

**Submission
No 16**

INQUIRY INTO THE GOVERNANCE OF NSW UNIVERSITIES

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEW SOUTH WALES



**FAX TO: The Director, General Purpose Standing Committee No.2
Legislative Council, Parliament House, Sydney**

**FROM: Dr Ian Walker
President UNSW Alumni Association**

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Submission to the NSW Legislative Council General Purpose Standing

Committee No.2

Inquiry into the Governance of NSW Universities

As President of the UNSW Alumni Association, I greatly appreciate the invitation of The Hon Robyn Parker MLC, Chair of the NSW Legislative Council's General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2, to make a submission to the Committee's inquiry into the governance of NSW universities.

This submission particularly addresses **point (8) of the Terms of Reference**, concerning representation on governing bodies and the current and appropriate balance between external members and elected (internal) representatives.

While recognizing the complex and challenging realities and imperatives of changing times in the provision of higher education in Australia and consequently in the governance of our universities, I believe that:

- ✦ **alumni must be included** in the membership of university senates and councils as among the most significant external stakeholders;
- ✦ **alumni members bring valuable perspectives** to the work of councils in their stewardship of resources and, most importantly, in their guardianship and fostering of the very nature and purposes of the universities they govern;

- ✦ while there is argument for alumni membership on the basis of election¹, I believe that at least there must be mandated positions for graduates on the governing body and that if such positions are by appointment, consultation about the appointments must take place between the governing body and representatives of any peak Alumni body of the University;²
- ✦ there should be at least two (2) mandated positions for alumni on governing bodies of less than 15 members, and at least three (3) graduates should be members of councils of 15 members and above.

Rationale:

The **UNSW Alumni Association** was formed following a meeting of over 750 graduates held in December 1967. Its Constitution was approved by the University Council in March 1969, with the then Chancellor, Sir John Clancy, as its Patron. A key aim of the Association has continued to be to foster the participation of alumni in the activities of the University, and to establish mutually beneficial relations between alumni and the University.

Over four decades the Association, through its Board of Governors, has initiated, conducted and/or supported activities, such as the Alumni Awards and Scholarships and the *Brain Food* series of public lectures, which have highlighted the significant qualities

¹ No matter what proportion of those who are eligible to vote actually do so, there is arguably a principle of having a broader and more independent perspective that is not accountable to any particular government or council agenda. On the other hand, the proportion of graduates who actually vote is always very small and elections are also very exposed to minority group agendas and popular votes that are not necessarily in the interests of good governance nor of alumni as a whole. It can be argued that the costs associated with such elections are high in relation to the size of the vote, but this needs to be weighed up against the broader and more independent perspective gained in having elected graduate membership.

² Peak bodies such as Convocations, Associations, Advisory Boards/Councils. Consultation might involve e.g. names for the mandated positions being proposed by the peak body for consideration by the Minister or Council. The nature and transparency of such consultation needs to be further explored.

and achievements of students, staff and alumni of the University. **The Association has strongly supported the participation of elected graduates in the governance of the University**, and such graduate members of Council have been invited to be 'Council Governors' on the Alumni Board for the term of their membership of Council. Such elected membership has stood the test of time as a mechanism for transparency in selection. There are currently **four (4) elected graduate members** of the University Council, including the Deputy Chancellor, Ms Gabrielle Upton, and a Pro-Chancellor, Dr Tina Clifton.³

Since 2005, 'membership' of the Alumni Association has included all graduates of the University, and the election of graduates to the Alumni Board has been held in conjunction with the election of graduates to the University Council.⁴

The Changing Nature of Universities, University Governance, and Alumni Organizations:

With the expansion of the number and complexity of Australian universities over recent decades, and with increasing pressures and demands in relation to funding, risk management, commercial activity, transparency, regulation, accreditation and accountability, **universities in Australia have become much more corporate in their governance, organizational structure and character.**⁵ The recently released Final Report of the Review of Australian Higher Education (the "Bradley Report") notes that

³ The current Chancellor, Mr David Gonski AC, is the first alumnus to be Chancellor. His name was proposed and strongly supported by the Alumni Board.

⁴ Memorandum of Understanding between the University and the Alumni Association, approved by the University Council in May 2005

⁵ These are themes taken up e.g. in Simon Marginson & Mark Considine *The Enterprise University: Power, Governance and Reinvention in Australia*: Cambridge University Press 2000

*higher education has changed dramatically over the last 30 years or so. It once comprised a small number of publicly-funded institutions. This is no longer the case. There are now 37 public universities, two private universities and 150 or so other providers of higher education.*⁶ The Report recommends that the Australian Government develop more rigorous criteria for accrediting universities⁷, and that the Australian Government should place primary accountability for (university) performance with the provider's governing body.⁸

The composition of university senates and councils has already, in response to such change, begun to move away from a more parliamentary style of representation of internal and external stakeholders, with the role of advocacy on behalf of particular constituencies, to **an emphasis on particular areas of expertise, with members acting more collectively in the institutional interest.** There is some focus on **reducing the size of governing bodies** and on favouring a higher proportion of **appointed** external members with particular skills to meet the changing times.

Similarly, the work of alumni relations, with **a growing emphasis on fund raising**, has become much more the domain of professional development, marketing and public relations personnel employed by the universities. Alumni Associations, such as the UNSW Alumni Association, are now very few, with more universities having either Convocations representing a broader cross-section of staff, friends as well as alumni, or with more narrowly focused Alumni groups, advisory boards or committees.

⁶ *Review of Australian Higher Education: Final Report* p.xi

⁷ Recommendation 22 p.xxi

⁸ Recommendation 42 p.xxv

Albeit with a keen sense of the history and the value of the close and collegial relationship between our Association and the University over some 40 years, I recognize and understand much of **the inevitability and necessity of these changes.**

Alumni and University Governance:

The Councils of universities in NSW and the ACT currently range in size from 15 (e.g. ANU) to 22 (e.g. Sydney and UNSW). UTS and Southern Cross University may have Councils that do not exceed 22.⁹ There is a range of membership categories, including Ministerial appointments and those elected from both internal and external stakeholders. A number of universities detail requirements for membership, especially for those appointed to Council, that focus especially on **expertise in areas such as finance, commerce, law, information technology, and education**, with the University of Canberra noting that the terms of office should *allow for continuity and a balance between new ideas and corporate memory.*

Elected graduate (alumni) membership ranges from no statutory/mandatory positions on the Councils of ANU and the University of Canberra, to 5 external persons elected by the graduates of the University of Sydney. Along with the 4 elected graduates on the Council of UNSW, 4 members of the UTS Council are alumni but are appointed by Council; 4 external members of the Council of the University of Newcastle must be members of Convocation. Among the other NSW and ACT universities, statutory/mandatory graduate membership mostly ranges between 1 and 2. In addition, of course, graduates may be included among those who are appointed to Councils.

⁹ Other universities: Macquarie 19, Newcastle 19, UWS 18, Wollongong 18, CSU 18, UNE 18, University of Canberra 15

The alumni of this and of other universities are among the most significant external stakeholders as permanent members of the University. Alumni hold degrees which have cost them "sweat equity" as well as fees.¹⁰ The value of our degrees depends on the success and reputation of the University, which in turn depends very much on the success and reputation, support and contribution of its graduates. Alumni arguably have the strongest vested interest in the quality, standards and reputation of the University. The support of alumni is increasingly seen as invaluable across the whole range of giving opportunities, financially and otherwise. Both North America and increasingly UK alumni and development programs have shown there is a strong nexus between alumni responsibility for their institution and being prepared to support it in practical and financial terms.¹¹ It is a vital partnership and one that ought appropriately to be acknowledged and encouraged at the level of governance. It is important that Alumni do not feel disenfranchised. Councils will come and go, but Alumni are life members of their University.

With alumni forming the greater part of the broader entity of the University, and ranging across the whole span of academic disciplines, they hold in large measure **guardianship and stewardship** of the values and ideals of an institution seeking to add to and to disseminate knowledge, with every need to ensure that **good governance** focuses not only on the increasing needs of funding and regulation but on guaranteeing a culture of free and open inquiry.

Perhaps the alternative to appropriate alumni participation in university governance might be as the late Professor Jeremy Knowles of Harvard University once recorded about the

¹⁰ Dr Jessica Milner Davis, Vice-President, UNSW Alumni Association, *Submission on Alumni Participation in University Governance to the Review of National Governance Protocols* July 2007

¹¹ Dr Jessica Milner Davis *as above*

supportive approval shown for the University by an alumnus of the Class of 1887, Mr Eldon Bisbee, who wrote to the *Harvard Magazine* encouraging his fellow alumni to attend the University's Tercentenary Celebration in 1936: *Thus the sons of our leading University ... are requested to journey to Cambridge on the occasion of the completion of her third century, to listen to endless orations, themselves to be mute and to contribute absolutely nothing (unless it be money and parades) to her future welfare.*¹²



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¹² Jeremy Knowles, Professor of Chemistry and Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences 1991-2002: excerpts presented in the *Harvard Magazine* 1999/01 from the principal speeches and the historical reading at the centennial celebration of *Harvard Magazine* 7th November 1998