

Present:

Dr Sarah Pearson, Chancellor
Jan McClelland AM, Deputy Chancellor
Prof Chris Moran, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer
Megan Aitken, Council Member
Dr Onoride Coast, Council Member
Russell Evans, Council Member
Ian Gillespie, Council Member
Phil Hess, Council Member
Col Murray, Council Member
David van Aanholt, Council Member
Prof Adrian Walsh, Chair Academic Board

In attendance:

Prof Chris Armstrong, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Karma Auden, Chief Financial Officer
Prof Simon Evans, Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Meredith Parry, Chief Operating Officer
Radha Thomas, Director Governance and University Secretary
Rebecca Cawood, Director, Office of Strategy Management
Neil Durrant, Executive Director Future Students, Engagement and Technologies
Dr Kyle Mulrooney, Senior Lecturer in Criminology (for item 3.6)

Apologies:

Chanel Hopkinson, Council Member
Kristy Sillman, Council Member

1. IN-CAMERA SESSION

2. OPEN SESSION

The meeting opened at 9.18. Declared open at 9.17am.

3. PROCEDURAL MATTERS

It was noted that the Secretariat would make a recording of this meeting solely to assist with the preparation of minutes. The recording will be stored securely and erased once the minutes have been confirmed.

3.1. * Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair undertook an acknowledgement of Country noting the Yinga Kara program organised for online Oorala students and thanked the staff involved in delivering the program.

3.2. * Apologies

Council received apologies from Chanel Hopkinson and Kristy Sillman.

3.3. * Conflicts of Interest

Council Members were asked to disclose any material interest, consistent with Schedule 2A Clause 5 of the University of New England 1993 Act (NSW).

Council Members were asked to update their Disclosed Register of Interest with the Secretariat as required.

No conflicts of interest were declared.

3.4. * Order of Business

It was agreed that item 3.7 (Actions from previous meetings) be moved to item 6.1.

Resolution: Council ACCEPTED the amended order of business and ADOPTED non-starred items.
 OC/25/01/01

3.5. * Safety Concerns and Risk Management

The Vice-Chancellor informed Council Members that the implementation of the academic workload model had created pressure points within the institution. To help alleviate these pressures, financial resources had been allocated, and the Executive Leadership Team had also provided support to the Executive Deans.

Although debris from a recent storm had been cleared, Members and staff were advised to remain vigilant.

3.6. * Celebrating Success

Dr Kyle Mulrooney attended the meeting at 9.25am and presented his experience in completing the Grad Cert in AI innovation over Trimester 3 last year.

Dr Kyle Mulrooney, a Senior Lecturer in Criminology reflected on the rapid pace of technological change and its impact on criminology, particularly the rise of cybercrime. He explained his decision to pursue a graduate certificate in Artificial Intelligence (AI) Innovation to enhance his understanding of AI's potential in crime prevention and criminal justice. Through this program, he aimed to leverage augmented intelligence for his teaching and criminological work, culminating in the development of a new University unit on AI, emerging technologies, and criminal justice. This course, launching in 2026, would provide students with hands-on experience with AI tools such as crime mapping and predictive behaviour analysis to better prepare them for future careers.

Dr Kyle Mulrooney also discussed a project he developed during his coursework called "Collab AI." This program, using a chatbot and OpenAI's large language model, helps connect University researchers with collaborators by analysing their expertise and project goals. The tool incorporates explainable AI to clarify collaboration suggestions, aiming to break down silos within the University. He highlighted the program's potential to anticipate industry needs and foster external partnerships. Dr Kyle Mulrooney expressed gratitude to the University for supporting his development and encouraged others to explore similar programs, emphasising the importance of communication and cross-disciplinary understanding in AI innovation.

Dr Kyle Mulrooney was thanked for his presentation and left the meeting at 9.41am.

3.7. * Action Items

This item was moved to Item 6.2 (Closed Session).

4. MATTERS FOR APPROVAL

4.1. * Amendment to the Graduation Rule: Implementation of Rolling Conferrals

Deputy Vice-Chancellor to speak, Professor Simon Evans was invited to speak to items 4.1 and 4.2. The Council approved amendments to the Graduation Rule to introduce rolling conferrals, meaning students could have their degrees conferred as soon as they completed their studies, without waiting for formal ceremonies. This change offered students flexibility to move forward with their careers and helped smooth institutional workloads by spreading conferrals across the year. Council also delegated conferral powers to the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor for coursework and research students, streamlining the process. Extensive consultation revealed strong support, and the new system would still preserve the significance of graduation ceremonies while providing better operational efficiency.

Council Members discussed how to keep graduation ceremonies meaningful while fostering engagement between the town and the University. Members also highlighted the need to monitor the impact of rolling conferrals on ceremony attendance and community relationships. Members noted the community’s optimism and strong support for the University’s initiatives, emphasising the institution’s vital role in the region’s infrastructure and future growth.

Action: The Deputy Vice Chancellor to report to Council after 12 months of implementation to evaluate the impact of the amended Graduation Rule, with a particular focus on staff workload and student engagement.

AOC/25/01/01

Resolution: The Council APPROVED the proposed amendment to the Graduation Rule to enable the implementation of Rolling Conferrals, beginning in 2025. [D25/12425].

OC/25/01/02

4.2 * Graduation Principal Dates Amendment for 2025 and 2026

Resolution: Council APPROVED the proposed amendments to the graduation ceremony principal dates to reflect the transition from three to two annual graduation rounds, specifically (in chronological order):

2025*

1. Movement of the Winter (August) Graduation round to Spring (October) in 2025.
2. Removal of the Summer (December) 2025 Graduation round.

2026*

3. Implementation of a new Autumn (May) Graduation Week in 2026; Effectively extending the current principle dates for May 2026 to capture the week.
4. Realignment of the traditional Winter (August) Graduation round to Spring (October) in 2026.
5. Removal of the Summer (December) 2026 Graduation round.

**Consulted and recommended dates available in Context, Key Information, Considerations and Analysis [D25/19586]
 OC/25/01/03*

5. MATTERS FOR NOTING

5.1. *Chancellor's Report (Open)

The Chancellor highlighted the strong community support for the University's success, emphasising the importance of collective planning to improve the region. She noted that collaboration with Mayors, Ministers, and schools had been crucial in achieving positive outcomes. The Chancellor mentioned her upcoming visit to the Parramatta Campus, where she aimed to engage with staff and build stronger connections. Additionally, she expressed interest in developing a strategic stakeholder engagement plan.

The Vice-Chancellor also shared his perspective on the challenges of responding effectively to opportunities, particularly in mobilising academic staff and forging partnerships. He acknowledged the need to shift the University's approach to research funding, focusing on larger projects that aligned with industry needs, and fostering a cultural shift in how research and industry partnerships were valued. Furthermore, he highlighted the University's recent efforts, such as the reopening of the Antiquities Museum, and the need for continued support in expanding the commercialisation and engagement initiatives. He concluded by stressing the importance of better collaboration and visibility to showcase research and attract investment.

The Chancellor advised that correspondence had been received from [REDACTED] and this had been published to the Document Library in Convene. *[Council only reference material > Strategy 2025 > [REDACTED] Letter Feb 2025.]*

Resolution: Council NOTED the Chancellor's Report to Council [D25/15908].
 OC/25/01/04

Standing orders were suspended at 10.09am.

Standing orders resumed at 10.22am.

The meeting was not quorate until 10.30am.

5.2. * Vice-Chancellor and CEO Management Report

The Vice-Chancellor and CEO, Professor Chris Moran was invited to speak to the report. The Vice-Chancellor discussed the positive impact of the Antiquities Museum and the enthusiasm it generated, particularly among children, highlighting its potential to engage the community.

The Vice-Chancellor also shared insights about the ongoing developments, including a notable example of a change in approach within the admissions team, where principles shifted to prioritise processing applications

from students most likely to enrol. This led to immediate improvements in efficiency and demonstrated the positive influence of new leadership.

The discussion also covered updates on various University projects, including the construction project in Tamworth, where progress has been made with the Council, and the expectation that building could begin soon. He highlighted the evolving student journey and the importance of adapting to changing attitudes towards education, emphasising a strategic approach to student intake. There was a focus on improving the messaging to make it clear that the University offered valuable educational opportunities that lead to better employment prospects, with the goal of gaining more buy-in from the local population.

Action: That the Vice-Chancellor draft a report on:

1. the Tamworth Campus engagement plan for prospective students;
2. the proposed course offerings for the Tamworth Campus and the rationale for their selection.

AOC/25/01/02

Members discussed the strategic considerations for expanding nursing programs in Sydney and Parramatta, particularly regarding international student numbers. Members acknowledged the complexities involved, particularly with the large number of international students in the area. The Vice-Chancellor emphasised that decisions should align with the University's strategic goals, cautioning against any purely cash flow-driven initiatives. The overall strategy had included maintaining a reasonable presence of international nursing students in Sydney without overwhelming the facilities.

Resolution: The Council NOTED the Vice-Chancellor and CEO's Report, in particular:

1. The current student load figures for 2025;
2. The information regarding the new Strategic Plan; and
3. The update regarding the Sector and Ministerial Direction 111; and
4. The ongoing implementation of the Academic Workload Model. [D25/15182]

OC/25/01/05

5.3. * Chair of Academic Board Report

Professor Adrian Walsh, Chair of the Academic Board, spoke about the recent TEQSA submission and the completion of self-review documents, which showed positive results. However, onboarding for new Members had not been completed, and the Chair planned to address this soon. He emphasised the importance of celebrating successes and fostering more engaging discussions on topics such as AI. Concerns were raised about the size of the Board, its impact on communication and decision-making, and issues with faculty-level representation. A summit to address AI strategy and academic concerns was suggested to improve university-wide collaboration. The Chair also planned to attend Ozcabs and Cocabs meetings to strengthen national connections.

Resolution: Council NOTED the Chair of Academic Board's Report to Council [D25/12382].

OC/25/01/06

5.4. * Workplace Gender Equality Agency Submission

The Chief Operating Officer, Meredith Parry was invited to speak and presented the annual Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) report. The Chief Operating Officer emphasised workforce planning to address career progression and promotion barriers, advocating for structural changes to support men in caregiving roles and promote societal shifts. Broader inclusivity for non-binary and asexual employees and targeted performance incentives for lower-income roles were also discussed. The Chief Operating Officer noted improvements in 2023–24 results and anomalies in senior executive roles due to interim appointments. The report outlined actions to address gaps, with many initiatives integrated into the biannual "Belonging at UNE Action Plan." Discussions included setting gender-related targets, enhancing diversity to attract talent through programs like Athena SWAN, and fostering a positive workplace culture with ongoing gender training and efforts to mitigate barriers for women in the workplace.

It was suggested that the following amendment be made to the annual report "In 2025 we aim to close the gender pay gap in senior executive."

Resolution: Council

1. NOTED the Workplace Gender Equality Agency Executive Summary 2023-2024 (Attachment A)
2. NOTED the publication of the UNE Gender Pay Gap Employer Statement at the end of February 2025 (Attachment B).
3. NOTED the recommended actions (Attachment C) [D25/15192].

OC/25/01/07

5.5. * Student Retention and Attrition

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Professor Simon Evans was invited to speak to the report. At the previous meeting, Councillors requested a report on retention and attrition as a strategic priority. The report presented ongoing initiatives under key plans, noting some progress but highlighting the need to focus on lead indicators for more accurate, real-time insights. Council was assured that strategic planning aligned with these indicators, and feedback on report presentation was welcomed.

The University's Executive Team discussed data-driven retention actions regularly, tracking 25 initiatives through a Retention Task Group. Isolating initiative impacts was challenging due to multiple influencing factors. Discussions noted marketing responsiveness, digital data usage, and real-time strategy adjustments. The Executive Team acknowledged the need for more coordinated, bold actions, and Council appreciated the transparency and focus on continued innovation.

Resolution: The Council NOTED the Student Retention and Attrition Report [D25/12083].

OC/25/01/08

The Vice-Chancellor left the room at 11.59am.

5.6. * HDR Attraction, Attrition and Retention

The Vice-Chancellor returned to the meeting at 12.02pm.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor – Research Professor Chris Armstrong was invited to speak to the report. The research plan aimed to increase HDR student numbers and quality, ensure timely completions, and reduce attrition for more research funding. Recent data showed a decline in student attraction, partly due to external factors like cost of living and internal issues with inconsistent scholarship funding. Stipends were increased, and scholarship durations extended to improve support. Strategic goals were set to attract 140 students by 2030, reduce attrition, and eliminate non-funding exits. Milestones were introduced to monitor student progress and address issues early, with ongoing efforts to improve student attraction and support.

Resolution: Council

1. NOTED the Attraction, Attrition and Retention Report with particular attention given to the declined in HDR commencements.
2. NOTED the HDR Growth Initiative (Project 140x30) as an initiative to increase commencing HDR students [D25/15220].

OC/25/01/09

6. CLOSED SESSION

