



The Expert Council on University Governance  
Via email: ExpertCouncilUniGov@education.gov.au

31 March 2025

Dear Ms Cilento and fellow Expert Council members

### **Submission to the Expert Council on University Governance – Strengthening University Governance**

Deakin University thanks the Council for this opportunity to engage with the critical issues being examined. As we stated in our submission (see **Appendix A**) to the recent parliamentary inquiry into areas of significant cross-over with this Council and its work:

*There can be no doubt that it is in the interests of Australian higher education, those communities we serve, and our nation, for discussions of governance approaches and standards to be at the forefront of ensuring our university sector is best positioned to succeed for Australia and Australians.*

However, also expressed in that submission, though we welcome any meaningful and informed discussion of university governance, we do so from a position at Deakin of governance systems that stand as best-practice and consistently benchmarked.

Having undertaken considerable benchmarking, and in recognition of the work undertaken by University Chancellor's Committee (UCC) governance guidelines, Deakin's governance is guided by three principles:

- **Responsibility:** an understanding of individual and collective responsibility, both for what, and to whom. As public institutions, university responsibility must include our own community – staff and students – the immediate communities in which we operate, and the wider nation we serve.
- **Transparency:** governance, like most decisions, must be transparent, readily accessible, understandable, and in turn defensible. It is not enough for decisions to be made; the how and why should be available.
- **Accountability:** whether executive or council/board level, where responsibility and transparency are present, a clear system of accountability must be present. We are public institutions, in receipt of significant volumes of public funding, and it is incumbent on us to engage with an accountability regime that recognises this.

In living up to these principles, our governance is measured, considered, and appropriate to the modern requirements and complexities of an institution of significant teaching and learning, as well as research depth and extensive industry engagement. Further, as a leading university in regional and rural

communities, our governance reflects the requirements to appreciate our unique position and responsibilities to these communities, while also reflecting our national and global footprint.

From this starting point, and these underlying principles, we provide the following comments on the specific questions posed.

**1. *Where do you think governance most needs to improve relative to your expectations of the role of Australian Universities?***

Australian universities are rightly expected to advance Australia's national life, address global challenges and support students and staff to achieve their full potential.

University governance provides the essential framework and underpinnings to fulfil these expectations.

The role of governance bodies is often unseen in its full breadth, but it is crucial to the wellbeing of Australian universities, staff and students.

There is a need to increase understanding across the sector and the community that Australian universities achieve high standards of governance and that this is integral to the success of Australian universities and their staff and students. Increasing this understanding will, in turn, help to reinforce and uphold high standards.

**2. *What governance principle(s) do you think could help resolve the issue(s) as you have identified?***

A firm governance focus on the success of students and staff helps to address the issue at 1.

At Deakin our University Council and Academic Board have a firm focus on the success and wellbeing of our students and staff and our contributions to our local and global communities. We do not shy away from scrutiny, and we take responsibility for rectifying areas where we fall short.

We stay true to our focus on students and staff through four practices.

First through the Council Charter, which all Council members agree to uphold when appointed, and our Academic Board Policy, which frames the work of our Academic Board. Both these frameworks provide for a focus on student and staff excellence and the highest standards of governance decision making for sustained success.

Second, the Council and the Academic Board pay close attention to staff and student satisfaction and engagement surveys. We take pride in Deakin's status as Victoria's leading university for student satisfaction and acknowledge the dedication and commitment of our staff in achieving this. We rank in the top five universities nationally for measures of teaching quality.

Third, we involve students and staff deeply in governance decision-making. Our elected student and staff members make a profound contribution to the work of the Council and the Academic Board. Additionally, the Council holds forums with students and employers of our students to hear about what the University is doing well and how we can improve. Our governance leaders seek out the views of staff members and our partner organisations at university and community events. We place importance on reporting back on how we have acted on feedback.

Fourth, the Council and the Academic Board place importance in paying tribute to the success of students and staff. Without seeking in any way to 'steal the limelight', both the Council and the Academic Board openly acclaim student and staff achievements. This occurs at graduation ceremonies and university and

community events. On these occasions members of our governance bodies come together to share students' and staff members' celebrations of their achievements.

These four measures are practical ways of increasing understanding of the interaction between good governance principles and the success of the University and students and staff.

**3. *Where possible, relate your comments to the key areas identified by the Education Ministers, and the Code of Governance Principles and Practices for Australia's Public Universities (linked below)***

The comments above and in our attached submission to the parliamentary inquiry, relate to key areas identified by the Education Ministers, specifically concerning governing body members' understanding of their roles and responsibilities, the balance between education, finance and risk perspectives in university governance, and the focus on student and staff success wellbeing.

Deakin Council adopted the Code of Governance Principles and Practices for Australia's Public Universities on 20 March 2024. A statement of compliance with the Code, setting out supporting evidence, is published on the [University Council website](#).

**4. *Other related or relevant matters to the governance of universities in Australia***

We are pleased to provide the attached document, which addresses other matters related to university governance, as directly reflecting the experience of Deakin. We would be pleased to provide further information as the Expert Council continues its work.

*Concluding Remarks*

Governance in a higher education institution, no matter which, may never be stagnant. We must be self-reflective, self-analytical, and open to informed critique, criticism, and suggestion. Deakin's approach, which speaks to external benchmarking and expertise, is a reflection of this very statement.

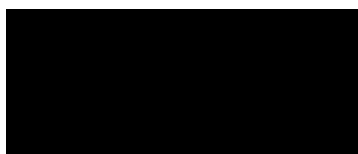
We welcome the continued opportunity to engage with the Expert Council in its work and share our learnings in service of continued service of the students, staff, communities, partners, and the nation, to which we are responsible.

Yours sincerely



Mr John Stanhope AM

**Chancellor**



Professor Iain Martin

**Vice-Chancellor**