



University of
**Southern
Queensland**

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The University of Southern Queensland (UniSQ) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Expert Council on University Governance.

Feedback on the in scope questions can be found below.

- **Where do you think governance most needs to improve relative to your expectations of the role of Australian Universities?**
 - Achieving the right balance between academic/education and business/corporate expertise. A better balance is needed to ensure decisions reflect both perspectives (Ref Education Ministers: Ten Priority Areas point 1).
 - Regional higher education institutions provide a unique mission to their regional communities, which can be summarised as the creation of human and social capital, and the achievement of employment, investment and income generating economic development priorities ¹ Given the inextricable link between regional universities and the regional communities and industries they work within, university governance bodies (and indeed executive) should prioritise and value the role of engagement within these communities. They should be, and be seen to be, partners in regional communities and industries, not just 'suppliers' of educational and research services. Regional knowledge, networks and engagement ability should therefore be reflected in the skills and experience matrix of governance bodies. (Ref Education Ministers 10 Priority Areas, priority area 3)
 - Transparency in financial reporting, risk management, and operational decision-making is crucial. The payroll compliance issues being experienced across Australian universities gives testament to this. (Ref: Education Ministers: Risks identified in the Australian Universities Accord point 2)
 - Generally, risk management is underdeveloped in Australian universities. The accurate capturing and assessment of potential risks, and the regular monitoring and review of them is a complex process, but a proactive approach to risk management would likely preclude the occurrence of significant issues in the higher education context. (Ref: Education Ministers: Risks identified in the Australian Universities Accord point 3)
 - Strategic oversight can sometimes get lost in the milieu of regulatory requirements but should always be at front of mind for university governing bodies.
- **What governance principle(s) do you think could help resolve the issue(s) as you have identified?**
 - One of the first formal sets of governance principles set out were developed by the UK Committee on Standards in Public Life, which was established in 1999 by the British

¹ Garlick, S. (2000). *Engaging universities and regions - knowledge contribution to regional economic development in Australia*. Retrieved from: <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv:21914>

Government, and chaired by Lord Nolan² The principles were a response to concern about increasingly negative public perceptions of the behaviours demonstrated by public office bearers, and focus on individual qualities and behaviours, which should be demonstrated by those undertaking governance roles. The principles have a preventative theme which focusses on anticipating potential issues and acting in a way which precludes their occurrence.

- This is further reinforced by the UK's Independent Commission on Good Governance in Public Services, which in 2004 developed six core principles for good governance across public services, which may be summarised as follows:
 - Focus on organisational purpose and outcomes.
 - Involve effective performance in clearly defined functions and roles.
 - Promote whole-of-organisation values and demonstration of these.
 - Centre on informed, transparent decisions and well-managed risk.
 - Include the development of the capacity of the governing body.
 - Involve stakeholder engagement and accountability.³

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

- Of the 10 Priority Areas outlined by Education Ministers, six of these (1,3,4,5,6,7) focus on the membership composition of governing bodies. Whilst we are generally in agreement with these priority areas, it is noted that each university is enabled by its own legislative instrument which dictates membership. A desktop review of the relevant instruments for Queensland's seven public universities shows significant variance in membership structures, as detailed in the table below:

| Institution | Official members | Governor-in-council appointed members | Elected members | Additional members appointed by Council | Total Members |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|---|---------------|
| University of Southern Queensland | 3 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 14 |
| University of Queensland | 3 | 8 | 8 | 3 | 22 |
| Griffith University | 2 | 7 | 5 | 4 | 18 |
| Queensland University of Technology | 3 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 15 |
| Central Queensland University | 3 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 15 |
| James Cook University | 2/3 | 8 | 10 | 1 | 21/22 |
| University of the Sunshine Coast | 3 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 18 |

**It is noted that the size of the governing body appears not to be a factor of the size of the institution (as measured by number of staff and students), for example University of the Sunshine Coast is smaller in size than the University of Southern Queensland but its governing body has more members.*

² Bew, P. (2015). The Committee on Standards in Public Life: twenty years of the Nolan principles 1995 – 2015. *The Political Quarterly*, 86(3), 411 – 418.

³ Independent Commission on Good Governance in Public Services. (2004). The good governance standard for public services. Retrieved from <http://www.cipfa.org/policy-and-guidance/reports/good-governance-standard-for-public-services>



- The significant variance in the total number of members means that it is more challenging for those universities with smaller sized governing bodies to achieve membership which includes balance of skills, abilities, experience and backgrounds such that the body can discharge its duties effectively and efficiently.
- The nature of both official member and elected member positions further impact on a governing body's ability to meet membership diversity goals.
- A broader analysis of the membership of governing bodies of universities across Australia would reveal even more significant differences between universities. For example, Charles Sturt University Council is able to determine its own membership size, within the parameter of 11-22 members, similarly Deakin University Council can be 13-21 members.
- Whilst university governing body membership remains so significantly varied in terms of both size and categories of membership, it will be challenging for many universities to achieve the goals of Priority Areas 1,3,4,5,6,7 as outlined by Education Ministers.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to the Expert Council on University Governance.

