

Submission
No 29

**INQUIRY INTO THE GOVERNANCE OF NSW
UNIVERSITIES**

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If I may be so bold as to quote the Queen of England, 2008 was UNE's *Annus Horribilis*. By way of background, I am one of two elected academic staff members on the UNE Council. Currently, I am in my third year on the Council, having been re-elected to a second two year term last year. Elected staff members on governing bodies play an important and difficult role. Conveying complicated 'insider' perspectives to a wide variety of lay Council members can be a complex, challenging responsibility.

Others who appear before this inquiry have and/or will make important points for the members of the Inquiry to consider. As for me, I would note the two most important issues about which I felt the strongest during 2008. One, everyone knows, 'you cannot lead, if no one is following'. As 2008 progressed, the 'UNE Community' in ever increasing numbers, and then finally the UNE Council itself lost their confidence in the former Chancellor. An initial meeting of 125 or so, mostly UNE academic and general staff, quite diplomatically (from my perspective) suggested characteristics that would be useful, appropriate and strategic in any Chancellor. This was done as the end-of-the-year, term of the former Chancellor came into view. A second meeting of something over 200 UNE staff, students and 'community', met to clarify and demonstrate their serious concerns about governance at UNE. A third and last meeting of some 700 'UNE Community' met and voted an unanimous vote of no-confidence in the former UNE Chancellor. Shortly there-after, the then UNE Council itself voted 'no confidence' in the former Chancellor. Even with this situation, the Chancellor would not vacate or indicate that he would be vacating his position as UNE Chancellor.

There seems to be no strategy in place to remove a Chancellor in such an unequivocally, unsupported position. I quote again, 'you cannot lead, if no one is following'.

The second issue would revolve around issues of respect. Mutual respect between a Chancellor and Council members, between elected and appointed Council members, and importantly between the entire Council and the entire academic and general staff is critical for good governance. A Chancellor does not endear him or herself to their constituency by comparing running a University to running a fish and chips shop. Respect is not engendered when Council meetings are conducted in secret without full representation of both elected and appointed members present. It is imperative that governing body members, and certainly a Chancellor, understand, appreciate and respect the content and context of the core business of a University.

In UNE's case, what recruitment and retention constraints exist in a regional and rural context? How would the business of a regional University differ from a metropolitan based company? How would a 'community of scholars' differ from a construction company? What strategies need to be in place that foster respect at all, and I mean all levels of the University and UNE Community? I can assure the Inquiry that the UNE Council is committed to doing everything in its power to make the necessary changes to all rules, regulations and by-laws. Ultimately, it is essential to define explicitly and differentiate between the roles, duties and responsibilities of both a Chancellor and a Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer.

In closing, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the willingness of Chancellor Torbay to take on the role of Chancellor of UNE, particularly during a time of crisis

and upheaval. All levels of the University were impacted by the *Annus Horribilis* of 2008. The University was greatly advantaged to have someone with Chancellor Torbays energy, experience and commitment to step into the role of Chancellor at such an untenable time; to restore confidence and mutual respect across the UNE Community. I would suggest, he enjoys the full confidence of the UNE Council, the senior executive and the UNE Community. He certainly has mine.

Associate Professor Jeanne Madison

Elected academic staff member
to UNE Council 2006 - 2010