

9 April 2025

The Expert Council on University Governance  
Council Secretariat  
Via email: [ExpertCouncilUniGov@education.gov.au](mailto:ExpertCouncilUniGov@education.gov.au)

Dear Expert Council members

### **Strengthening University Governance: Expert Council on University Governance**

Thank you for your correspondence dated 7 March 2025 inviting Flinders University to contribute to the important work of the Expert Council on University Governance. Flinders University believes that quality governance is critical to ensuring universities are effective in meeting the needs of students and our communities.

As referenced in Expert Council's review scope, Education Ministers identified the following key governance risks through the Australian Universities Accord process:

- *'Ensuring that universities are good employers providing a supportive workplace – and, importantly, a workplace where staff can have confidence that they will not be underpaid for the important work they do.'*
- *'Making sure governing bodies have the right expertise, including in the business of running universities.'*
- *'Making sure our universities are safe for students and staff.'*

Our submission highlights the important work Flinders does in ensuring our approach to these matters reflects the highest standards in governance.

#### About Flinders University

Flinders University was established in South Australia in 1966. It has a student cohort of around 26,000 and employs around 5,000 staff. The University's main campus is located at Bedford Park in the southern suburbs of Adelaide with two further metro campuses located in the Adelaide CBD and at the Tonsley Innovation District. Our South Australian regional campuses are in Murray Bridge, Mount Gambier, Barossa Valley, Renmark and Victor Harbor, and our Northern Territory campuses are in Casuarina, the Royal Darwin Hospital, Nhulunbuy, Katherine, Tennant Creek, and Alice Springs.

We offer more than 500 undergraduate, postgraduate and research degrees.

#### Governance at Flinders

Under our founding legislation, the *Flinders University Act 1966* (SA), the Flinders University Council is established as the governing body of the University. The Council's powers, authorities, duties and responsibilities as the University's governing body are derived from the Act.

Attached is a copy of our recent submission to the Senate's Education and Employment Legislation Committee inquiry: *'Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers,'* as it may be of interest to the Expert Council. This submission (which is in the public domain) highlights our governance structure, our compliance with Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency requirements, and our robust financial management and risk oversight frameworks.

#### Workplace matters

As mentioned, the Accord process had a strong focus on universities' compliance with relevant workplace laws in terms of the correct payment of staff wages. Flinders has robust, proactive systems in place to ensure our compliance with workplace laws. We actively seek to maintain Flinders' reputation as an employer of choice at our South Australian and Northern Territory campuses. No 'wage theft' findings have been made against Flinders University.

#### Council expertise

Governing bodies having the appropriate expertise was another key issue highlighted through the Accord process. Our Act prescribes the composition of our Council, including that it must have representation from staff, students, and external members with commercial and financial management expertise.

In line with contemporary governance practices, Flinders also maintains a skills matrix for its Council to ensure that its composition guarantees adequate skills, expertise and diversity for a university of our size and complexity. Our Council is supported in its governance through several specialised sub-committees, including an Audit and Risk Committee, a Finance and Investment Committee and an Academic Senate, which collectively monitor the University's risk and financial sustainability, and delivery of our education and research quality.

#### Student and staff safety

Regarding the critical issue of student and staff safety, we take a proactive approach to ensuring our campuses are safe spaces for learning and working. We have a suite of resources available to students and staff, including health and wellbeing programs, our student-led 'Be a Better Human' campaign, counselling services, and numerous training programs.

Our multi-award-winning student-led 'Be a Better Human' campaign has been implemented across dozens of Australian universities to provide education and tools to support people to navigate consent, sexual harassment, sexual assault, bystander education and respectful relationships. This initiative was designed by a group of Flinders students to reflect our campus culture centring on the themes of consent, respect and empathy.

We would be happy to provide further information to the Expert Council on any matters raised through this consultation process. We look forward to further opportunities to contribute to critical conversations around university governance in Australia.

Yours sincerely



John Hood  
Chancellor

3 March 2025

Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee  
Committee Secretary  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
*Sent via:* electronic submission

### **Senate Inquiry - Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers**

Dear Committee Members

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this important inquiry. Quality governance is foundational in ensuring that our universities are effective in meeting the needs of students and our communities.

#### About Flinders University

Flinders University was established in South Australia in 1966. It has a student cohort of around 26,000 and employs around 5,000 staff. The University's main campus is located at Bedford Park in the southern suburbs of Adelaide with two further metro campuses located in the Adelaide CBD and at the Tonsley Innovation District. Our South Australian regional campuses are in Murray Bridge, Mount Gambier, Barossa Valley, Renmark and Victor Harbor, and our Northern Territory campuses are located in Casuarina, the Royal Darwin Hospital, Nhulunbuy, Katherine, Tennant Creek, and Alice Springs.

The University offers more than 500 undergraduate, postgraduate and research degrees.

Under our founding legislation, the *Flinders University Act 1966* (SA), the Flinders University Council is established as the governing body of the university. The Council's powers, authorities, duties and responsibilities as the University's governing body are derived from the Act. The responsibilities of Council include the appointment of the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and new Council members, approving the strategic direction and annual budgets of the University, and oversight and monitoring of the performance of the University.

The Act also prescribes the composition of our Council, including that it must have representation from staff, students, and external members with commercial and financial management expertise. In line with contemporary governance practices, Flinders also maintains a skills matrix for its Council to ensure that its composition guarantees adequate skills, expertise and diversity for a university of our size and complexity. Our Council is supported in its governance through several specialised sub-committees, including an Audit and Risk Committee and a Finance and Investment Committee, which collectively monitor the University's risk and financial sustainability.

We are also subject to various State and Federal legislation that apply to our operations. Our comments in this submission focus in the main on the regulatory framework under the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), as this agency is responsible for national quality assurance and regulation of the higher education sector and the subject of the Committee's inquiry.

### TEQSA and the Higher Education Standards Framework

The Higher Education Standards Framework sets out minimum expectations for higher education providers to maintain their registration. Amongst these Standards, Domain 6 addresses the governance of higher education providers. This Domain requires higher education providers to demonstrate effective governance to TEQSA while remaining sufficiently flexible to accommodate the specific circumstances of individual providers, such as the requirements of their governing legislation, their size, the nature and complexity of their operations, their unique organisational culture, and their risk profile.

Each time a higher education provider seeks re-registration with TEQSA, it is scrutinised through a comprehensive audit process and required to demonstrate that it meets all the Higher Education Standards, including that its governance arrangements are effective, that it is financially sustainable, that it manages its risks, and that it complies with all relevant laws. Flinders University, through our recent re-registration process, was granted registration by TEQSA for the maximum period of seven years with no conditions pertaining to our registration.

This re-registration process is supplemented by a requirement for higher education providers to undergo a periodic, independent review of their governance arrangements. These reviews bring external expertise to the providers' governance arrangements. Most states also require their universities to participate in their State Government audit processes, which annually examine the adequacy of their internal controls relating to expenditure, risk management and conflicts of interest. In the case of Flinders University, we participate in an annual audit overseen by the Audit Office of South Australia.

These arrangements have been effective in ensuring strong corporate governance at Flinders. In Flinders' experience, TEQSA's re-registration process has been thorough and robust, and it is our view that it has the necessary powers and authority to ensure Flinders is meeting its responsibilities under the Standards.

Any change to the Higher Education Threshold Standards, or TEQSA's powers to perform its role, should be carefully considered and weighed against the administrative compliance burden placed on universities. This can be most effectively achieved through consultation with stakeholders.

Flinders acknowledges TEQSA's role in ensuring that higher education providers have appropriate governance arrangements in place to identify and ensure their compliance with workplace laws. Providers are required to demonstrate this to TEQSA during their registration process. However, it should be acknowledged that TEQSA is just one of several regulators which have responsibility for monitoring and enforcing compliance with workplace laws, including state workplace safety regulators and the Fair Work Ombudsman. There have been no wage theft underpayment findings against Flinders, and we proactively monitor and audit our systems to ensure our compliance with employment laws.

### Financial and risk management

Flinders operates within a robust financial management control environment which provides assurance regarding the reliability and relevance of its financial reporting. Furthermore, Flinders operates a mature risk and legislative compliance program, which includes both internal and external audits, overseen by

an Audit and Risk Committee with external representation by risk and compliance professionals. This program addresses compliance with all applicable laws and regulations. Some key elements of the internal control environment at Flinders are described below.

The University's annual financial statements are prepared in accordance with Australian accounting standards, Commonwealth Department of Education Guidelines, the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012* (Cth) and South Australian State Government accounting requirements and State Treasurer's Instructions. These statements are also published annually on our website and tabled in the South Australian Parliament.

Further, Flinders also has defined organisational values, a code of conduct, and a comprehensive policy and procedure framework that outlines the operational guidance and responsibility for staff, which include but are not limited to:

- Financial and non-financial information monitoring and reporting.
- Information management.
- Delegations of authority and organisational structure.
- Training and professional development for staff.
- Regular risk management assessments.
- Information system operation, segregation of duties and security controls.
- Payment processing and approvals.
- Comprehensive risk management policies, procedures and guidelines.

As part of our commitment to best practices corporate governance, Flinders also maintains an annual internal audit program supported by independent auditors (currently Ernst & Young). Our Internal Audit plan is a risk-based plan and considers key areas of organisational risk including revenue, assets, payroll, security, and expenditure. The draft plan is approved by the Audit and Risk Committee of Council which is attended by representatives of both our internal and external auditors, being Ernst & Young and the Auditor-General's office, respectively. Our annual financial statements are subject to an external audit by the Audit Office of South Australia under the *Public Finance and Audit Act (1987)* SA.

Flinders University is committed to ensuring that our organisation has the highest standards of governance and is compliant with legislative requirements while delivering outstanding education and research for students and the communities we exist to serve. We look forward to working collaboratively with stakeholders to ensure that student and community needs are met by the tertiary education sector.

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide a submission to this important inquiry and are happy to provide any further information the Committee may require.

With kind regards  
Yours sincerely



**John Hood**  
**Chancellor**