
University of New England
Council (3:2025)
Armidale Council Meeting Room (Boooloominbah) and Zoom Video Conference
Friday 30 May 2025

Present:

Dr Sarah Pearson, Chancellor
Jan McClelland AM, Deputy Chancellor
Prof Chris Moran, Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer
Megan Aitken, Council Member
Dr Onoriode Coast, Council Member
Russell Evans, Council Member
Ian Gillespie, Council Member
Chanel Hopkinson, Council Member
Col Murray, Council Member
Kristy Sillman, Council Member
David van Aanholt, Council Member (Zoom)
Prof Adrian Walsh, Chair Academic Board

In attendance:

Karma Auden, Chief Financial Officer
Prof Simon Evans, Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Meredith Parry, Chief Operating Officer
Radha Thomas, Director Governance and University Secretary

Apologies:

Phil Hess, Council Member

Council's Values:

1. respect and value the diverse contributions of each individual;
2. foster trust and transparency;
3. keep a focus on the broader vision; and
4. clarity of task and expectation.

IN-CAMERA SESSION

1. Chancellor's Welcome

The Chair opened the meeting at 8.30 am and declared it quorate.

2. In-Camera Session



The in-camera session concluded at 9.00 am.

OPEN SESSION

3. Procedural Matters

3.1. * Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair undertook an Acknowledgement of Country.

3.2. * Apologies and Quorum

Apologies for Phil Hess were received.

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.

Russell Evans declared a conflict of interest as Director of Agricultural Business Research Institute (ABRI)

The Vice-Chancellor & CEO, Professor Chris Moran declared a conflict of interest as Chairman of UNE Partnerships.

The Chair, Chancellor Dr Sarah Pearson declared that she has a new role as a member of the Board of Funds SA, with no expected conflict of interest between the new role and her role at UNE.

3.4. * Order of Business

Resolution: Council ACCEPTED the order of business and ADOPTED non-starred items.
OC/25/03/01

3.5. * Safety Concerns and Risk Management

The risks identified in the ABRI presentation were to be incorporated into the University's Risk Register for ongoing monitoring and management.

4. * Celebrating Success

Vanessa Sewell (Associate Lecturer) was invited to present on her role as a Superstar of STEM (2025).

Vanessa Sewell, a Warhamai woman and lecturer at the Ooralá Aboriginal Centre, shared her involvement in the Superstars of STEM program, which promotes women in STEM and inspires the next generation. Recently awarded her PhD in biomedical science, Vanessa was one of 60 participants selected nationally, including three First Nations women. She highlighted her goal of encouraging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to pursue STEM careers and described the program's training in communication and public engagement. Vanessa planned to visit schools and communities to promote UNE's outreach programs, such

as the Science and Engineering Challenge, and strengthen pathways for Indigenous students into STEM. She also acknowledged UNE’s legacy in the program and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to contribute to STEM education and Indigenous outreach.

5. Chancellor's Reports

6. Chancellor's Report to Council

Resolution: Council NOTED the Chancellor’s Report to Council [D25/10176].
 OC/25/03/02

7. * Council Members University Activities

This item was not considered at the meeting as Council member engagement was discussed in the Chancellors report, thanking Council members for their involvement in significant events.

8. Vice-Chancellor's Business

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

The Council discussed several key topics, starting with a request for the Vice-Chancellor to highlight three or four key points from the reports for focused discussion. The Vice-Chancellor provided updates from the Universities Australia plenary, including the Minister’s announcements. The government allocated \$1 billion for childcare centres, and the Prime Minister emphasised the importance of delivery. Minister Clare outlined upcoming legislation, including the Sexual Violence Bill, the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) Bill, and the Needs-Based Funding and Managed Growth Bill, with the latter expected to take effect in January 2026. The Minister confirmed there would be no legislation for international student caps, maintaining the current MD 1.1 framework.

The Council noted the A-TEC would have significant staffing and decision-making responsibilities, though questions remained about its structure and reporting lines. Mary O’Kane invited feedback on the A-TEC’s role, encouraging direct input from universities. The Council also discussed challenges related to pricing and costing of university degrees and the complexity of staffing adjustments in response to declining student loads.

The discussion shifted to student enrolments, with concerns raised about declining continuing load despite increasing commencing enrolments. The Council acknowledged ongoing interventions to address attrition, particularly during the critical early weeks of enrolment, and highlighted the need for further analysis of causal factors, including cost-of-living pressures. Members debated the importance of setting timelines for evaluating the effectiveness of interventions and making decisions on courses in long-term decline. The conversation concluded with plans to revisit these issues during the Finance report later in the meeting.

Action: That the Vice-Chancellor’s Office invite Mary O’Kane to the University to discuss the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (A-TEC) and its evolving role.
 AOC/25/03/01

Resolution: Council NOTED the Vice-Chancellor and CEO’s Report. [D25/104470]
 OC/25/03/03

8.2. * 2024 Key Result Area Performance Report

The Council discussed whether to combine agenda items 8.2 and 8.3, ultimately deciding to address them together. The Vice-Chancellor highlighted key insights, including positive outcomes and areas requiring further analysis. Council provided positive feedback on the performance report, noting positive results. Questions

were raised about marketing strategies, student retention, and the impact of slip-back offers on enrolment data. It was noted that the University was transitioning, a new marketing manager had been recruited, and it was agreed the Marketing Strategy would be reviewed in a future Council meeting.

Council members emphasised the importance of separating probable enrolments from ghost figures in the data to avoid skewed analysis. They discussed challenges related to sector-wide trends, including full employment and cost-of-living pressures, and debated whether declining continuing load was due to external factors or internal issues. Members agreed on the need for a clear timeline to evaluate interventions and address long-term declines.

The Council also acknowledged positive results in student employment, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation, and first-in-family statistics, while expressing concern about declining research performance. Suggestions were made to explore regional partnerships and unconventional marketing approaches. The Vice-Chancellor committed to addressing specific concerns raised by Council members and facilitating further discussion.

Action: The Executive Director of Future Students, Engagement, and Technologies to present a report on the Marketing Strategy at the September Council meeting.
 AOC/25/03/02

Resolution: Council NOTED the 2024 Key Result Area Performance Report [D25/98031].
 OC/25/03/04

8.3. * Business Plan and Key Performance Indicators

Resolution: Council NOTED the Business Plan Key Performance Indicators – May 2025 update [D25/97841].
 OC/25/03/05

8.4. *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategic Initiatives – Annual Update

The Chair invited the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and CEO, Professor Simon Evans to speak to the report.

The Council received the annual update on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strategic initiatives and commented on the positive outcomes. Key highlights included the upcoming start of the new Pro Vice-Chancellor (Indigenous) in three weeks. The Council noted improvements in Indigenous student success rates, GPA, and share of total enrolments, despite a decline in overall student numbers. However, a gap remained between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student success, which continued to be addressed through various programs, including HEPPP-funded initiatives and the appointment of Indigenous staff in faculties to provide cultural knowledge and support.

The Council also discussed the new four-year Indigenous employment plan, which shifted responsibility for achieving employment targets to hiring managers and leaders, rather than relying solely on the Aboriginal Employment Coordinator. This approach was seen as a cultural shift, supported by monitoring and embedding responsibilities into position descriptions. Additionally, the Council was informed that the statement of intent with the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly was expected to be signed soon, committing to long-term collaboration to support Indigenous education in far-western New South Wales.

The Council acknowledged the success of initiatives like the First Nations Indigenous Knowledges Lecturers program, which contributed to student success but also placed significant responsibilities on junior staff. Plans to redesign the program under senior leadership were underway. Members discussed the importance of sharing the institution’s achievements more broadly, including with government and community stakeholders, to highlight contributions to closing the gap and promoting Indigenous student success. Suggestions were made to develop a one-page summary for discussions with government representatives.

The Vice-Chancellor left the meeting briefly at 9.58am and returned to the meeting at 10.02am.

Resolution: Council NOTED the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategic Initiatives – Annual Update. [D25/98452]
 OC/25/03/06

8.5. * Strategy Update Report

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

The Vice-Chancellor provided an overview of the consultation process, highlighting positive feedback from various groups, including alumni, local communities, and regional stakeholders. He explained that the consultation process had evolved significantly, with strong engagement and contributions shaping the articulation of the university’s vision and strategy. Upcoming consultations were planned for regional towns, including Tamworth, Gunnedah, Moree, Narrabri, Inverell, and Glen Innes, with the executive team dividing responsibilities to manage the workload.

Updates on the strategy development process were provided, including the refinement of the vision statement to focus on connecting individual aspirations to community outcomes. It was noted that while the statement was well-received, there was ongoing work to address its passive tone regarding community outcomes. Members were informed about the integration of feedback from consultations, SWOT analyses, and previous strategic documents, which were shaping the university’s priorities and initiatives.

Members discussed the importance of balancing investment in strategic initiatives with budget constraints, acknowledging the need for careful prioritisation. The Vice-Chancellor emphasised the critical nature of certain investments for the institution’s future and proposed further discussions in July to clarify priorities and assess financial implications. The Council agreed to note the report and expressed support for the ongoing consultation and strategy development efforts.

Resolution: The Council NOTED the Strategy Development Update report. [D25/107888]
 OC/25/03/07

9. * Student Member Report (verbal)

The Chair invited Student Representative Kristy Sillman to speak to the item, who noted ongoing work in the operational space to support representatives in gathering feedback from the student body. Two representatives were being placed on four committees: the Academic Board, Teaching and Learning Committee, Curriculum Committee, and the Research Committee. Efforts were made to integrate the Student Council into orientation programs, with representatives participating in online orientation week and welcome ceremonies in Armidale and Sydney. The Chair of the Student Council had begun engaging with heads of schools to explore potential collaboration with online representatives.

Challenges with student engagement were highlighted, particularly the difficulty in maintaining interactions beyond initial orientation activities. Feedback from the SAF survey indicated declining participation, with 800 students responding this year compared to 900 last year. The majority of respondents were online, domestic, and undergraduate students, raising concerns about the survey’s representation of the broader student body.

Members were advised that plans to prepare for Student Council elections in September next year were in the process of being drafted, focusing on creating a smooth transition for the incoming Student Council. Suggestions were made to strengthen connections between the Student Council and the Student Journey Team to improve engagement and align feedback mechanisms. Additional ideas included leveraging physical access points, such as the Sydney campus, to support online students and exploring peer-to-peer engagement strategies.

10. Chair of Academic Board

10.1. * Report of Academic Board

The Chair invited the Chair of the Academic Board, Professor Adrian Walsh to speak to the report. The Chair of the Academic Board, Professor Adrian Walsh discussed several updates, beginning with acknowledgments for Paul McDonald, Clara Murray, and Janelle Wilkes for their contributions over the past six months. It was noted that new members, including Rachel Adlington for the Curriculum Committee and Tristan Taylor for the Teaching and Learning Committee, had joined and were already making positive contributions. An induction event was scheduled for July 3rd, focusing on governance values and their importance to the University. Council asked for their thanks to be passed on to outgoing members.

The upcoming Artificial Intelligence (AI) Summit was highlighted as an opportunity to foster constructive discussions on artificial intelligence while avoiding polarisation. Papers had been commissioned, and significant interest was noted from staff sharing their views on AI. Collaboration with Education Futures and participation in a TEQSA workshop on 12 June 2025 were also mentioned as part of ongoing efforts in this area.

The Chair of the Academic Board noted that the report on research productivity had progressed without contention and would now be addressed further by the Executive team. Council demonstrated a keen interest in the outcomes of actions relating to this topic.

Resolution: Council NOTED the Chair of Academic Board’s Report to Council and provided feedback on concerns that have been highlighted for the period from 28 March 2025 to 26 May 2025 [D25/107281].

OC/25/03/08

Standing orders were suspended at 10.30 am and resumed at 10.45am.

CLOSED SESSION

