2025 – Email from Catriona Reid, Executive Officer, NSW Vice Chancellors' Committee, to the secretariat, attaching a letter from Professor Alex Zelinsky AO, Vice-Chancellor, University of Newcastle, and Convener, New South Wales Vice-Chancellors' Committee, making a formal complaint about the inquiry into the university sector
- 8 December 2025 – Email from Canio Fierravanti, Director, Government and Community Relations, University of Wollongong, to the secretariat, declining the attendance of Mr Greg West (Council Member, Former chair Finance Committee & Former chair UOWGE Board, University of Wollongong), Mr Matthew Wright (Chief Financial Officer/COO, University of Wollongong) and Ms Jennifer Ng (CEO Asia, UOW Global Enterprises / UOW Malaysia), and confirming the attendance of five University of Wollongong representatives at the hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 10 December 2025 – Emails between Ms Thalia Anthony, Professor of Law, University of Technology, and the secretariat, confirming that only her name and opening statement may be published in the *in camera* transcript of 7 November 2025 for the inquiry into the university sector
- 10 December 2025 – Email from Ms Lisa Simmons, former Executive Manager, Faculty of University of Wollongong, to Chair, requesting acceptance of her late submission for the inquiry into the university sector and providing background information for her appearance
- 13 December 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, confirming the UTS Student Representatives' Submission on the Academic Change Proposal can be published
- 14 December 2025 – Email from Dr Adam Lucas, Honorary Senior Fellow, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Wollongong, to the secretariat, advising Emeritus Professor James Guthrie AM FCPA is unable to attend due to sickness a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector.

Sent

- 28 November 2025 – Letter from Chair, to Ms Joy Misrachi, responding to correspondence about Ms Misrachi's experience with Metropolitan Memorial Parks in respect of her late mother's grave.
Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva:
- That the committee keep the following correspondence confidential, as per the request of the author, as it contains identifying and/or sensitive information:
 - 4 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to Chair, providing context for their submission to the inquiry into the university sector and requesting to appear at a private hearing of the inquiry
 - 4 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting that certain organisations be invited to appear at a private hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
 - 7 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, detailing their experience and requesting to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
 - 7 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, providing further information relating to their appearance at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector, attaching the Student Representative submission against the Change Proposal, requesting that it be kept confidential
 - 24 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting that their sections of the *in camera* transcript at the inquiry into the university sector remain confidential

- 27 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, providing an overview of their submission and expressing interest in giving *in camera* evidence for the inquiry into the university sector
- 3 December 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting Mark Pietsch, disability advocate, give evidence at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 10 December 2025 – Email from Ms Lisa Simmons, former Executive Manager, Faculty of University of Wollongong, to Chair, requesting acceptance of her late submission for the inquiry into the university sector and providing background information for her appearance
- 13 December 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, confirming the UTS Student Representatives' Submission on the Academic Change Proposal can be published.
- That the committee publish the UTS Student Representative submission against the Change Proposal, with the permission of the author.
- That the committee keep the following correspondence confidential as per the recommendation of the secretariat as it contains identifying and/or sensitive information:
 - 7 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting that another individual be invited to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
 - 13 November 2025 – Email from an individual, to Chair, indicating that members of the Australian Association of University Professors are open to being invited to appear at a public hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
 - 1 December 2025 – Emails from an individual, to the secretariat, agreeing to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector if compelled by the committee
 - 1 December 2025 – Email from an individual, to the secretariat, requesting to give evidence *in camera* inquiry into the university sector
 - 27 November 2025 – Email from Mr Robert Czernkowski, UTS Council Member, to the secretariat, requesting that specific sections of his *in camera* transcript of 7 November 2025 for the inquiry into the university sector be redacted and the remainder published.
- That secretariat de-identify the minutes to keep confidential the identities of certain inquiry participants, as per the above resolutions to keep certain correspondence confidential.

4. Inquiry into NSW university sector

4.1 *In camera* witness to be summoned

The committee noted that it agreed via email on 5 December 2025 that a summons be issued to the appearance of an individual, and for them to give evidence *in camera*, as requested by the witness.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That:

- under the authority of s 4(2) of the *Parliamentary Evidence Act 1901*, the committee issue a summons of an individual to attend and give evidence *in camera* before the committee on Wednesday 17 December 2025, a 11.45 am
- the committee take evidence from the individual *in camera*
- the individual be de-identified in the minutes and referred to as Witness B.

4.2 Correspondence from Chair of New South Wales Vice-Chancellors' Committee

Mrs Mitchell moved: That:

- (a) the committee has concerns regarding the issuing of the media release dated 27 November 2025 by the Chair, raised in the letter from the Chair of NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee received 8 December 2025.
- (b) that the Chair respond in writing to the Vice-Chancellor's Committee addressing their concerns.

Question put on paragraph (a).

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Question put on paragraph (b).

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell.

Noes: Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee note the correspondence from the Chair of New South Wales Vice-Chancellors' Committee.

4.3 Public submissions

The committee noted that submission 54, previously circulated and resolved to be kept confidential, has since been withdrawn. The submission number was subsequently reallocated to the National Students with Disability Leadership Collective, which was published under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee.

The committee noted that the following submissions were also published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos. 24, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 91, 94.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee authorise the publication of submission no. 103.

4.4 Partially confidential submissions

The committee noted the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos. 92, 95, 95a, 96, 97 and 98.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the request of the author: names and/or identifying and sensitive information in submissions nos. 92, 95, 95a, 96, 97 and 98.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee authorise the publication of submissions nos. 89, 90 and 93, with the exception of potential adverse mention which is to remain confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat.

4.5 Confidential submissions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee keep submission no. 102 confidential, as per the request of the author.

4.6 *In camera* transcript of 7 November 2025

The committee noted that it agreed via email on 14 November 2025 that the secretariat consult with the three *in camera* witnesses of 7 November 2025 as to whether they would like some or all of their evidence published with or without their name. The secretariat prepared a version of the transcript, highlighted to identify the parts of the transcript that the witnesses request remain confidential.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee publish the *in camera* transcript of 7 November 2025, with redactions as highlighted by the secretariat as per the request of the witnesses, and that highlighted content remain confidential.

4.7 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee authorise the publication of the following answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions:

- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Ms Anne O'Driscoll FAICD FCA, UTS Council Member, and answers to supplementary questions from Ms Anne O'Driscoll FAICD FCA, on behalf of UTS Council Members Panel 1, received 10 December 2025

- answers to supplementary questions from Dr Lisa O'Brien AM, UTS Council Member, and answers to supplementary questions from Dr Lisa O'Brien AM, on behalf of UTS Council Members Panel 1, received 10 December 2025
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Dr John F Laker AO, Deputy Chancellor and UTS Council Member, received 10 December 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Richard Howes, UTS Council Member, received 10 December 2025
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Dr Jack Steele, UTS Council Member, and answers to supplementary questions from Dr Jack Steele, on behalf of UTS Council Members Panel 2, received 10 December 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Professor Lynn Sinclair, PFHEA, Chair of Academic Board, Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning), Faculty of Health, UTS, and UTS Council Member, received 10 December 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Richard Fleming, Chair, Infrastructure Committee, and UTS Council Member, received 10 December 2025
- answers to supplementary question from Professor Sue Wright, Professor of Accounting, UTS, on behalf of the authors of the UTS Alternative Plan, received 11 December 2025
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Professor Andrew Parfitt, Vice-Chancellor and President, UTS, received 11 December 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Neeve Nagle, President, UTS Students' Association, received 12 December 2025
- answers to supplementary questions from Robert Czernkowski, UTS Councillor, received 16 December 2025.

4.8 Questions on notice – request for extension and assurance of confidentiality

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the secretariat, on behalf of the committee, respond to the Office of the Vice Chancellor's email, received 8 December 2025, indicating that the committee:

- agrees to an extension to Friday 13 February 2026 to provide the staff submissions
- agrees that the submissions be provided in de-identified form
- will consider further the Vice Chancellor's request for confidentiality upon receipt of the submissions.

4.9 Public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

The committee noted that given the proximity of the hearing to the Christmas/New Year break, transcripts, questions on notice and supplementary questions will not be provided to the witnesses before the Christmas break.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That answers to questions on notice be due on Tuesday 27 January 2026.

Witnesses, the public and media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Dr Adam Lucas, Honorary Senior Fellow, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Wollongong (via videoconference).

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Professor Fiona Probyn-Rapsey, Former National Tertiary Education Union Branch President, University of Wollongong

- Dr Susan Engel, Associate Professor, Politics and International Studies, University of Wollongong, and Branch President, National Tertiary Education Union, University of Wollongong.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Dr Hanzel-Jude Pador, Outgoing President and Incoming General Secretary, Wollongong University Students' Association
- Ms Caitlin Veigel, Outgoing General Secretary and Incoming President, Wollongong University Students' Association
- Ms Alexia Chipperfield, 2025/2026 Women's Representative, Wollongong University Students' Association.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses, the public and the media withdrew.

4.10 *In camera* hearing

Having previously agreed to conduct an *in camera* hearing with Witness B, the committee proceeded to take *in camera* evidence.

Persons present other than the committee: committee secretariat, Hansard reporters and audiovisual and broadcast staff.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Witness B.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

4.11 Public hearing

The public and the media were readmitted.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Ms Lisa Simmons, Former Executive Manager, Faculty of Research Operations and Chair, WHS Committee, University of Wollongong.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Ms Marissa Mastroianni, Group CEO and Managing Director, University of Wollongong, Global Enterprises.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Mr Michael Still, Chancellor, University of Wollongong.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Professor G. Q. Max Lu AO, Vice Chancellor and President, University of Wollongong.
- Mr Warwick Shanks OAM, Deputy Chancellor, University of Wollongong
- Professor Nina Reynolds, Chair of Academic Senate, University of Wollongong.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee accept and keep confidential

the following document tendered during the public hearing:

- Letter dated 26 May 2025 from Justin Benitez, Principal Assessment Officer, Independent Commission Against Corruption, to Ms Lisa Simmons, Former Executive Manager, Faculty of Research Operations and Chair, WHS Committee, University of Wollongong, about her experience at the University of Wollongong.

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee accept and publish the following document tendered during the public hearing:

- Attachment V: Chronology of Key Events dated 6 March 2025 by Ms Lisa Simmons, Former Executive Manager, Faculty of Research Operations and Chair, WHS Committee, University of Wollongong, submitted to the Independent Commission Against Corruption about her experience at the University of Wollongong.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 4.35 pm until Wednesday 18 February 2026.

Bridget Armstrong

Committee Clerk

Minutes no. 25

Wednesday, 18 February 2026

Standing Committee on Social Issues

Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 9.01 am

1. Members present

Dr Kaine, *Chair*

Mr Fang (substituting for Mrs Mitchell, *Deputy Chair*)

Ms Boyd (via videoconference)

Mr D'Adam

Mrs Merton

Mr Nanva (via videoconference)

2. Election of deputy chair for the duration of the hearing

Dr Kaine took the Chair.

The Chair called for nominations for Deputy Chair.

Mr D'Adam moved: That Mrs Merton be elected Deputy Chair of the committee for the duration of the hearing.

There being no further nominations, the Chair declared Mrs Merton elected Deputy Chair for the duration of the hearing.

3. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That draft minutes no. 24 be confirmed.

4. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 19 December 2025 - Email from Professor Rylee Dionigi, President, Australian Association of University Professors (AAUP), to Chair, indicating that members of the AAUP are open to being invited to appear at a public hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 19 December 2025 - Email from Dr Shumi Akhtar, Associate Professor, University of Sydney Business School, The University of Sydney, to the secretariat, indicating that she is open to being invited to appear at a public hearing of the inquiry into the university sector

- 19 December 2025 - Email from Ms Danielle Woolley, Head of Government Relations and Policy, Office of the Vice-Chancellor, University of Technology Sydney, to the secretariat, requesting guidance from the committee about a question taken on notice during the 17 December 2025 hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 24 December 2025 - Letter from Dr Robin Fitzsimons AM, Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of Sydney, to Chair, indicating she intends to lodge a late submission and is open to being invited to appear at a public hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 26 December 2025 - Letter from an anonymous individual, to Chair, about the Chancellor's installation ceremony at the University of Wollongong
- 27 January 2026 - Email from Mr Weihong Liang, President of the International Students Representative Council of Australia (ISRC), to the secretariat, indicating that the ISRC is open to being invited to appear at a public hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 5 February 2026 - Email from Ms Yifei Zhang, Director, Oceania Public Policy, Ernst & Young, to the secretariat, declining to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector on the basis that they do not believe that they can provide useful evidence that would best support the committee's work under the terms of reference
- 6 February 2026 - Email from Ms Laura Henschke, Regulatory Affairs and Public Policy, PwC, to the secretariat, declining to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector
- 9 February 2026 - Letter from Ms Jasmina Joldic PSM, Deputy Secretary, Higher Education, Research and International at the Australian Government Department of Education, to Chair, advising of the Commonwealth actions currently underway to strengthen university governance
- 10 February 2026 - Email from Ms Jenny Bridge, Partner, Performance Improvement, KordaMentha, to the secretariat, declining to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector on the basis that they have a number of competing commitments

Sent

- 23 December 2025 - Email from the secretariat, to Ms Danielle Woolley, Head of Government Relations and Policy, Office of The Vice Chancellor, University of Technology Sydney, advising that the university is requested to provide a summary of the key themes arising in the 500+ submissions from UTS staff providing feedback on the Academic Change Proposal by 13 February 2026
- 10 February 2026 - Email from the secretariat, to Mr Michael Still, Chancellor, University of Wollongong, advising that the committee declined his request for confidentiality regarding question 16 of his supplementary questions on the basis that the answer does not raise any confidentiality issues, and that his answers would be published within 48 hours
- 13 February 2026 - Letter from Chair, to Ms Yifei Zhang, Director, Oceania Public Policy, Ernst & Young, reissuing the invitation to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector and noting the committee's power to issue a summons
- 13 February 2026 - Letter from Chair, to Ms Laura Henschke, Regulatory Affairs and Public Policy, PwC, reissuing the invitation to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector and noting the committee's power to issue a summons
- 13 February 2026 - Letter from Chair, to Ms Jenny Bridge, Partner, Performance Improvement, KordaMentha, reissuing the invitation to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector and noting the committee's power to issue a summons.

5.1 Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam:

- That the committee keep the letter from an anonymous individual, to Chair, about the Chancellor's installation ceremony at the University of Wollongong, dated 26 December 2025, confidential, as per the request of the author, as it contains identifying and/or sensitive information
- That the committee keep the correspondence from Ms Jasmina Joldic PSM, Deputy Secretary, Higher Education, Research and International at the Australian Government Department of Education regarding the Commonwealth's actions currently underway to strengthen university governance, dated 9 February 2026, confidential, as per the request of the author.

5. Inquiry into the New South Wales university sector

5.1 Attendance of consultancy firm witnesses

The committee noted that it agreed via email on 12 February 2026 to write to PwC Australia, EY and KordaMentha to reinvoke them to attend the hearing on 18 February 2026, highlighting the value of their evidence for a balanced inquiry and noting the committee's power to issue a summons if needed.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Boyd: That the committee:

- Publish the email from Ms Laura Henschke, Regulatory Affairs and Public Policy, PwC, to the Chair, declining to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector, received 16 February 2026.
- Write to Ms Jenny Bridge, Partner, Performance Improvement, KordaMentha, to re-issue the witness invitation to appear at the next hearing of the inquiry into the university sector.

5.2 Public submissions

The committee noted that the following submissions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission nos: 100, 103 and 104.

5.3 Partially confidential submissions

The committee noted the following submissions were partially published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submissions nos: 89, 90 and 93.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the request of the author: names and/or identifying and sensitive information in submissions nos. 89, 90 and 93.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Fang: That the committee authorise the publication of submission no. 99, with the exception of potential adverse mention which is to remain confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat.

6. Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following questions on notice and supplementary questions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee:

- answers to supplementary questions from Dr Adam Lucas, Honorary Senior Fellow, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Wollongong, received 1 February 2026
- answers to supplementary questions from Ms Veigel, General Secretary, Incoming President, Wollongong University Students' Association, received 3 February 2026
- answers to supplementary questions from Mr Pador, President (outgoing) - General Secretary (incoming), Wollongong University Students' Association, received 3 February 2026
- answers to supplementary questions from Ms Chipperfield, 2025/2006 Women's Representative, Wollongong University Students' Association, received 3 February 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Professor G. Q. Max Lu AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Wollongong, received 3 February 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Warwick Shanks OAM, Deputy Chancellor, University of Wollongong, received 3 February 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions Professor Nina Reynolds, Chair of Academic Senate, University of Wollongong, received 3 February 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Ms Mastroianni, Group CEO and Managing Director, University of Wollongong Global Enterprises, received 3 February 2026
- answers to supplementary questions from Ms Lisa Simmons, Former Executive Manager, Faculty Research Operations and Chair, WHS Committee, University of Wollongong, received 9 February 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Michael Still, Chancellor, University of Wollongong, received 3 February 2026
- Answers to questions on notice from UTS, received 13 February 2026.

The committee noted that following a request for confidentiality from Mr Michael Still, Chancellor, University of Wollongong, for question 16 of his answers to supplementary questions, the committee agreed via email on 10 February 2026 that the question does not raise any confidentiality issues and would be published within 48 hours after he was notified of the committee's decision.

Resolved on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee authorise the publication of the following answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions:

- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Dr Engel, Associate Professor, Politics and International Studies, University of Wollongong and Branch President, National Tertiary Education Union, University of Wollongong, received 10 February 2026.

The committee noted the correspondence from Dr Jonathan Mackay, Senior Lecturer, University of Wollongong, and former Chair of the UOW Pride Network, received 16 February 2026, challenging the answer to supplementary question 11(c) from Ms Marisa Mastroianni, UOW Global Enterprises, regarding concerns raised by staff about opening a campus in Saudi Arabia, along with the following attachments:

- Email from Dr Mackay to Senior Professor Sue Bennett, Interim Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic and Student Life, UOW, resigning from his role as Chair of the UOW Pride Network, sent 10 April 2025
- Email from Dr Mackay to UOW Pride Network, advising of his resignation as Chair of the Network, sent 9 April 2025

Resolved on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee write to Ms Mastroianni to provide the opportunity to respond to Dr Mackay's correspondence, with a view to publishing each of the items.

7. Public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Mrs Merton, Mr Fang and Mr D'Adam: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the public and media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Professor Corinne Cortese, Professor of Accounting, University of Wollongong.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Dr David Bond, Director of Online Programs, UNSW Business School
- Mr Jack Thrower, Senior Economist, The Australia Institute (via videoconference).

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Timothy Orton, Managing Principal and Chief Executive Officer, Nous Group
- Mr Paul Taylor, Principal, Nous Group

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Ms Claire McGuinness, NSW Government Lead Partner, KPMG (via videoconference)
- Mr Chris Matthews, national Sector Lead Partner – Education, KPMG (via videoconference)

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Allan Mills, Lead Partner, NSW Government and Public Sector, Deloitte
- Ms Lucy Mannering, Partner, Cyber and National Privacy Lead, Deloitte.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

7.1 Deliberative for interim report

Resolved on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee produce an interim report on a date to be determined by Chair following consultation with the committee.

8. Next meeting

Wednesday 1 April 2026, 9.00 am, Preston Stanley Room, Parliament House, for the fourth hearing of the inquiry into the NSW university sector.

Bridget Armstrong
Committee Clerk

Draft minutes no. 26

Wednesday, 1 April 2026

Standing Committee on Social Issues

Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney, 9.00 am

1. Members present

Dr Kaine, *Chair*

Mrs Mitchell, *Deputy Chair*

Ms Boyd

Mr D'Adam

Mr Lawrence (substituting for Ms Suvaal for the pre-hearing deliberative meeting) (*via videoconference*)

Mrs Merton

Mr Nanva

Ms Suvaal

2. Previous minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Boyd: That draft minutes no. 25 be confirmed.

3. Correspondence

The committee noted the following items of correspondence:

Received

- 6 March 2026 - Email from an individual, former Professor at the University of Wollongong, to the secretariat, advising that not all redundancies at the university in 2025 were voluntary
- 9 March 2026 - Letter from Ms Marisa Mastroianni, Group CEO and Managing Director, University of Wollongong Global Enterprises, to Chair, responding to Dr Jonathon Mackay's correspondence of 16 February 2026 challenging her answer to supplementary question 11(c) regarding concerns raised by staff about opening a campus in Saudi Arabia
- 16 March 2026 - Email from Mr Shaun Wilson, a former Macquarie University staff member, to the secretariat, declining to appear at a hearing of the inquiry into the university sector on the basis that he is no longer in paid employment in the higher education sector
- 31 March 2026 - Letter from Mr Vince Caughley, Secretary, National Tertiary Education Union NSW Division, to Chair, challenging the answer to supplementary question 3 from KPMG regarding their use of laptops acquired by the University of Technology Sydney as part of their contracted work in 2025.

Sent

- 4 March 2026 - Letter from Chair to Ms Marisa Mastroianni, Group CEO and Managing Director, UOW Global Enterprises, providing the opportunity to respond to the correspondence from Dr Jonathan Mackay, and advising that the committee will then consider whether to publish Mr Mackay's correspondence and her response

- 17 March 2026 – Email from the secretariat to Ms Marissa Mastroianni, Group CEO and Managing Director, UOW Global Enterprises, advising that the committee will publish each item of correspondence related to the matter on its website.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva: That the committee keep the following correspondence confidential as per the recommendation of the secretariat as it contains identifying and/or sensitive information:

- Email from an individual, former Professor at the University of Wollongong, to the secretariat, advising that not all redundancies at the university in 2025 were voluntary, received 6 March 2026.

4. Inquiry into the New South Wales university sector

4.1 Publication of correspondence – University of Wollongong Global Enterprises

The committee noted that it agreed via email on 12 March 2026 to publish the following items of correspondence on the inquiry website:

- Email from Dr Jonathan Mackay, Senior Lecturer, University of Wollongong, and former Chair of the UOW Pride Network, received 16 February 2026, challenging the answer to supplementary question 11(c) from Ms Marisa Mastroianni, UOW Global Enterprises, regarding concerns raised by staff about opening a campus in Saudi Arabia, along with the following attachments:
 - Email from Dr Mackay to Senior Professor Sue Bennett, Interim Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic and Student Life, UOW, resigning from his role as Chair of the UOW Pride Network, sent 10 April 2025
 - Email from Dr Mackay to UOW Pride Network, advising of his resignation as Chair of the Network, sent 9 April 2025
- Letter from Chair to Ms Marisa Mastroianni, UOW Global Enterprises providing the opportunity to respond to the correspondence from Dr Mackay, sent 4 March 2026
- Letter from Ms Mastroianni, UOW Global Enterprises, to Chair, responding to the correspondence from Dr Mackay, received 9 March 2026.

4.2 Partially confidential submissions

The committee noted the following submission was partially published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee: submission no: 99.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva: That the committee keep the following information confidential, as per the recommendation of the secretariat: potential adverse mention in submission no. 99.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the committee authorise the publication of submission no. 105, with the exception of identifying and/or sensitive information which is to remain confidential, as per the request of the author.

4.3 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The committee noted that the following questions on notice and supplementary questions were published by the committee clerk under the authorisation of the resolution appointing the committee:

- answers to supplementary questions from Professor Corinne Cortese, Deputy Dean (Graduate Research), Faculty of Arts, Society and Business, University of Wollongong, received 2 March 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Deloitte, received 12 March 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Dr David Bond, received 12 March 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from KPMG, received 12 March 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Nous Group, received 12 March 2026

- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Mr Jack Thrower, Australia Institute, received 16 March 2026.

The committee noted that following a request from Nous Group for additional answers to questions on notice to be kept confidential, the committee agreed via email on 16 March 2026 to consider this request at the next meeting.

Resolved on the motion of Mrs Mitchell: That the committee keep confidential the following answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions, as per the request of the author:

- additional answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Nous Group, received 12 March 2026
- answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions from Witness B, received 22 February 2026.

4.4 Future hearings

The committee noted that it agreed via email on 31 March 2026 that it will hold two further hearings for the inquiry on Friday 12 June 2026 and Monday 13 July 2026.

4.5 Evidence of KPMG

The committee noted the correspondence from Mr Vince Caughley, Secretary, NTEU NSW Division, to Chair, challenging the answer to supplementary question 3 from KPMG regarding their use of laptops acquired by the University of Technology Sydney as part of their contracted work in 2025.

Resolved on the motion of Ms Boyd: That the committee write to Ms Claire McGuinness, NSW Government Lead Partner, and Mr Chris Matthews, National Sector Lead Partner – Education, KPMG, to provide the opportunity to respond to the allegations of a discrepancy between their evidence to the committee and:

- the information provided in the correspondence from the NTEU NSW Division dated 31 March 2026 regarding laptops acquired by the University of Technology as part of their contracted work in 2025
- information aired in the ABC 4 Corners Program of 30 March 2026.

4.6 Public hearing

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Nanva: That the allocation of questions to be asked at the hearing be left in the hands of the Chair.

Witnesses, the public and media were admitted.

The Chair made an opening statement.

The following witness was sworn and examined:

- Mr Dean Yates, EY Oceania, Government and Health Services Leader, EY
- Mrs Leigh Walker, EY Oceania, Risk Management and Independence Leader, EY
- Mr John Dewar AO, Partner, KordaMentha.

The evidence concluded and the witness withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Mr Lea Patterson, President/CEO, Pilbara (via videoconference)
- Ms Michelle Brooke, Program Manager, Pilbara (via videoconference)
- Mr Adam Gallard, Chief Product Officer, Pilbara (via videoconference).

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Professor S. Bruce Dowton, Vice-Chancellor, Macquarie University
- Professor Eric Knight, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (People and Operations), Professor of Strategic Management, Macquarie University
- Professor Chris Dixon, Executive Dean, Faculty of Arts, Macquarie University.

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

The following witnesses were sworn and examined:

- Dr Nicholas Harrigan, Senior Lecturer in Quantitative Sociology and NTEU Macquarie University Branch President
- Associate Professor Jumana Bayeh, School of International Studies, Macquarie University
- Associate Professor Nicole Matthews, School of Communication, Society and Culture, Macquarie University

The evidence concluded and the witnesses withdrew.

4.7 Consideration of Chair's draft report

The Chair submitted her draft report entitled 'Interim report: University of Technology Sydney, University of Wollongong and consultants', which, having been previously circulated, was taken as being read.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That Finding 1 and paragraph 4.65 be amended by omitting 'are not sufficient' and inserting instead 'may be insufficient.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Chapter 1

No amendments

Chapter 2

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 2.1 be amended by omitting 'sent shockwaves across the university' after 'emailed all staff with the news that'.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 2.25 be amended by inserting 'some' at the beginning of the paragraph.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 2.28 be amended by:

- a) omitting the first sentence
- b) inserting 'in their submission' after 'accountability structures'.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 2.38 be omitted:

"The committee pursued matters relating to academic decision-making in its hearing with Professor Parfitt. Challenged as to whether his decision to abolish the role of the Provost (akin to the chief academic officer) served to further centralise control, Professor Parfitt insisted that the intention was 'actually to enable and empower areas across the university to exercise their responsibilities.'

and the following new paragraph be inserted instead:

'The committee asked Professor Parfitt questions relating to academic decision making, including the decision to abolish the role of the Provost. Professor Parfitt indicated that the intention was 'actually to enable and empower areas across the university to exercise their responsibilities.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 2.39 be amended by omitting after 'Professor Parfitt' in the third sentence, 'insisted' and inserting instead 'stated'.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 2.45 be amended by inserting 'some' before inquiry participants.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 2.48 be amended by:

- a) omitting the first sentence of the paragraph
- b) inserting at the start of the new first sentence, 'Clarity was sought from Professor Parfitt about the five year extension'.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 2.49 be amended by inserting 'some' before 'inquiry participants argued that'.

Question put and passed.

Chapter 3

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 3.42 be amended by omitting the second sentence, 'She repeatedly sought to take the question on notice before eventually providing a broad estimate, stating that 'my salary would be in the range of \$600,000.' and inserting instead, 'After initially seeking to take the question on notice, she provided a broad estimate stating that, 'my salary would be in the range of \$600,000.'

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 3.44 be amended by inserting 'some' before 'witnesses described a clear decline.'

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 3.47 be amended by inserting 'Dr Engel's' before 'evidence to the inquiry.'

Question put and passed.

Chapter 4

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.1 be amended by omitting 'and a narrow view of the institution's role' at the end of the second dot point.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.1 be amended by omitting the third dot point, 'the sidelining of collegial governance processes that have traditionally enabled valuable academic and professional staff engagement in institutional decision making.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.1 be amended by omitting 'weak' before 'student consultation' in the fourth dot point and inserting instead 'issues with'.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.1 be amended by omitting the fifth dot point 'poor transparency in governance and cultures of secrecy and defensiveness, with the impact of eroding trust', and inserting instead 'concerns about transparency in governance and the impact of eroding trust.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.1 be amended by omitting the sixth dot point 'entrenchment of a culture of corporate managerialism that has weakened working conditions.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.1 be amended by omitting the seventh dot point 'extensive use of consultants working hand in glove with the corporatised boards, again with poor transparency as to costs', and inserting instead 'the use of consultants with poor transparency as to costs.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.1 be amended by omitting 'profound' at the start of the ninth dot point.

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.9 be amended by omitting the word 'powerfully' before 'articulated by Professor Katie Barclay' in the first sentence.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.52 'Evidence to the inquiry indicated that compliance with formal reporting requirements does not necessarily equate to meaningful transparency for staff, students or the wider public' be moved into the committee comment, in a place to be determined by the secretariat.

Question put and passed.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.55 be omitted:

'With regard to university council composition, the committee received compelling evidence of the predominance of externally appointed members with corporate, governance or consulting backgrounds. While the committee recognises the importance of financial, commercial and risk expertise on councils, it is deeply troubled by the substantiated pattern of underrepresentation of elected academic staff, professional staff, and students. Witnesses expressed dismay and profound concern that this imbalance has led to governance cultures that prioritise managerial and financial logics over academic expertise, institutional memory, and public purpose values.'

and the following new paragraph be inserted instead:

'With regard to university council composition, the committee received evidence of the predominance of externally appointed members with corporate, governance or consulting backgrounds. Some witnesses expressed concern that this has led to governance cultures that prioritise managerial and financial logics over academic expertise, institutional memory, and public purpose values.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.56 be omitted:

'The committee shares the strong view of participants documented in chapters 2 and 3 that academic and other staff, students and alumni all have the right to be represented on university councils, and that the governance of universities will be better for it. Moreover, we were deeply troubled by reports of undemocratic and untransparent processes on the UTS Council and conflicts of interest among UOW council members.'

and the following new paragraph be inserted instead:

'The committee shares the view that academic and other staff, students and alumni all have the right to be represented on university councils, and that the governance of universities will be better for it.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Mrs Mitchell moved: That paragraph 4.57 be amended by:

a) omitting 'the present' after 'we recognise that' in the first sentence

b) omitting 'is contributing' before 'to a growing reliance' in the second sentence and inserting instead 'may contribute'

c) omitting the sentence 'The committee was again deeply troubled by the example raised at UTS, where consultants produced a spreadsheet ranking academics by selective research metrics, which was later found to be inaccurate.'

Question put.

The committee divided.

Ayes: Mrs Merton, Mrs Mitchell

Noes: Ms Boyd, Mr D'Adam, Dr Kaine, Mr Nanva, Ms Suvaal.

Question resolved in the negative.

Resolved on the motion of Ms Suvaal: That:

- The draft report as amended be the report of the committee and that the committee present the report to the House
- The committee secretariat correct any typographical, grammatical and formatting errors prior to tabling
- The committee secretariat be authorised to update any committee comments where necessary to reflect changes to recommendations or new recommendations resolved by the committee
- Dissenting statements must be provided to the secretariat by 3.00 pm Tuesday 7 April 2026
- The secretariat expects to table the report at 11.00 am on Wednesday 8 April 2026
- The Chair to advise the secretariat and members if they intend to hold a press conference, and if so, the date and time.

4.8 Correspondence from stakeholder

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Boyd: That the correspondence from an individual to the Chair regarding the committee's intentions in respect of the University of Sydney be circulated to the committee for its consideration.

4.9 Referral of transcript to Law and Justice Committee

Resolved, on the motion of Mr D'Adam: That the portion of the day's transcript related to work health and safety be referred to the Law and Justice Committee for its information in respect of the 2026 Review of the Work health and Safety Scheme.

5. Adjournment

The committee adjourned at 4.40 pm.

Bridget Armstrong
Committee Clerk

