



[REDACTED]

ISANA International Education Association Inc.

Emails: [REDACTED]

Ph: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Submission on the proposed *University Governance Principles and Recommendations*

As the peak body for dedicated professional members who work at educational institutions and organisations in various roles covering international student services, advocacy, teaching and policy development, ISANA International Education Association Inc. (ISANA) welcomes the opportunity extended by the Expert Council on University Governance (Council) to lodge a submission for review on the proposed *University Governance Principles and Recommendations* to be submitted by the Council to the Education Ministers.

The governance of Australian universities is undergoing significant reforms to enhance diversity, accountability, and expertise in decision-making. As international education continues to be a vital component of the higher education sector, it is imperative that university councils include representatives with deep knowledge and experience in this field. Members of ISANA serve as ideal candidates for such representation due to their expertise in international student affairs, policy development, and the broader international education landscape.

Key areas outlined by the Ministers as risks in the Australian Universities Accord

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.

ISANA notes in regard to staff underpayment, it was via already established policies and procedures as well as the highlighting of this issue by Unions and TEQSA that changes have been made to ameliorate this issue recurring and implementing corrective actions. Continuing sufficient funding of existing regulatory bodies to monitor and enforce University processes and reporting is essential.

Fair employment conditions for students employed on a student contract or undertaking *voluntary* work which would otherwise be remunerated, must be addressed.

ISANA also believes further transparency on staff payments including senior staff and governing bodies remuneration and appropriateness, will add to confidence levels.

Making sure governing bodies have the right expertise, including in the business of running universities.

International education is one of Australia's largest service export industries, contributing billions of dollars annually to the economy whilst enriching campuses with cultural diversity and global perspectives and building pathways on which soft diplomacy is built. University governing bodies must include industry specialists who understand the complexities of international student recruitment, retention, and welfare to ensure the sector remains competitive and sustainable. Without informed representation, universities risk making decisions that could negatively impact international student experiences, institutional reputation, and financial stability.

ISANA council and members are well placed to create a comprehensive environment for international education development from the services and student experience /welfare perspectives, not just student recruitment perspectives.

Governing bodies should be required to provide additional training for student representatives to allow them to understand the 'language' and 'assumptions' made and used; how to time manage; and how to ensure they feel equal to others on the committee which will in turn give them the confidence to raise appropriate concerns and items, e.g. public speaking, media training and self-empowerment.

Making sure our universities are safe for students and staff.

ISANA members are dedicated professionals with extensive experience in student support services, cultural integration, and policy advocacy. They possess first-hand knowledge of the challenges international students face, including accommodation, employment rights, mental health support, and academic success. By serving on or being an essential reference point for university councils, ISANA members can ensure that policies are developed with a student-centred approach, fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment.

All governing bodies should remind each level of government that the sharing and use of misinformation about international students, directly impacts each student within the communities in which they live, work and study.

Other Key areas

A Code of Governance Principles and Practice for Australia's Public Universities

Composition of governing bodies – suggest that one or more members has experience in international business and the international student industry.

Re 5.1 there should be a nomination of appointment process outside of the governing body, if not there is a risk that 'like' appoints 'like'.

6.5 re public conflict of interest annual updates of the governing body register – it would not be onerous to ensure any declarations are updated immediately for transparency.

7.2 the impact on appointed student's academic study needs to be acknowledged and supported. This is especially important for international students who must maintain a full-time study load as any failed grades due to the impact of workloads associated with the governing body role can have a devastating financial impact.

8.1 (a) the assessment of performance should include submissions from non-committee members.

9.2 does this mean that this proposed Code is optional for University's to adopt, and if not, adopted, will they suffer adverse consequences?

10.1 the ability to *access any university documents* – how is this equitable for other University staff and does this negate FOI requests and withholding of sensitive information?

11.1 and 12.1 (b) if a situation arises that a board member or the Chancellor or Deputy Chancellor be removed from their position, would it not follow that there should be further action taken including financial penalties, outside of the employment of contract which might allow them to still access a payout clause?

Other considerations from ISANA

ISANA's In-Depth Understanding of Policy and Compliance

The international education sector operates within a complex regulatory framework, including the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act, National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students, and visa regulations. ISANA members are well-versed in these policies and can provide valuable insights to university councils on maintaining compliance, mitigating risk, and upholding Australia's reputation as a premier study destination.

Enhancing Institutional Competitiveness and Global Engagement

To maintain global competitiveness, universities must continuously adapt to emerging trends in international education, including transnational partnerships, offshore programs, and evolving student expectations. ISANA members bring industry expertise

and a network of global connections that can guide universities in strengthening their international engagement strategies, ensuring long-term sustainability and growth.

Promoting Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

University councils are tasked with ensuring governance structures reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. Given that international students make up a significant proportion of the university population, their needs and perspectives must be adequately represented. ISANA members, who work closely with diverse student cohort are well-equipped to advocate for equitable policies that enhance student belonging, participation, and academic success.

Supporting Workforce Development and Post-Study Opportunities

One of the critical concerns in international education is the transition from study to employment. Many ISANA members work on programs that connect students with career pathways, internships, and post-study work opportunities. Their presence on university councils ensures that employment strategies are designed to support both domestic and international graduates, aligning with national workforce needs and immigration policies.

Addressing Key Risks in University Governance

ISANA members, with their deep understanding of student needs and sector best practices, can help mitigate risks by:

- Advocating for fair and equitable student employment at educational institutions
- Providing governance expertise in managing student welfare risks, ensuring compliance with safeguarding policies.
- Offering strategic insights on enhancing institutional resilience in the face of geopolitical shifts and enrolment fluctuations.

As universities navigate an increasingly complex and competitive global education landscape, it is essential that governing bodies include experts who can drive informed, student-focused decision-making. ISANA members, with their specialized knowledge in international education policy, student welfare, and institutional strategy, are uniquely positioned to contribute to university councils. Their inclusion would strengthen governance, improve student experiences, and ensure that Australian universities remain leaders in the international education sector.

By appointing an ISANA representative, universities can benefit from an evidence-based approach to policy development and strategic planning, ultimately fostering a more inclusive, sustainable, and globally engaged higher education sector.

Final comments

ISANA members are concerned by the impact on governing bodies and staff engaged in the application of policies and provision of student support services, by the lack of

certainty and consistency in the language used by those external to Universities when discussing Universities; and the assurances of ongoing funding to allow Universities to engage in world-class research, deliver a superior student experience and instil the highest confidence in and value for, an award conferred by an Australian university.

The increasing amount of compliance requirements and associated workload necessary to report to an ever growing number of disparate bodies that Universities are obliged to report to has to be acknowledged and addressed.

And lastly, it is important that findings, improvements and best practice that arise from this submission on University Governance feed back into all sectors of the education industry, both public and private.
