



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
SYDNEY

**David Thodey AO**  
Chancellor

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7 April 2025

[REDACTED]  
Council Secretariat  
Expert Council on University Governance

By email: [ExpertCouncilUniGov@education.gov.au](mailto:ExpertCouncilUniGov@education.gov.au)

Dear [REDACTED]

**Invitation to submit to the Expert Council on University Governance**

Thank you for your email of 7 March 2025, inviting feedback on where governance of Australia's universities most needs to improve, relative to the University of Sydney's expectations of the role of Australian universities, and the principles that could help resolve these issues.

The University of Sydney previously participated in the University Chancellors' Council (UCC) discussions that resulted in the UCC recommending the creation of an expert council dedicated to the continuous improvement of university governance. That proposal was modelled on the [Australian Stock Exchange's independent Corporate Governance Council](#), which has significantly enhanced governance across ASX-listed companies for over twenty years.

The University and our governing body, [the Senate](#), welcomed the Education Ministers' decision in April 2024 to establish an Expert Council on University Governance. We also welcomed the announcement by the Federal Education Minister in January 2025 of the first members of the Council and its terms of reference. We are eager to engage with the inaugural Council as it works to strengthen the governance of Australia's universities.

As Australia's first university (founded in 1850) we have a proud legacy of leadership in knowledge generation, preservation and its translation for the benefit of New South Wales, Australia and the world. Today, we serve over 70,000 students, employ more than 10,000 full-time equivalent staff and operate campuses, teaching and research facilities, accommodation and other support services across metropolitan Sydney, regional NSW, interstate and overseas. Independent modelling demonstrates that in 2023 alone, our education, research and related activities contributed \$7.8 billion to the economy and generated over 40,000 full-time equivalent jobs.

This impact and legacy would not be possible without robust, effective and streamlined governance. Our governance framework is designed to maximise the quality of our teaching, scholarship and research. The framework underpins compliance with applicable laws, provides transparency and accountability, and demonstrates our commitment to ongoing improvement whenever governance or compliance weaknesses are identified.

We provided a detailed overview of our current approach to governance and legislative compliance in our recent [submission](#) to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee's inquiry into the quality of governance at Australian higher education providers.

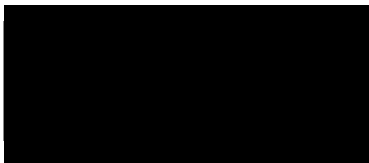
As we stated in that submission:

- 'The Parliament and the Australian community should rightly have high expectations of public universities, and the University of Sydney does not shy away from increased scrutiny and transparency of our structure, processes, and outcomes' and,
- 'The Senate and University leadership are committed to delivering transformational education for our students, enabling excellent research that tackles the greatest challenges, and ensuring that our diverse community can thrive in a better place to work, and a place that works better. Good governance is the fundamental enabler of these outcomes and a duty we undertake with great diligence and respect.'

We trust the attached response to your questions, along with the content of our submission to the SEELC inquiry, will be helpful.

We look forward to engaging with the Expert Council as it develops its first set of draft *University Governance Principles and Recommendations* for consideration by Education Ministers.

Yours sincerely,



**David Thodey AO**  
Chancellor  
University of Sydney



**Mark Scott AO**  
Vice-Chancellor and President  
University of Sydney

**Attachment**    The University of Sydney, submission to Expert Council on University Governance, April 2025

## The University of Sydney submission to the Expert Council on University Governance's initial request for feedback and information, April 2025

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### Council Secretariat consultation questions

- **Where do you think governance most needs to improve relative to your expectations of the role of Australian Universities?**
- **What governance principle(s) do you think could help resolve the issue(s) as you have identified?**

*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.*

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

### The role of Australian universities

The University of Sydney's role, [as legislated by the Parliament of NSW](#), is to promote scholarship, research, free inquiry, the interaction of research and teaching, and academic excellence for the benefit of the people of NSW.

The University's [Charter of Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom 2020](#) elaborates on our core mission and values, including promoting and supporting:

- the free, and responsible pursuit of knowledge through research in accordance with the highest ethical, professional and legal standards
- the dissemination of the outcomes of research, in education, as publications and creative works, and in public discourse, and
- the principled and informed discussion and debate of all aspects of knowledge and culture.

The role of Australian universities as independent, self-governing and accrediting educational institutions is also described in the Objects clause of the [Higher Education Support Act 2003 \(Cth\)](#) and in Part B of the [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2021 \(Cth\)](#).

Both the *HESA* and the *Threshold Standards* explicitly require Australian universities to uphold and protect freedom of speech and academic freedom. They recognise that Australia's public universities are established under laws of the Commonwealth, the states and territories that empower their universities to achieve their objectives as autonomous institutions with governing bodies that are responsible for their overall performance and ongoing independence.

Part 6 and Part B1.3 of the *Threshold Standards* set the core governance standards and principles that Australian universities must meet, and continue to satisfy, for registration with the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) to operate as an *Institute of Higher Education* under the *Australian University* provider category. In practice, most of the other threshold standards in Part 6 (covering student participation and attainment; learning environment; teaching; research and research training; institutional quality assurance; representation, information and information management) are also relevant to university governance, as their governing bodies are required to ensure institutional compliance with all of the standards.

Australia's public universities are not-for-profit charitable institutions, registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). As such, they are also required to meet the [ACNC's governance and reporting standards](#) for charities to gain and retain registration as a charity, and to be eligible for endorsement by the ATO to receive tax deductible gifts from Australian taxpayers.

As not-for-profit entities, Australian universities must also adhere to best practice governance and accounting standards that apply to such organisations in Australia. These include the [NFP Governance Principles](#) and NFP Accounting Standards developed, published and updated periodically by the Australian Institute of Company Directors and the Australian Government's Accounting Standards Board.

Additionally, the University of Sydney was a founding signatory of the [Magna Charta Universitatum in 1988](#). In 2021, we [reaffirmed our commitment](#) to that principles-based statement of the fundamental purpose, values and responsibilities of universities. As the Magna Charta asserts, *'to fulfil their potential, universities require a reliable social contract with civil society, one which supports pursuit of the highest possible quality of academic work, with full respect for institutional autonomy.'*

Similarly, in 2013, the University indirectly endorsed the [Hefei Statement on the Ten Characteristics of Contemporary Research Universities](#), released jointly by the Association of American Universities (AAU), the League of European Research Universities (LERU), the Group of Eight (Go8) and the China 9 League (C9). That statement included the following characteristics of research-intensive universities relevant to the Expert Council's work:

- A tolerance, recognition and welcoming of competing views, perspectives, frameworks and positions as being necessary to support progress, along with a commitment to civil debate and discussion to advance understanding and produce new knowledge and technologies.
- The right to set their own priorities, on academic grounds, for what and how they will teach and research based on their mission, their strategic development plans, and their assessment of society's current and future needs...
- An open and transparent set of governance arrangements, which protect and support a continuing commitment to the characteristics that define and sustain world-class research universities, and, at the same time, assure that the institutions meet their public responsibilities.

Today, Australia's universities operate in an increasingly complex and ever-changing regulatory environment. Our recent submission to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee (SEELC) highlighted that our Legislative Compliance Register currently records 331 instruments and associated documents, with 157 imposing significant compliance burdens – a 10 per cent increase over the last two years. Moreover, universities and their governing bodies must navigate tensions inherent in issues: where the law may not be clear or in conflict; where multiple regulators with overlapping powers and competing expectations are operating; and where community views are strongly held and often polarised.

For example, as noted above, universities are required by various laws to protect and uphold freedom of speech and academic freedom (including the right to peaceful protest) while also ensuring the physical and psychological safety of their communities. Additionally, the sector's approach to sexual misconduct is regulated by TEQSA, the National Student Ombudsman and the Commonwealth Department of Education (pending legislation). Furthermore, universities must comply with an increasingly complex suite of national security and foreign interference laws and guidelines involving multiple government agencies, while also responding to the changing demands and expectations of foreign governments and other potential international funders of research.

In this context, our approach to governance is underpinned by principles including:

- **Representation, skills and expertise:** ensuring that membership of our Senate and its committees is well-balanced, has an appropriate mix of skills and expertise and reflects the communities the University serves.
- **Excellence:** a commitment to meet or exceed the voluntary best practice governance standards for Australian universities and charitable NFPs as they evolve.
- **Legal and regulatory compliance:** a commitment to achieving legislative compliance and assurance of regulatory compliance through ongoing monitoring of university performance, and updating of our governance processes and policies.
- **Risk management:** a commitment to a robust and structured approach and process for identifying, assessing and managing risks.

- **Constant improvement and transparency:** subjecting our governance framework to regular independent review and transparent public reporting.
- **Consultation and engagement:** listening to, and taking seriously, criticisms and concerns raised about our governance structure and processes.
- **Benchmarking:** with comparable institutions in Australia and overseas to compare and identify leading approaches and implement changes as appropriate.
- **Action:** ensuring that we take appropriate steps in response to feedback or when our governance processes identify gaps or other weaknesses.
- **Accountability:** to the people of NSW through the Parliament of NSW, through the requirements of the University's enabling Act and other State and Commonwealth legislation, and through an ongoing program of internal and external audit, reporting and response.

### **University governance areas most in need of improvement**

We stressed our commitment to continually improving our governance framework and approach when weaknesses are identified in our [submission](#) to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee's (SEELC) inquiry into the quality of governance at Australian higher education providers.

The [July 2023 Interim Report of the Australian Universities Accord](#) recommended five priorities for immediate government action, all of which were accepted by the Federal Minister for Education. The fifth recommendation was that the Australian Government should:

**'Through National Cabinet, immediately engage with state and territory governments and universities to improve university governance, particularly focusing on:**

- universities being good employers
- student and staff safety
- membership of governing bodies, including ensuring additional involvement of people with expertise in the business of universities.

*Australian governments should work together to strengthen university governing boards by rebalancing their composition to put greater emphasis on higher education expertise. Governing bodies must as a priority do more to improve student and staff wellbeing and become exemplary employers.*

**Source: Australian Universities Accord, Interim Report, July 2023, p.13**

The Accord Panel made its recommendations in response to evidence and feedback received from stakeholders in the first six months of its review. It emphasised that Australia's universities needed to improve their governance to ensure they are:

- consistently and reliably meeting their workplace obligations,
- safe places to work and study for staff and students, and
- have governing bodies whose members reflect the diversity of the University's community and who have significant higher education knowledge, experience and expertise.

Below, we provide examples of actions the University has taken both before and since July 2023 to enhance its governance framework, processes and approach.

These efforts specifically address the three key areas of concern identified by the Australian Universities Accord, as well as the [10 priority areas for action to strengthen university governance](#) agreed upon by Education Ministers in April 2024.

These priorities have since been incorporated into UCC's revised voluntary [Code of Governance Principles and Practices for Australia's Public Universities](#) released in December 2024.

## *Universities as good employers*

### Issues raised by the Accord Interim Report

- **Staff underpayments**. The report found that reported occurrences of staff underpayment by universities are damaging public confidence, with 11 universities under investigation by the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO) at that time. The Accord Panel concluded that causes included poor governance and oversight, lack of central HR functions and lack of investment in workforce system architecture.
- **Psychosocial stress**. Submissions to the Accord had raised concerns around psychosocial stress in some university workplaces.
- **Poor workforce arrangements and casualisation**. Concerns were raised in submissions that rigid workload arrangements (set ratios of teaching, research etc) and casualisation are limiting workforce efficacy and contributing to precarious employment conditions for academic and professional staff.
- **Increased professional development needed**. To ensure academics are adequately prepared for all aspects of their roles.

### Accord Interim Report recommendations / considerations

- **Wage underpayments**. Ensuring universities develop appropriate governance frameworks to avoid underpayments of staff.
- **Revised guidance** on oversight and governance of workforce arrangements and employment issues e.g., through a revised voluntary Governance Code of Conduct.
- **Nationally consistent and transparent reporting on universities' workforce profiles**. Consistent public reporting by universities against standard definitions, including casual staff, contractors and fixed-term staff to increase transparency and confidence.

### The University of Sydney's response to date

**Governance**. The Senate People and Culture Committee (PCC) monitors and advises Senate on employment matters including: workplace relations, University culture and values; the attraction, development and retention of academic and professional staff; remuneration and reward; diversity and inclusion; and performance and development of senior executive. The Chair is a Senate Fellow with extensive higher education teaching, research and management expertise and experience.

**Governance of underpayment remediation and prevention**. A control board has been established with the Provost and Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, and the Vice-President Operations as executive sponsors. The Control Board reports regularly to Senate, through University Executive and Senate PCC.

**Wage underpayments**. The University self-disclosed the risk of staff underpayments to the Fair Work Ombudsman in 2020. Since then, the University has been working to identify past incorrect payments and remediate affected staff. As of 4 April 2025, the University has made remediation payments to more than 14,600 current and former professional and academic staff. Remediation has been completed for confirmed underpayments of current and former professional staff.

We are currently progressing a detailed historical review of past payments for casual academic staff. Alongside this historical review and remediation, the University has introduced standardised systems, processes and controls to help ensure we pay our people correctly and meet our recordkeeping obligations, now and in the future.



The University is continuing to keep the Fair Work Ombudsman informed about the progress of the review and entered into an Enforceable Undertaking on 10 December 2024. This agreement outlines the work undertaken to date and the University's commitment to ensure ongoing compliance with workplace laws.

As part of this agreement, the University has committed to a series of obligations including finalising its casual academic review, regular reporting and commissioning an independent audit of employee entitlements. In March 2025, the University provided the Fair Work Ombudsman with a Draft Project Framework for completion of the casual academic review, a monthly report on the progress of the casual academic review, a quarterly report on complaints and requests for review, and an updated schedule of employees covered by the review.

**Workforce arrangements and casualisation.** The University's [2023-2026 Enterprise Agreement](#) took significant steps to address key concerns raised by the Accord in these areas by providing sector-leading pay and conditions and taking steps to reduce casualisation in the workforce. The current EA includes a package to support high-quality research, excellent teaching, provide more diverse career advancement paths for academic colleagues, ensure workload allocations are fair and equitable, and reduce casualisation. Enhanced entitlements are supporting the University's aspirations to be a better and more inclusive place to work, including: significant enhancement of paid leave entitlements; steps to ensure fair and manageable professional staff workloads; expanded entitlement to flexible work arrangements; steps to maintain a work-life balance; improved workplace conditions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff; ensuring a safe and welcoming workplace; mental health training and support; and recognising the lived experience of staff with disability.

A key focus of the current EA is to reduce levels of casualisation, which includes commitments to reduce our reliance upon casual academic staff and investment in continuing staff including:

- taking all reasonable steps to achieve a 20 per cent reduction in the proportion of the casual academic workforce
- an increase in roles for continuing staff by increasing continuing academic positions through a funding commitment and advertising 330 new continuing academic positions
- a commitment that 25 per cent of the new education focused positions created are designated to be filled by long-term casual and fixed-term staff and that 50 per cent of the new teaching and research positions will be designated to be filled by existing eligible staff.

In addition, the University has EA and legislative obligations in relation to casual and fixed-term conversion. We have implemented changes in response to legislative amendments to the *Fair Work Act* and between January 2023 and March 2025, 661 staff have utilised these processes to convert to either a continuing or fixed-term position at the University. This includes 158 casual staff conversions to fixed-term or continuing employment and 503 conversions from fixed-term to continuing employment.

**Workplace culture.** As a key part of the University's 2032 Strategy a new role has been created in the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Community and Leadership), to lead and be accountable for providing strategic direction and guidance across the University's culture, leadership and diversity, equity, and inclusion activities.

**Academic Excellence Program.** The University has launched its Academic Excellence Program to collaborate closely with academics at the discipline level to define what academic excellence looks like, and how we can improve our culture, processes and procedures to consistently and cohesively support academics to flourish. See Leadership Academy below.

## ***Student and staff safety***

### **Issues raised by the Accord Interim Report**

- **Sexual misconduct.** The [2021 National Student Safety Survey](#) (NSSS) found that nationally, since starting university, 16.1 per cent of respondents had been sexually harassed and 4.5 per cent had been sexually assaulted. The Accord heard from many stakeholders that existing approaches to reduce incidence on university campuses were inadequate.
- **Supporting mental health and wellbeing.** The Accord heard significant concerns regarding declining student mental health.

- **Lack of culturally safe places.** The Accord Panel raised issues with lack of culturally safe spaces, including for First Nations people.
- **Enhancing and empowering the student voice.** The Accord noted there are few powerful avenues for complaints by university students.
- **Funding for student unions.** The Accord noted that the major source of funding is the Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF), which is distributed at the discretion of universities in consultation with students. Some student groups submitted that these negotiations create an unequal power dynamic that limits student organisations' autonomy in holding universities accountable.

#### Accord Interim Report recommendations / considerations

- **Consistent complaints legislation** across jurisdictions, especially for complaints involving providers' handling of individual student allegations of sexual misconduct.
- **National Student Ombudsman** a stand-alone entity, independent of government, to investigate student complaints and with the capacity to resolve disputes.
- **Revised guidance on student and staff safety** to ensure whole-of-organisation approaches are in place and to assure safety in student accommodation.
- **Development of a student charter** possibly based on a model from New Zealand.
- **Nationally consistent and transparent reporting on sexual misconduct.**
- **Incorporation of recommendations into the Support for Students Policy.**

#### The University of Sydney's response to date

The University takes its workplace safety obligations very seriously and is committed to ensuring a safe environment for all students, staff and visitors. Health and wellbeing at the University is structured into two centrally operated teams. The first is the Student Wellbeing team, which is responsible for student safety and wellbeing and sits within Student Life within the Office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education). The second is the Health and Safety Professional Service Unit (PSU), which is responsible for staff safety and wellbeing and sits within the Office of the Vice-President (Operations).

Both teams play an integral role in the identification, prevention, support, response and control of health and wellbeing risks for the University. Both teams work closely with functional and cross-functional teams, including Protective Services to deliver holistic services. For example, within the Health and Safety Unit, the Health and Wellbeing team develops and delivers the health and wellbeing program; the Staff Health Support function supports staff through illness, injury and health related matters; and Health and Safety Partners identify and control for hazards and incidents, along with embedding wellbeing offerings across portfolios, faculties and schools. Health and Safety also partner with other services across other portfolios, particularly HR colleagues. Similarly, Student Wellbeing ensures integrated student support by working closely with other teams in Student Life and across the University.

**Governance.** The Chief Student Life Officer chairs the University's Safer Communities Advisory Group. Monitoring and reporting of risks is provided by the Student Wellbeing and the Health and Safety teams to the Senate and University Executive, and their committees, including the Senate People and Culture Committee (PCC) and the Senate Performance and Risk Committee (PARC). Reports are made as a part of monthly and quarterly reports, and annually on staff and student safety and wellbeing, or when requested or planned to provide updates on specific strategic initiatives or projects being delivered.

**Hodgkinson Review.** On 25 July 2024, the Senate commissioned Bruce Hodgkinson AM SC to conduct an external review of the University's policies and procedures - to ensure they are appropriate and fit for purpose to safeguard the wellbeing of the University community, academic freedom and freedom of speech, and the effective operations of the University into the future. Mr Hodgkinson is a preeminent Senior Counsel in New South Wales with relevant expertise including in health and safety. On 26



November 2024, the Senate resolved to accept in principle all 15 recommendations of Mr Hodgkinson's report and asked the University Executive for a blueprint for consultation and delivery.

**Complaints handling review and reform.** In September 2024, a preliminary review of the University's complaints processes and systems commenced, which identified a range of key pain points. These challenges were echoed by the findings of the Hodgkinson Review. The University has undertaken a significant program to redesign its complaints processes and reporting, so the community has trust and confidence that concerns are heard and appropriately responded to by the University. The primary focus in 2025 is ensuring no wrong 'front door', i.e. multiple channels of choice for users to submit a complaint leading to a primary triage hub by the end of May 2025.

**National Student Ombudsman and National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence.** During 2023 and 2024 the University supported and engaged proactively with the Australian Government as it consulted with stakeholders to develop legislation and implementation plans for the National Student Ombudsman and National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence. This included making detailed submissions on both proposals in early 2024. Since the draft of the National Code was made public in February 2025, we have been reviewing our relevant activities, policies and processes in advance of Parliament passing the required enabling legislation.

**Annual public reporting on Sexual Misconduct.** In addition to its regular reporting on sexual misconduct, student and staff complaints in its Annual Report to the NSW Parliament, the Senate has committed the University to publishing a [dedicated report on sexual misconduct annually](#). This report forms part of our University's pledge to improving transparency for victim-survivors and it is hoped this will be a step towards reducing some of the barriers to reporting that they face.

**Roadmap to prevention of sexual misconduct.** In March 2022, the University launched a roadmap in response to concerns raised in the NSSS. Led by the Safer Communities Office, the roadmap includes initiatives to: improve awareness of support and reporting options; streamline and increase confidence and transparency in reporting; consent modules and workshops. The **Roadmap to prevention of sexual misconduct** was followed up in August 2024 with the launch of our [Strategic Actions for the Prevention of and Response to Sexual Misconduct 2024-2026](#), which outlines a whole-of-institution approach for targeted action to create a safe, inclusive, and supportive environment for the University community. Our Strategic Actions are led by the University's Safer Communities Office and involve consultation with our key stakeholders, including our students and staff. These initiatives were endorsed by the Senate PCC in August 2024.

**Reporting and responding to allegations with trauma-informed case management.** The University has clear policies and reporting procedures in place for students and staff who have experienced sexual misconduct. The Safer Communities Office includes specialist staff who can provide trauma-informed case management and support to student and staff survivors of sexual misconduct providing one-on-one tailored services to meet each survivor's needs.

**Safety in affiliated residential colleges.** The 2017 report, *Cultural Renewal at the University of Sydney Residential Colleges* by Elizabeth Broderick & Co. made 23 recommendations, all of which have been implemented. The colleges provide updates to Senate and committees of Senate throughout each year. The University has agreements covering data sharing and investigations with two colleges.

**Anti-racism initiatives, including antisemitism and islamophobia.** The University has acknowledged the lived experience of antisemitism and other forms of racism on its campuses and the distress many in our community feel, including in relation to the ongoing conflict in the Middle East and increasing incidents of antisemitism in Australia. The Senate and University are committed to consulting widely to implement changes to our relevant policies and practices necessary to ensure that our campuses and online environments are safe and welcoming places for all.

On 28 November 2023, the Vice-Chancellor formally launched the University's inaugural **Anti-Racism Statement** (extract below) which speaks to the University's aspiration to stand against racist ideas and practices within the institution, alongside our obligation to uphold the principles of freedom of speech and academic freedom. The statement was developed in collaboration with many students and staff and was unanimously endorsed by the Academic Board, a decision affirmed by the University Senate.

## **University of Sydney Anti-Racism Statement**

'The University of Sydney is committed to upholding human rights and to building an inclusive community in which we are all treated fairly and with dignity regardless of where we are from, where we live, what we look like, what we think or what we believe. None of our staff and students should suffer any form of discrimination, whether it be on the basis of age, disability, race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion or any other reason. Respect for human rights is fundamental to our strength as an academic institution and the University is actively engaged in tackling all forms of discrimination, through our comprehensive research, teaching and programs to enhance equity, diversity and inclusion.'

On 12 February 2025, the Federal Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights recommended that Australian universities adopt a clear definition of antisemitism that aligns closely with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition. On 24 February 2025, the vice-chancellors of all Australian universities unanimously endorsed a new definition, the *Working Definition on Combatting Antisemitism*. This definition has been added to the supplementary resources for the University's [Anti-Racism Statement](#).

**Empowering student voices.** The representative student groups at the University of Sydney include the Students' Representative Council (SRC) for undergraduates, the Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (SUPRA) for postgraduates and the University of Sydney Union (USU) which supports over 200 student clubs and delivers a range of student-centred entertainment, food and events services. The SRC and SUPRA provide free, independent and confidential casework help to deal with issues such as academic appeals and complaints. In terms of the student voice in University governance, the undergraduate and postgraduate student bodies each have an elected Senate Fellow and two elected members of the Academic Board – in addition to the SRC and SUPRA presidents. A quarterly Student Consultative Committee (chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education) allows sharing of views between the University and student representatives on student issues. Senior University staff engage regularly with student leaders on their matters of concern and to seek their contributions, for example, in relation to the complaint handling reform project currently underway.

**Support for students policy and minimum funding for student representative organisations.** During 2023, the University engaged with the Commonwealth Department of Education as it developed legislation and supporting instruments setting additional requirements for minimum academic and other supports for students at risk of not completing their studies, and in 2024 in relation to minimum standards for providing Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) income to support elected student representative organisations to provide support services for students. Our approach to compliance with both reforms is outlined in the [Support for Students Policy 2024](#) and in [our public reporting](#) on consultation and distribution of revenues collected annually from the SSAF.

**Mental health and wellbeing support services for students.** The University has a Student Mental Wellbeing Strategy and supports in place led by the Safer Communities Office and Student Wellbeing. Supports include online services, student counselling, Talk Campus, International SOS, after-hours Mental Wellbeing Support and a Wellbeing Response Team.

## **Governing body membership**

### **Issues raised by the Accord Interim Report**

- **Systemic challenge with effective oversight of universities.** The report concluded that while University Councils have governance obligations under their legislative arrangements, 'issues of wage theft, casualisation and student safety illustrate that these accountability requirements do not always translate into effective oversight.'
- **Ensuring University Councils are appointed with the right mix of skills.** The Report focused on ensuring business expertise on councils is balanced by council members who 'deeply understand the functions of universities', including learning and teaching, research and management, and who reflect the communities universities serve, including First Nations peoples. It called for these issues to receive urgent attention from university governing bodies and governments.

## Accord Interim Report recommendations / considerations

- **Diversity and skills.** University governance in general needs reforming to more effectively embed collaboration, include First Nations leadership and expertise, and include more leaders in teaching and research.
- **Improving how ministerial appointments are used** to ensure governing bodies better represent the communities they serve.
- **Revisions to the voluntary code** to recognise the importance of universities' governing bodies including members with significant expertise and leadership in teaching and research.

## The University of Sydney's response to date

**Biannual external review of governance.** The Senate uses external assessment to reflect on the efficacy and effectiveness of its governance.

**Senate governance review framework.** This framework includes the Voluntary Code of Best Practice for the Governance of Australian Universities and is reported on annually to Senate.

**Annual committee effectiveness reviews.** An annual review process reviews the work of a committee during the previous year, the effectiveness of its systems and membership and reviews its Terms of Reference to ensure these remain relevant.

**Clearly defined role of the governing body.** The role of the Senate (our governing body) is clearly defined, with a remit of oversight of strategy and operations rather than day-to-day management, whilst maintaining our obligations as stated in the [University of Sydney Act 1989](#), which sets out the constitution, function and other duties of the University.

**Smaller, well-balanced and well-functioning governing body.** The Senate is currently made up of 15 appointees to facilitate better discussion and increase participation, and in turn, increase staff and student representation.

**Composition of governing body that is balanced, including academic skills and experience.** The majority of the 15 members of Senate have university sector experience including the Chair of Academic Board, the Vice-Chancellor, staff, students, and two external appointees. The University's Act requires that all appointed members have expertise and experience relevant to the Senate's functions and an appreciation of the University's object, values, functions and activities. In 2024, the Senate Nominations Committee adopted a revised *Skills & Diversity Matrix*, which includes demographic data related to gender and diversity, and has reduced the number of skills categories assessed from 18 skills to 13. This ensures membership of the Senate is well-balanced, has appropriate expertise and reflects the communities the University serves. The Senate's Nominations Committee is also responsible for identifying, undertaking due diligence about, and recommending to Senate, persons who may be suitable for nomination or appointment by Senate, or for consideration for appointment to the Senate by the NSW Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education.

**Strong engagement between governance body and Academic Board.** The Academic Board report is a priority item on the agenda at each Senate meeting; is presented by the Board Chair, and subject to discussion and endorsement by Senate.

**Strong communication between the governing body, university leadership and the university community.** This is essential and underpinned by a culture of open and transparent communication, as shown by material breaches of conduct or policy being reliably reported to the governing bodies.

**Primary focus on teaching quality, student experience and research outcomes.** These are the primary focus of Senate and are key agenda items at dedicated meetings throughout the year.

**Supporting committees that provide more detailed oversight.** The Senate is supported by key academic and operational committees including Performance and Risk, People and Culture, Finance and Audit, and Building and Estates. The committees are reviewed at least annually to ensure the academic

and business components of the University are scrutinised in detail by appropriately qualified and experienced members.

**Expert team to support and facilitate effective governance.** This includes holding induction processes for new members of Senate and their committees including Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) training as required.

***The ten key areas identified by the Education Ministers and included in the University Chancellors Council's revised voluntary Code of Governance Principles and Practices for Australia's Public Universities released in December 2024.***

The Senate and the University's Governance Office have and continue to consider the Education Ministers' ten priority areas for action thoroughly. This work is progressing in line with the approach that the Senate has taken, overseeing and directing the University's response and actions in relation to the three key areas of concern raised by the Australian Universities Accord Expert Panel.

The approach is being led primarily through a review of the University of Sydney's current alignment with the principles and practices for Australia's public universities contained in the [UCC's voluntary code](#) (as revised in December 2024) to incorporate the Education Ministers' ten key areas of concern.

Of the ten priority areas, seven are directly related to the membership of governing bodies. The University of Sydney Senate has taken numerous steps in recent years to ensure its membership is representative of the communities the University serves, while also ensuring the Senate and its committees are of a workable size and comprise people with the required experience, skills and expertise.

The Senate remains committed to ensuring its structures, policies and processes align fully with the best practice guidance provided by the UCC voluntary code. Section 9 of the UCC Code requires each governing body to review its compliance with the Code annually and to disclose in its annual report its compliance with the Code and areas of non-compliance with reasons for non-compliance and measures undertaken to address them.