



UNIVERSITY
OF WOLLONGONG
AUSTRALIA

University of Wollongong

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS – NSW BUDGET ESTIMATES

NSW Budget Estimates 2024-2025 – Supplementary Questions

Questions from Ms. Abigail Boyd MLC

- 1. How many reasonable adjustments, accommodations and/or special considerations were applied for, in each calendar year from 2018?**
 - a. Of these, how many were granted?**

The University of Wollongong supports students who require additional support to ensure access and inclusion in their studies. This approach is underpinned by the Support for Students Policy and the Disability Policy - Students. Reasonable adjustments are communicated via Access Plans, and can include adjustments to classroom or teaching spaces, adjustments to assessment conditions, in-class adjustments or assistance, and adjustments to work integrated learning.

In 2023, there were 111,705 approved reasonable adjustments implemented. In 2024, there were 105,756 approved reasonable adjustments implemented. Given that students don't specially apply for an individual adjustment, there is no discrepancy between applications and approvals. Data prior to 2023 is not readily accessible without significant technical intervention following a systems enhancement which has enabled more accurate and timely reporting.

- 2. I understand that UOW cut a number of subjects and disciplines in 2024, based on a 'viability study' of subject enrolments 'over time'. One reported case involved a subject with low enrolments that had not been offered the year before. Can you confirm that staff provided extensive feedback on the inaccuracies and systemic bias in the data used but that cuts were made regardless?**

UOW conducted a comprehensive assessment of course and subject viability in 2024, which ultimately led to a workplace change process. The Final Teaching and Learning Change Plan was released on 14 January 2025 and was based on extensive consultation and feedback from staff, which led to a revised proposal and the retention of some disciplines originally proposed for closure. The Teaching and Learning change process was conducted in line with the requirements of UOW's enterprise agreements, including having specific periods of consultation.

Staff were provided with opportunities throughout the consultation process to raise concerns and have those responded to, including potential inaccuracies with data. Some inaccuracies were identified and corrections were made as part of the consultation and quality assurance process. It is important to note that the viability analysis reviewed subjects grouped into disciplines rather than individual subjects to account for year-on-year variability in offerings so as to provide a more accurate view of overall enrolments and trends in a particular discipline area. It is important to also note that a range of financial and non-financial considerations were considered in developing the change plan.

As a result of the consultation undertaken with staff, the University was able to maintain some disciplines that were originally proposed to be disestablished, while at the same time helping to assure the long-term financial sustainability of the University. We appreciate that not all staff may agree with the final decisions made, but it was necessary for the University to make tough choices to ensure a viable course portfolio moving forward.

- 3. Are you aware of action recently taken via the Fair Work Commission which forced Management to release data on all disciplines?**
a. Why was this data not made available initially?

Following constructive discussions facilitated by the Fair Work Commission in late December, the University reached an agreement with the NTEU to resolve two disputes related to the Teaching and Learning Workplace Change Process. This resolution reflected our shared commitment to moving forward with clarity and collaboration. Part of the agreement involved extending consultation and releasing data relating to disciplines that had not been directly impacted by the change. This data was not released initially because it did not relate to the disciplines which were proposed to be directly impacted under the change proposal.

- 4. Why are restrictions being imposed on Research Grant expenditures as a cost saving measure, particularly noting that this research money is for the conduct of research and often involves contractual relationships with third parties?**
a. Have you evaluated the potential risk of reputational damage that these restrictions may incur, including the risk that researchers will take their grants elsewhere to avoid the obstacles being placed on expenditures?

The transformation of UOW's operations will take time and must be done in a carefully considered and comprehensive manner. In the meantime, there remains a clear and ongoing need to reduce expenditure and address UOW's escalating cost base.

A range of short-term cost saving measures have been put in place, including relating to travel. However, not all travel is banned. If external funds, contract or agreement specifically requires travel then the travel can be undertaken. This includes researchers presenting at conferences, undertaking fieldwork or delivering teaching programs. Where researchers hold external grants or contractual obligations requiring travel, this can, and should, continue.

We expect that all travel should meet critical business need to prevent unnecessary spending on travel, particularly from operational funds. Critical research activity, particularly when funded externally, must continue, and our communications with staff make that clear. We are acutely aware of the risks associated and are working hard to ensure clear communications and consistent decision making. We deeply value our researchers and want to ensure they remain at UOW, delivering impactful research that benefits the communities we serve.

- 5. Is it correct that management has created an additional DVC role while it was contemplating a further \$30M in cuts, including to jobs?**
a. Did you conduct a risk assessment in relation to setting up yet another highly paid Senior Exec role?

UOW is currently undertaking a process of consultation on our UOW Operations Draft Change Proposal and no decisions have been made. Consideration of UOW's current top-level structure, including sector-benchmarking, has identified gaps and opportunities to enhance the University's leadership and direction. It should be noted that a DVC role was disestablished in late 2024 to improve efficiencies while the UOW Enterprise Wide Operations Review was underway.

Outcomes and recommendations from the Operations Review, along with sector-benchmarking, indicate that the University's existing portfolios are sizable and fragmented, limiting opportunities for strategic cooperation and future-focused activity. For this reason, the University is proposing a re-design of the senior executive structure including the proposed establishment of a DVC Growth that will re-align existing areas of University operations into a holistic and agile function that will drive institutional growth. Given the significant and ongoing shifts in the domestic and international higher education sector, the proposed Senior Executive structure will position the University for future sustainability and ensure that UOW remains competitive and innovative.

Noting the disestablishment of a DVC role in late 2024, representing the proposed establishment of a DVC Growth position as an increase in the number of DVCs at the university would be misrepresentative.

A risk assessment has been undertaken and is an ongoing process throughout the transformation. The purpose of the consultation process is to seek feedback from staff to inform the proposed structure, including through the identification of any risks associated with proposed changes.

- 6. I understand that from mid 2023 to today, most of the Senior Executive positions (DVCS, VCs, Executive Deans) have been held in an Acting or Interim capacity. Why did management make the decision to halt merit based, competitive appointments for such a long period of time?**
- a. Did you conduct a risk assessment in relation to this?**

In March 2024, Council approved amendments to Delegations of Authority Policy such that the responsible delegate for establishing, appointing, terminating, and reappointing senior executive positions was the Performance and Remuneration Committee[#]. In alignment with the Delegations amendments, Council also approved amendments to the Council Performance and Remuneration Committee Terms of Reference to include oversight of the performance outcomes for senior executive roles.

These amendments increased Council's monitoring and oversight of senior executive performance outcomes, supporting the robustness of the University's processes. From April 2024, there have been transitions in leadership roles with several interim and acting appointments in place. An internal interim / acting appointment is the best way for the University to maintain continuity, particularly during a period of significant change while the University's operating model is being considered and re-designed.

Given the criticality of the Vice-Chancellor position for the leadership and direction of the University, Council undertook a rapid Interim Vice-Chancellor Recruitment to ensure an individual with the appropriate expertise was appointed. As one of the longest serving Vice-Chancellors at an Australian University, having served as the Vice-Chancellor of La Trobe University between 2012 to January 2024, Professor John Dewar AO was appointed to this position while the search and recruitment for a permanent Vice-Chancellor was ongoing.

With the imminent arrival of Professor Max Lu AO as UOW's next Vice-Chancellor, it would be a key priority for Council and the Performance and Remuneration Committee to recruit Senior Leadership positions with appropriate involvement of Professor Lu to provide greater clarity, accountability and stability of UOW leadership. The Council Performance and Remuneration Committee will continue to maintain appropriate oversight of Senior

Executive appointments and performance and ensure university leadership are held to account. In considering both interim and permanent appointments into roles, as well as the impacts for the institution and the individuals, Council has risk utmost in mind to support careful deliberations and decision-making.

#Prior to this delegation amendment, the Vice-Chancellor was the delegate for the appointment, termination, and reappointment for Senior Executive positions.

7. In relation to the recent restructure of the University, can you confirm the total number of staff positions that were lost in the restructure?

We take this question to relate to the recent Teaching and Learning Change Plan that was released on 14 January 2025. This Change Plan resulted in a reduction of 91.6 full time equivalent positions.

8. Did the university engage any consultants in the development of the new operating model 'One UOW'?

a. If yes, which consultancy firm was engaged, and what was the total cost?

No external providers were engaged in relation to OneUOW.

9. Can you please provide all consulting reports prepared in relation to the recent Transformation project?

In 2024, the University Council initiated an external review of the University's operations (UOW Enterprise Wide Operations Review) which was focused on how we can shape our operating model to ensure UOW's future success and sustainability.

Council also initiated a comprehensive review of our research portfolio, performance, operations and strategy (UOW Research Review) to ensure our research portfolio and strategy is positioned optimally to drive excellence and impact.

These reviews have helped inform the UOW Operations Draft Change Proposal and, as per the requirements of our enterprise agreements, were released to staff on 24 March 2025 to inform consultation and provide further context in relation to the changes being proposed. These reports are attached.

10. Can you explain the purpose, role and responsibilities of the University Internationalisation Committee?

The purpose, role and responsibilities of the University Internationalisation Committee are set out in the Committee's [Terms of Reference](#).

11. If the Transformation was based on projected impacts of MD107, why has there been no change to the proposed approach since December 2024?

In 2024, changes to the Australian Government's visa processing regime (Ministerial Direction 107) resulted in a significant reduction in UOW's international onshore student

enrolments, which resulted in a substantial drop in revenue compared to original budget forecasts. This revenue drop will have a sustained impact on our finances, because the forecast revenue of the anticipated international student pipeline over the coming years will not be realised.

The UOW Operations Draft Change Proposal released on 24 March 2025 acknowledges the release of Ministerial Direction 111 in December but makes clear that it does not reverse the significant financial impact that MD107 has had on UOW over the last 12 months and does not change the fact that our pipeline of prospective international students is severely damaged. We are not the only Australian university that has been and continues to be significantly impacted by these changes.

12. How many new Academic staff have been employed in 2025 so far, broken down by type of contracts?

New Academic Appointments FTE – 2025 (at 10 April 2025)

Contract Type	Number of Positions (FTE)
Contingent	2
Fixed Term	80.62
Ongoing	38.1
Total	120.72

It is important to note that some of the new fixed term and continuing positions have been created under UOW's decasualisation plan that is being implemented to address changes to casual academic employment. About 75 per cent of the positions come from conversion of casuals to fixed term or continuing employment. This is consistent with the requirements of our enterprise agreement. Some positions have also been funded by external grants and projects.

13. Is there an intention to replace expensive senior staff with cheaper salaried staff who are required to do double the amount of teaching?

a. Have you considered the potential long-term risk this may pose to UOW's research capacity?

The University is proposing to re-design its organisational structure to position UOW's portfolios and faculties for growth and future sustainability. No decisions have been made on the UOW Operations workplace change process. Any proposed changes to and impacts on staffing will continue to include appropriate consideration of the risks associated.

UOW deeply values its academic staff, including those conducting impactful research and delivering high-quality teaching.

14. Do you think that there are appropriate measures in place to deal with Senior Executives and COI?

a. Given the recent case of interim Vice-Chancellor John Dewar continuing to work for consultancy firm KordaMentha during his tenure, what confidence do you have in the work that KordaMentha has done at UOW given the issues raised?

The University has in place a Conflict of Interest Policy applicable to all staff and affiliates of the University including Senior Executives. In accordance with the University's Conflict of Interest Policy, Professor Dewar formally declared his association with KordaMentha. A management plan was established and followed. Professor Dewar took unpaid leave from KordaMentha for the duration of his appointment at UOW. He did not undertake any paid work for KordaMentha during that period.

KordaMentha was engaged following a competitive Request for Tender that was conducted in line with the University's Purchasing and Procurement Policy and the University's Tender Procedure. The UOW Transformation Program, of which the KordaMentha external review was a component, is overseen by the Council Program Control Board (PCB) which includes representatives from University Council, executive, management and subject matter expertise. The PCB is a committee of Council and provides oversight for the Transformation Program, including management of the Interim Vice-Chancellor John Dewar's advised conflict with KordaMentha.

KordaMentha undertook an external review of the University's operations (UOW Enterprise Wide Operations Review) which was focused on how we can shape our operating model to ensure UOW's future success and sustainability. The report helps identify areas within our operations that need to be addressed and forms part of the information and analysis undertaken to help inform the UOW Operations Draft Change Proposal which is currently out for consultation with staff. The Council Program Control Board (PCB) continues to meet and provides oversight and guidance for the UOW's transformation program.

15. When management refers to engaging with and consulting with students, does it generally mean the Student Advisory Council?

Yes. The Student Advisory Council (SAC) is the peak student advisory group to the Vice-Chancellor. SAC is consulted on a wide range of matters across the entire university, including matters that affect the student body, largely because they represent groups of people across the entire diversity of the university.

16. On how many occasions has management engaged with the student elected body, the Wollongong Undergraduate Students Association?

The University is committed to engaging with students on important issues. The Wollongong Undergraduate Students Association (WUSA) is a key aspect of this consultation, as an important voice for the welfare and interest of UOW undergraduate students. WUSA also has a representative on UOW's Student Advisory Council.

In 2025, the University has so far engaged with WUSA nine (9) times – this includes regular scheduled meetings with WUSA Executive, attendance at quarterly Student Services & Amenities Fee (SSAF) Project Managers Meeting, and the WUSA President's attendance at the March Student Advisory Council meeting, which was also attended by the Interim Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic & Student Life). Additionally, UOW has engaged with WUSA to provide support at orientation stalls, WUSA's physical space on campus, and other general matters.

17. Does the University Council require members to sign non-disclosure agreements?
a. Does the University Council use any other kind of confidentiality agreement?

Schedule 2A of the University of Wollongong Act sets out the duties of Council members. Under the Act, Council members have a duty not to improperly use information. The Act states: A member of the Council must not make improper use of information acquired because of his or her position (a) to gain, directly or indirectly, an advantage for the member or another person, or (b) to cause detriment to the University.

On appointment to Council, Council members are informed of these duties and responsibilities under the University of Wollongong Act 1989 and confirm that they understand and will comply with their duties and responsibilities as a member of Council. The University provides each newly commencing Council member with an induction program that includes a governance induction on the role of Council and the statutory duties of Council members under the University of Wollongong Act 1989. Further to this, all Council members receive an annual briefing from the UOW General Counsel on Council member duties and obligations, with the last briefing provided in August 2024.

The Council Code of Conduct, provided to all Council members as part of the University Council Handbook, also states that members must “recognise that confidential information received by a Council member in the course of his or her duties remains the property of the University (from which it was obtained) and ensure that it is not disclosed, or allow it to be disclosed, unless that disclosure has been authorised by the University, or the person from whom the information was provided, or is required by law”.

18. What consequences are there for Council members when poor management or financial decisions are taken?

As the governing authority of the University, Council acts for and on behalf of the University and controls and manages the University's affairs and concerns. The functions of Council are specified in the University of Wollongong Act 1989. Schedule 2A of the University of Wollongong Act sets out the duties of Council members.

There is a clear delineation between the responsibilities of Senior Management / University Executive and the role and responsibilities of Council and its members. The responsibility of the University as set out in the University Council handbook notes that the University is responsible for providing Council members with complete and accurate information relevant to the Council's identified functions. Council's role, also articulated in the Council handbook, is to monitor and provide oversight of the University's affairs and concerns by evaluating this information and raising any relevant questions or seeking clarification where required for assurances around the accuracy of the information.

When considering past decision-making, it would be important to understand the temporal context and what information was provided to Council and university governance as part of the decision-making process. While it is important for every university to review decisions made with consideration of approach, implementation and outcomes, and carry forward lessons learned, it would be unreasonable to rely on the advantage of hindsight when evaluating a decision.

Noting that Council and Council members carry out their duties under the Act based on the information the University provides to Council, should there be a breach of any duty set out in Schedule 2A of the University of Wollongong Act, the Council may remove a member from officer under Section 21G.

19. What was the process that was undertaken in order to arrive at the job cuts?

This question is taken to relate to the Final Teaching and Learning Change Plan which was released on 14 January 2025. The Final Change Plan was developed in line with the requirements of the University's enterprise agreements and involved an extensive consultation process included staff and other stakeholders to ensure diverse perspectives were heard, which led to amendments and improvements in the plan. The Managing Change clauses are available in our Academic Staff Enterprise Agreement (Part 6, Clause 40) and Professional Services Enterprise Agreement (Part 6, Clause 54).

The Teaching and Learning Change plan was informed by a comprehensive assessment of course and subject viability with a need to reduce unviable teaching activities, to assure the effective use of University funds to build on UOW's academic strengths and help secure the University's long-term sustainability and institutional viability.

This process involved a preliminary period of consultation prior to the release of the Draft Change Proposal. The Draft Change Proposal was then subject to a four-week period of consultation with staff. Feedback was then considered, and a Revised Change Proposal was released for a further period of consultation, which ran for more than five weeks. Further feedback was considered, and a Final Change Plan was released to staff.

As a result of this consultation with staff, the University was able to maintain some disciplines that were originally proposed to be disestablished, while at the same time helping to assure the long-term financial sustainability of the University. These decisions were not made lightly, but were essentially to ensure that UOW remains competitive, innovative and committed to delivering an outstanding student experience.