



## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

### STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

#### **Inquiry into the New South Wales university sector**

#### **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 membership

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

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