



Australian
National
University

Submission to the Expert Council on University Governance

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Office of Commonwealth and Government Relations



The Australian National University

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INTRODUCTION

The Australian National University (ANU) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Expert Council on University Governance. ANU appreciates the focus of the Expert Council in strengthening governance frameworks within Australian universities.

Established nearly 80 years ago under the *Australian National University Act 1991 (Cth)* (ANU Act) to provide Australia with a national centre of research, learning and teaching, ANU has shaped and held conversations to build a better and more prosperous future. Today, ANU is ranked among the best universities in the world, with more than 10 subjects ranked in the top world subjects globally. More than 6,500 students live on campus, and our student cohort of 20,000 come from more than 100 nations. The University's more than 4,500 staff have skills and expertise that cover the range of requirements for a modern university and ANU is committed to ensuring that our standards for proper governance is aligned with those of the world's best, including in the provision of a safe study, research and work environment for the ANU community.

ANU welcomes all 10 Priority Areas as outlined by the Education Ministers and referenced in the Terms of Reference for the Expert Council on University Governance. ANU recognises the importance of these principles in ensuring that the University operates in a transparent, inclusive, and accountable manner. The principles, as well as the *Voluntary Code of Best Practice for the Governance of Australian Public Universities*, and the recently created *Code of Governance Principles and Practice for Australia's Public Universities*, are currently reflected in the requirements set for the University, through its founding legislation, the standards set by regulators and through the University's own approach to self-governance.

OVERVIEW

ANU is unique in the Australian higher education sector as the first and only national university. Beyond its founding Act, ANU is subject to an extensive range of Commonwealth and Australian Capital Territory legislation – more than 100 distinct legislative instruments with separate compliance obligations.

The University is subject to the general regulatory requirements of any higher education institution, as well as those of a Corporate Commonwealth Entity. ANU proactively engages with these obligations and related regulatory functions such as the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*, the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (ESOS Act), foreign interference and national security requirements, as well as work health and safety obligations under the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* and the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act). Key legislation is monitored through the Annual Governance Conformance Statement, which is endorsed by ANU Council.

As a Corporate Commonwealth Entity, the University's operations and governance are subject to significant and welcome scrutiny from Federal Parliament. With significant operations across the Australian Capital Territory, Australia and the world, ANU is also subject to an extensive range of Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation. The Australian National Audit Office, under the *Auditor-General Act 1997*, are invited participants in the University's Audit & Risk Management Committee Meetings and carry out performance audits on the University as they would for any other Commonwealth entity, such as the 2021 ANU Governance and Control Audit¹.

The University also has a well-developed set of legislation, internal policies, procedures and practice which are reviewed and tested regularly both by the ANU community and external stakeholders. More information on the University's approach to governance and compliance more generally can be found in our recent submission to the *Senate Standing Legislation Committee on Education and Employment Inquiry into the quality of governance at Australian higher education providers (Annex A)*.

COMPOSITION OF GOVERNING BODIES

ANU agrees that a university's governing body should be both representative but also "have the right expertise, including in the business of running universities." The Composition of ANU Council is prescribed in the ANU Act and it has one of the highest proportions of internal members in Australia, at 40%. This includes two elected student representatives, three elected academic representatives and an elected professional staff representative. In addition, the Chair of Academic Board is an observer/non-voting member of Council.

ANU Council also includes seven members who are nominated by the Nominations Committee and appointed by the Minister for Education. In making recommendations to the Minister, the Committee, as per its Charter, seeks to ensure that ANU Council maintains a balance of gender, appropriate representation of Indigenous Australians, a balance of members from across the States and Territories of Australia and relevant skills and experience including sufficient financial and commercial expertise. Finally, ANU Council also includes the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor and President of the University.

The diverse makeup of the University's Council, bringing together experienced non-executive members from across Australia and across industries, combined with elected internal members of varying levels of familiarity with Board operations, underscores the importance of training and the maintenance of clearly documented role descriptions. It is, however, a strength, bringing a diversity of views and experiences in the common goal of delivering what is best for the University.

New Council members and relevant governance staff are enrolled in the Australian Institute of Company Directors Foundations of University Governance Course which provides an excellent benchmark for incoming members on their roles with Council. All members are also provided with an internal induction provided by the Corporate Governance and Risk Office upon commencement as well as ongoing

¹ <https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/australian-national-university-governance-and-control-framework>.

opportunities for development through background briefings with university leadership and presentations by experts on important topics.

The Nominations Committee of Council maintains a regularly updated Skills Matrix, ensuring that members retain the skills and expertise distribution required of University legislation and good governance standards. With a membership of elected and non-elected members, often serving non-concurrent terms of differing lengths, this is a significant and ever evolving challenge.

UNIVERSITY STRATEGY, POLICIES AND PERFORMANCE

ANU supports the emphasis that the Minister's Priority Areas places on the need to consult and engage broadly in the development of University strategy, policies and performance.

The University's strategy and performance as an institution are laid out in the annual Corporate Plan 2025-2028.² This document, a requirement of the PGPA Act, is submitted to the Commonwealth Ministers of Finance and Education and is publicly available on the University's website. The Corporate Plan outlines the University's key activities and performance indicators (KPIs), ensuring transparency and accountability in the University's operations over the Corporate Plan's period.

The ANU Policy Governance Framework, which outlines how ANU policies, procedures, standards and guidelines are developed and reviewed, provides that consultation is at the centre of policy development. The University ensures that all stakeholders have a voice in the development of these policies, as seen in 2024, when ANU undertook one of its largest-ever policy consultation exercises, receiving over 900 submissions to review the Socially Responsible Investment policy. This exercise demonstrates the University's commitment to broad engagement with the University community.

The University's Annual Report, which is also a requirement of the PGPA Act, outlines its activities over the reporting period and provides an assessment of the University's progress towards the KPIs listed in the Corporate Plan. This document is submitted in April of each year to the Minister for Education and is tabled in Parliament, at which point it is made publicly available on the Australian Government's Transparency Portal.

SENIOR STAFF REMUNERATION AND GOVERNANCE

ANU acknowledges the importance of setting senior staff remuneration in a rigorous, transparent, and equitable manner. The University's approach is clearly outlined in the Remuneration – University Executive policy³, which includes comprehensive benchmarking against comparative organisations and industry data to ensure fair and competitive compensation.

The Remuneration Committee of Council, comprising three external members, including the Chancellor, Pro-Chancellor, and Chair of the Finance Committee, ensures that senior executive remuneration is monitored and reviewed regularly. Furthermore, the remuneration of Senior Executives is publicly

² <https://www.anu.edu.au/about/strategic-planning/anu-corporate-plan-2025-2028>.

³ https://policies.anu.edu.au/ppl/document/ANUP_6936566.

reported in the University's Financial Statements, which are audited by the Australian National Audit Office and tabled in Parliament, reflecting the University's commitment to transparency.

COMMITMENT TO STUDENT AND STAFF SAFETY

With a diverse community of students and staff, ANU is steadfast in its commitment to upholding the highest standards of safety and wellbeing for our community. ANU was the first Australian University to have a Council subcommittee dedicated to monitoring and advising Council on matters concerning the safety and wellbeing of students, reflecting the University's alignment with Australian Universities Accord key themes and priorities. The Student Safety and Wellbeing Committee of Council was established in 2022.

The University's Residential Experience Division, alongside the University Experience Division and ANU Security, provides a safe environment for the over 6,500 students living on campus. ANU delivers comprehensive training, counselling, security, and 24-hour on-call support to address the unique safety needs of the residential community. This is also supported by the ANU OK App which is the official safety and wellbeing APP for the ANU community.

Furthermore, the University's compliance with the *Residential Tenancies Act 1997* (ACT), and collaboration with the ACT Government and ACT Human Rights Commission, ensures that ANU meets legal obligations while supporting student safety. ANU is also fully compliant with Work Health and Safety (WHS) legislation across multiple jurisdictions and is committed to reporting progress towards key WHS KPIs annually through Council.

EMPLOYER OF CHOICE AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

ANU is dedicated to being an employer of choice and fully supports the Minister's commitment to ensuring that universities are supportive workplaces. The University takes its obligations under the *Fair Work Act 2009* seriously, and the ANU Enterprise Agreement 2023-2026 ensures that staff are fairly compensated. The University has pro-actively self-reported and is currently working through rectifying any underpayments it has identified. It is working with the Fair Work Ombudsman to ensure it fully meets its responsibilities as an employer.

The University is committed to ensuring that its workforce reflects the diversity of the Australian community. In line with the University's Equal Opportunity policy, ANU aims to be an inclusive workplace that mirrors the diversity of our student body and society at large.

In summary, ANU supports the work of the Expert Council on University Governance and appreciates the opportunity to provide input. The University believes that further strengthening transparency, expertise, and inclusivity within governance structures will help Australian universities meet the challenges of the future while remaining accountable to the communities they serve.

For more detailed information on the University's governance approach, please refer to Annex A - Senate Standing Legislation Committee on Education and Employment Inquiry into the Quality of Governance at Australian Higher Education Providers – ANU Submission.

The University looks forward to engaging further with the Expert Council and contributing to the ongoing dialogue on governance improvement in Australian universities.