
University of New England
Council (2:2025)
Tamworth and Zoom Video Conference
Tuesday 8 Apr 2025

Present:

Dr Sarah Pearson, Chancellor
Jan McClelland AM, Deputy Chancellor (Zoom)
Prof Chris Moran, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer
Megan Aitken, Council Member
Dr Onoriode Coast, Council Member
Ian Gillespie, Council Member
Phil Hess, Council Member (Zoom)
Chanel Hopkinson, Council Member
Col Murray, Council Member
Kristy Sillman, 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 Sharma, Director Governance and University Secretary
Dr Neil Durrant, Executive Director, Future Students Engagement & Technologies
Rebecca Cawood, Director Office Strategy Management (Zoom) for item 10.1
Professor Peter McGilchrist (Zoom) for item 5
Anthea White, Director of People and Culture (Zoom) for item 12.3

Apologies:

Russell Evans, Council Member

IN-CAMERA SESSION

1. Chancellor's Welcome

The Chancellor welcomed members to the meeting.

2. Business Paper Update

The Director Governance and University Secretary, Radha Sharma provided an update on the new Agenda format. The DGUS noted that the revised agenda reflected the request from Council made on the 18 February 2025 for the DGUS to review Council operating protocols. The new format was designed to maintain the existing order of the meeting whilst enabling more time for strategic discussion and the addition of new standing items suggested by the Chair to be included in the agenda. New standing items included a Deep Dive into each Executive Portfolio and priority topics for Council.

3. In-Camera Session

The Director Governance and University Secretary, Radha Sharma and the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Chris Moran left the meeting at 8.55am.

OPEN SESSION

The Chair opened the meeting at 9.15 am and declared it open.

The Chair advised that the meeting would be recorded.

4. Procedural Matters

4.1. * Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair undertook an acknowledgment of Country.

4.2. * Apologies and Quorum

Russell Evans' apology was noted.

Deputy Chancellor, Jan McClelland advised that she would have to leave the meeting to attend an appointment.

4.3. * 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.

The Chair emphasised the importance of being mindful of conflicts of interest, noting that they can be obvious, subtle, or perceived. Members were urged to be vigilant and transparent when completing conflict of interest declarations, especially given the sensitive topics discussed and the heightened external interest in University matters.

Deputy Chancellor, Jan McClelland informed the Council that she has been appointed by the Attorney General to the NSW Judicial Commission, which oversees judicial education, training, and conduct. While this role did not directly affect her position on the University Council, she acknowledged the potential for a conflict of interest, particularly in relation to current District Court proceedings involving the former Vice-Chancellor. Conflicts of interest were also declared for items 14.4.1 and 14.5. The Chair advised that there was a section within her report (item 11.2 Chancellor's Confidential Report) relating to the Deputy Chancellor that had not been documented but would be addressed during the closed session of the meeting. The Deputy Chancellor advised that she would also leave the meeting for this section.

Student member, Kristy Sillman noted a perceived conflict of interest regarding the Chair of Academic Board's report (item 14.3 Report of Academic Board) and the Terms of Reference therein.

It was further noted that all members had a conflict of interest in item 14.4.1 Council and Deputy Chancellor Remuneration Resolution.

4.4. * Order of Business

Due to a scheduling miscommunication, it was noted that the Vice-Chancellor would need to leave the meeting at 11:15 am to attend an important local business leaders' event where he was speaking on a panel. It was agreed that Members aimed to cover key items requiring the Vice-Chancellor's input before he left, with a few possibly deferred until his return.

Resolution: Council ACCEPTED the order of business and ADOPTED non-starred items.
OC/25/02/01

4.5. * Safety Concerns and Risk Management

Concerns were raised about academic workload modelling, which was causing psychosocial stress due to unclear distribution. Nursing staff, in particular, had borne excessive workload. While staff at Parramatta expressed concerns about workload, there was also optimism as they explored creative uses of non-teaching time.

Ongoing work was also underway on the risk register and policy updates, with acknowledgment of the significant workload involved and the importance of realistic planning.

5. * Celebrating Success

The Chair welcomed Professor Peter McGilchrist. Professor Peter McGilchrist presented on the successful revival of the Feedlot Steer School—an intensive three-day short course held in February 2024 after a 13-year hiatus. The event attracted 250 delegates from across Australia, showcased the University's agricultural facilities and research, and aimed to increase industry engagement and brand awareness. The program included expert-led lectures, hands-on workshops, and valuable networking opportunities, all supported by significant industry sponsorship and government funding. Positive feedback, strong media coverage, and plans for a biennial continuation highlighted the event's success and future potential.

The Chair thanked Professor Peter McGilchrist for an insightful and encouraging presentation.

6. * Chancellor's Report to Council

The Chair spoke to her report which outlined efforts to increase engagement and visibility for the University, both internally and externally. Meetings were held with staff and external figures, including local leaders and potential donors, to raise the University's profile and foster collaboration. An influential alum offered to host a dinner to attract potential donors, and connections were made with government officials and development groups.

Resolution: Council NOTED the Chancellor's Report to Council [D25/57629].
OC/25/02/02

7. * Council Members University Activities

The Chair thanked Megan Aitken who had offered to attend the Anzac Day luncheon representing the University.

The Deputy Chancellor, Jan McClelland provided an update on recent activities, including attending a meeting with government Audit and Risk Committee Chairs where the Auditor General highlighted priorities such as data analytics, cyber security, value for money, asset revaluation, and climate change impact reporting. She also represented the University at International Women's Day in Parramatta, spoke on a panel, and visited the University's Sydney campus, noting the high morale among staff. The Chair thanked the Deputy Chancellor, Jan McClelland.

Council members registered an interest in participating in more engagement on behalf of UNE. A process to support this will be developed.

8. Vice-Chancellor's Business

8.1. * Vice-Chancellor and CEO's Report to Council

The Chair invited the Vice-Chancellor and CEO, Professor Moran to speak to the report.

Student load was discussed, noting the significant effort made to retain students through the application process. The action led to improvements in student interest and enrolment pre census, however the impact on final student load was not as large as hoped. Conversations about the experiences of students (relating to student retention and magnitude of ongoing enrolment), revealed that many were affected by life pressures and financial constraints, leading to ongoing efforts to better understand and support students.

There have been ongoing efforts to address various issues related to student behaviour and the associated consequences. The University's actions had led to mixed reactions within the community, with some strongly opposed to the actions, while others recognised the necessity for the University to address unacceptable behaviours. Challenges were faced during the investigation processes, which were lengthy and complex. The hard work of the team involved in these cases was acknowledged, and despite the difficulties, a zero-tolerance approach was deemed essential. While some students expressed discontent, the overall message sent was one of strong leadership.

Resolution: The Council NOTED the Vice-Chancellor and CEO'S Report; particularly:

- (1) the current student load for Trimester 1;
- (2) the proposed SSAF Transition Plan for 2025 to 2027; and
- (3) updates in the sector. [D25/61894]

OC/25/02/03

9. * Student Member Report (verbal)

The Chair invited Kristy Sillman to speak, as student representative. The Student Council focused on rebranding and strengthening its presence within the University. Efforts included engaging with orientation events, creating a regular spot in the student newsletter, and updating the online student portal to reflect the current student load of approximately 15,000. Work to connect online representatives with specific schools had been undertaken. Challenges included minimal student engagement, with recent surveys yielding low

response rates, and ongoing concerns about online exam experiences and the disconnect between international students and the University.

10. Operational Matters

10.1. * Business Plan and Key Performance Indicators

The Vice-Chancellor acknowledged Rebecca Cawood's contributions to the report presented to Council. The report noted concerns, particularly around student load targets and Indigenous staff representation, both falling short of goals.

Discussion centred on the effectiveness of current KPI tracking, suggesting a need for more nuanced, year-round monitoring and clearer risk tolerance levels. Cybersecurity maturity was flagged as needing further action and understanding. Suggestions included enhancing KPI explanations, adding planned actions and mitigation strategies, and providing better progress reporting. The gender pay gap was discussed, with ideas to explore regarding support for lower-level female staff. Staff safety, especially regarding psychosocial risks, was also highlighted as requiring deeper analysis.

The item concluded with agreement on the need for clearer risk frameworks, with a workshop planned to develop these further.

Action:

The Vice-Chancellor was asked to:

1. provide a clear rationale for each KPI rating in future reports, outlining the factors that influenced the current status and any challenges or limitations that may have affected performance.
2. incorporate mitigating factors directly within the KPI table in the report. For each KPI that is marked as amber or red, provide a summary of the actions being taken to address the underlying issues and any steps being implemented to improve performance.

AOC/25/02/01

The Chair noted that the attachments contained a high level of detail and suggested that they be summarised for clarity and focus.

Resolution: Council NOTED the March Business Plan Key Performance Indicators Update Report and actions that have been highlighted are underway to maximise the potential to reach agreed 2025 targets. [D25/57534]

OC/25/02/04

10.2. * Financial Update

The Chair invited the Chief Financial Officer, Karma Auden to speak to the report.

The discussion covered various aspects of the University's financial situation. Updates on payroll expenditure showed favourable variances though some of this relates to timing of payments. A review of course and unit growth, alongside attrition data, highlighted the need to prioritise successful courses and address declining student numbers. A unit costing analysis was underway to assess financial efficiency. The conversation shifted to research performance, focusing on allocations for research costs, and scenarios for balancing the budget, including cost reductions and performance evaluations.

The importance of reinvesting in growing courses and targeting areas for attrition reduction to balance financial outcomes was emphasised. Members noted a favourable increase in new student enrolments, although the decline in continuing international students could lead to a revenue drop. A rapid action group was formed to address these trends and develop measures for future trimesters.

Looking ahead, the University was undertaking strategic planning to provide long-term sustainability and optimal operational efficiency. The need to adapt strategies in response to ongoing challenges was noted, with Management to provide detailed financial modelling and sector benchmarking data to inform Council's approach to resource allocation and organisational structure.

The discussion concluded with a recognition of the challenges ahead, with the potential for difficult decisions, but also an affirmation of the support for the necessary changes, recognising the need to adapt to the evolving environment.

The Deputy Chancellor Jan McClelland and the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Moran left the meeting at 11.23 am.

Resolution: Council NOTED the Financial Update and 28 February 2025 YTD management financial reports. [D25/65319]

OC/25/02/05

Standing Orders were suspended at 11.27 am and resumed at 11.43 am.

10.3. Annual Environmental Sustainability Report

Resolution: The Council NOTED the Annual Environmental Sustainability Review, 2024. [D25/58563].

OC/25/02/06

CLOSED SESSION

