

University of New England
Council (6:2025)
Armidale and Zoom Video Conference
Wednesday 3 Dec 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
Ian Gillespie, Council Member
Phil Hess, Council Member
Col Murray, Council Member
Kristy Sillman, Council Member
David van Aanholt, Council Member
Prof Adrian Walsh, Chair Academic Board

In attendance:

Karma Auden, Chief Financial Officer
Prof Simon Evans, Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Meredith Parry, Chief Operating Officer
Dr Neil Durrant, Executive Director, Future Students Engagement & Technologies
Prof Chris Armstrong, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Kus Pandey, Acting Director Governance and University Secretary

Guests

Peta McDougall, Acting Director Corporate Communications

Apologies:

Radha Thomas, Director Governance and University Secretary
Chanel Hopkinson, Council Member

IN-CAMERA SESSION



OPEN SESSION

1. Procedural Matters

The Chair advised the Secretariat would make a recording of this meeting solely to assist with the preparation of minutes. The recording would be stored securely and erased once the minutes have been confirmed.

1.1. Welcome

The Chair opened the Meeting at 9.30 am and declared it quorate.

The Chair thanked the Executive Team for the significant workload undertaken in 2025 and also noted that this was Jan McClelland’s last meeting.

1.2. * Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair provided an Acknowledgement of Country.

1.3. * Apologies

Apologies were received for Chanel Hopkinson.

1.4. * 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 Deputy Chancellor, Jan McClelland declared an interest in Items 12.4.1 (Honorary Degree Submissions for Approval by Council) and 16.1.(Election of Deputy Chancellor) as current Deputy Chancellor.

David van Aanholt declared an interest in Item 16.1 (Election of Deputy Chancellor) as a nominee for the position of Deputy Chancellor.

1.5. * Order of Business

Council agreed to take as read and adopt the non-starred items,

[REDACTED]

Resolution: Council ACCEPTED the order of business and ADOPTED non-starred items.
 OC/25/06/01

2. Regulatory Reports (Unstarred)

2.1. Professional Accreditation Annual Report

Resolution: Council:

1. NOTED the Professional Accreditation Annual Report; and
2. NOTED the Audit and Risk Committee's recommendation to reduce the ongoing level of Audit and Risk Committee oversight of the professional accreditation risk now that the Professional Accreditation Procedure has been implemented. The Audit and Risk Committee has instead requested an annual attestation of compliance with accreditation requirements be provided from December 2026 and that the immediate flagging of breach, litigation, TEQSA notifications be communicated via VC's report, and relevant litigation and compliance reports. [D25/197551]

OC/25/06/02

2.2. Infrastructure and Facilities Annual Report

Resolution: Council NOTED the Infrastructure and Facilities Annual Report. [D25/197587]

OC/25/06/03

2.3 2025 Interim Key Result Area Performance Report

Resolution: Council NOTED the 2025 Interim Key Result Area Performance Report. [D25/198883]

OC/25/06/04

2.4. Staff with Excessive Leave Accumulations and Management Recommendations

Resolution: Council NOTED the November 2025 Leave Balances Report and the Next Steps in the context of the University's Financial Rectification Plan. [D25/195417]

OC/25/06/05

2.5. Principal Dates

Resolution: Council APPROVED to Council the proposed 2027 Principal Dates [D25/183427]

OC/25/06/06

3. * Safety Concerns and Risk Management

The Council discussed campus safety concerns arising from severe weather, noting that heavy snow and winds had caused significant internal damage to tree branches, creating ongoing hazards with large branches falling despite arborists having previously inspected and approved the trees. The Vice-Chancellor acknowledged the University's long-term proactive planning to remove large trees from proximity to buildings, which had been controversial at the time but had proven effective in minimising infrastructure damage. It was also noted that climate change considerations would inform future planning, whilst also acknowledging current risks from snake season and potential bushfires in the windy conditions. The Chancellor raised concerns about Executive wellbeing, acknowledging the substantial workload carried by the Vice-Chancellor and senior Executive Team in driving the University's ambitious agenda, urging them to take breaks over Christmas to avoid burnout, reinforcing that whilst the strategic work was exciting, it must not come at the cost of staff wellbeing

4. * Celebrating Success

The Chair invited Peta McDougall to present the 2025 Celebration video. A short video celebrating the achievements in 2025 was played to members.

Peta McDougall left the meeting at 9.48 am

5. Chancellor's Reports

5.1. * Expert Council on University Governance Principles and Recommendations

The Chair reported on the progress in implementing the 8 principles from the Expert Council on University Governance report, emphasising Council's accountability for actioning these commitments. Several actions relating to the recommendations have begun, including making open sections of Council meetings publicly available on the Council website. The Chair also noted progress on appointing new Council members with consideration of the Expert Council's Recommendation #5 using the recently updated UNE Council Skills and Expertise matrix, particularly seeking members with leadership in higher education experience. A gap analysis will be undertaken in 2026 and a plan to improve UNE governance to align with the recommendations developed and begun.

Resolution: Council NOTED the endorsement of the Expert Council on University Governance Principles and Recommendations, sector positions, and regulatory expectations. [D25/192519]

OC/25/06/07

5.2. * Chancellor's Engagement Report to Council

The Chair thanked David van Aanholt for presiding over the recent Graduation, and other members of Council for attending events on behalf of UNE Council.

Council members reflected on achievements from the past year, highlighting the financial rectification plan, the consultative approach to the Strategic Plan, financial discipline in cost management, the response to TEQSA, handling of difficult matters with lessons learned identified, and digital strategy development under Dr Durrant's leadership. Looking forward, members identified priorities including greater emphasis on continuing student load reporting to Council, infrastructure investment (noting this was addressed in the Strategy and Operational Plans), maintaining a Director mindset, financial sustainability, student retention, securing government support, governance upgrades, implementing the strategy realistically. The Chair celebrated the consultative strategy process, artificial intelligence leadership, cultural change, student satisfaction, research grants, and Council functioning as a team.

An update from Nominations Committee deliberations regarding Council membership was given. The position identified for a candidate with higher education leadership experience has several shortlisted nominees, and discussions are ongoing with these. The Committee prioritised female candidates. For the First Nations Council position, the Chair rejected the initial process of non-Indigenous Committee members selecting a candidate, instead implementing a community consultation process led by the Pro Vice-Chancellor Indigenous with the Vice-Chancellor, acknowledging this would take time but was necessary for the right outcome.

The recommendations developed at a previous Council meeting relating to ensuring staff and student representatives were able to contribute to Council were discussed. A number of the recommendations have been enacted, others still to be started. The Chair encouraged all members of Council to support participation.

Resolution: Council

1. DISCUSSED what they are proud of having achieved in 2025 and
2. DISCUSSED what they would like to achieve in 2026
3. NOTED the Chancellor's Report to Council [D25/198085].

OC/25/06/08

6. Vice-Chancellor's Business

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

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

The Vice-Chancellor reported on discussions with the new Deputy Secretary of the Federal Department of Education and the acting Executive Director of ATEC regarding potential funding changes (currently not budgeted), and noted that regulatory requirements strengthened the University's case for improved compliance. He reported receiving a Deputy Secretary letter requesting hub assistance. Addressing his Key Performance Indicators, the Vice-Chancellor detailed his achievements, whilst emphasising the need for careful retention analysis to avoid misallocating attrition reasons, noting the University's different student cohort required understanding students' lives. He also highlighted Tamworth campus progress (building to be constructed the following year).

Resolution: Council NOTED the Vice-Chancellor and CEO's Report. [D25/202057]

OC/25/06/09

6.2. * Financial Rectification Plan Update

The Chair noted the Financial Rectification Plan was part of the budget paper and invited the Chief Financial Officer, Karma Auden to speak to the report. The Chief Financial Officer highlighted pages 191-192 that contained a summary of key actions already being taken across the University (grouped thematically from five pages of specific actions, with some yielding future results). A Council member requested that the financial rectification targets for 2026 continue to be specified separately in reporting rather than absorbed into the overall budget, to enable monitoring against the rectification plan, noting this was critical for 2027 and 2028 projections. The Chief Financial Officer confirmed the plan to continue reporting the Financial Rectification Plan separately with tables, risk matrix, and actions to Council monthly, acknowledging the lesson from previous attempts where targets became lost in the budget. A Council member sought clarification on the second red pillar regarding one-off adjustments, with the Chief Financial Officer explaining these comprised two separate items: Tamworth land valuation (which came in above expectations) and insurance recoveries (which did not meet expectations, dropping from expected levels). A Council member suggested promoting free accommodation models in Trimester 3 to encourage student registrations and reduce costs, with the Vice-Chancellor directing ideas to the financial rectification plan email address (FRP@UNE.edu.au).

Resolution: Council NOTED the Financial Rectification Plan Update for October 2025. [D25/202620]

OC/25/06/10

6.3. * Business Plan and Key Performance Indicators

The Chair invited the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Chris Moran to speak to the report. It was noted that most objectives were on track. Council discussed severe and very high severity incidents, including hazing allegations, staff subjected to abuse during fieldwork, and mental health incidents. Council noted concerns about continuing student load and the research income metric, with the Vice-Chancellor acknowledging the need to focus on magnitude and breadth of research activity rather than simply counting grant applications. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) outlined initiatives to improve grant application quality, including faculty-level triaging, Thrive Labs, and structured fellowship support with mentoring programmes. Council

discussed significant infrastructure gaps in both property and research facilities, with a campus development plan due in January focusing on consolidation and investment in the highest quality buildings, and a research infrastructure plan due in March covering three areas: supporting access to external facilities, upgrading existing facilities such as the W33 poultry laboratory, and pursuing larger collaborative infrastructure projects with industry and university partners. Members noted potential opportunities through the 2027 state election and the Restart NSW Fund.

Resolution: Council NOTED the Business Plan Key Performance Indicators – December 2025 update [D25/198879].

OC/25/06/11

6.4. * AI Policy, Risk and Governance

The Chair invited the Executive Director, Future Students Engagement & Technologies, Dr Neil Durrant to speak to the paper, which consolidated work across the Deputy Vice-Chancellor portfolio and the Vice-Chancellor's portfolio. A subsequent development was noted: new TEQSA guidelines appeared to require a single omnibus AI policy for each university, necessitating a revised approach with an interim policy to be published in January based on the draft, followed by work to condense the planned four-element policy suite into a single policy. Feedback from the University community had been robust and provided good direction, though the rapidly changing landscape, including the recently released national AI policy and safety framework, would require ongoing iteration. The interim policy was considered critical to address student experience elements in relation to the launch of Madgwick and how this related to the broader policy framework. The AI framework and principles document, which had been endorsed by the Executive in the middle of the year and shared with the University community as part of policy discussions, included six principles, with one principle being "to be courageous in our deployment of AI," reflecting the ethos of the Strategic Plan. These principles were expected to become a useful way to track how the University was meeting its commitments and to inform oversight functions, though not all principles could be directly incorporated into policy. Council sought clarification on risk oversight, with confirmation that the Audit and Risk Committee would track the AI risk management framework, which would sit outside but be referenced within the policy. The classification framework in Part C of the consultation document would need to be rewritten following robust feedback that it was overly simplistic, though no industry standard yet existed for the typology of tool sets and their associated risks, with the national AI safety policy expected to inform future development. Council emphasised the importance of risk management given the University's leadership position in AI, with discussion noting the intersection of cybersecurity and artificial intelligence as a critically important area, and confirmation that the new Chief Information and Digital Officer had specific ideas about addressing this intersection, with further discussion planned for the February risk appetite workshop.

Resolution: Council NOTED the AI Policy, Risk and Governance update report. [D25/197483]

OC/25/06/12

6.5. * UNE Whole-of-Organisation Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Plan and Outcomes Framework

The Chief Operating Officer, Meredith Parry was invited to present the gender-based violence prevention and response plan. The condensed timeframe was noted with the code approved in late August and legislation enforced from 1 January 2026, requiring submission to government by 16 January 2026. The plan addressed seven national standards spanning 2026 to 2030, with an outcome framework requiring six-monthly reporting

to Council, and would be reviewed by the Executive before being sent to Full Stop Australia for external expert critique. Standard 1.2 required Council to have a member with staff and student wellbeing expertise, the Deputy Director Governance and University Secretary advised this was satisfied through three existing ex-officio members of Council (Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Chair Academic Board). Mandatory gender-based violence training for all staff was planned by Q4 2027, with training already commencing for student and resident leaders. The Vice-Chancellor emphasised the importance of the University's reputation as a safe learning environment given the predominantly female student population, and whilst minimum requirements would be met, Council agreed the University would benefit from having someone actively involved in driving societal changes in this area, potentially through a separate governance committee focused on safety and wellbeing. Council endorsed the plan subject to final approval following government template compliance and evidence mapping, expressing appreciation for the quality and consultation undertaken by the small team of two staff members.

Resolution: Council:

1. DISCUSSED and NOTED the draft University of New England Whole-of-Organisation Gender-based Violence Prevention and Response Plan (Plan) and Outcomes Framework;
2. DISCUSSED and ENDORSED through to Vice-Chancellor APPROVAL the DRAFT Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response Policy;
3. NOTED the implementation timeline and the circulation of the flying minute requesting ENDORSEMENT of the Plan on the 15 December 2025; and
4. NOTED that changes to the Council's Terms of Reference and Vice Chancellors Rule will be implemented in Q1 2026 to reflect the governance requirements in the Code. [D25/200464]

OC/25/06/13

7. * Chair of Convocation Report

The Chair opened the item for discussion. Council members noted many suggestions were operational matters outside Council's remit. The Vice-Chancellor raised concerns about requests to review historical decisions from 2018 and undertake benefit analyses of initiatives from 2021, questioning the contemporary relevance of such reviews and the appropriateness of expecting staff to undertake retrospective analysis of decisions made years earlier when documentation and original expectations may no longer be readily available. Council agreed the minutes should note the report and recognise that matters raised were highly operational and outside Council's remit, with other avenues available within the institution for operational concerns to be pursued.

Resolution: Council NOTED the Chair of Convocation's report, the Minutes of the Meeting of Convocation held on 31 October 2025 and the resolutions contained within. [D25/190108]

OC/25/06/14

8. * Student Member Report (Verbal Report)

The Chair invited Kristy Sillman, the Student Representative of Council to speak to this item. It was noted that the majority of the current Student Council would graduate by September 2026 with a new Chair needed by October. Celebrations included students attending the TEQSA conference, re-invitation to host Lifesaver Day, invitation to speak at UNE Life Board meetings from the following year, and a student forum on ProctorU. The next forum planned for Term 1 would focus on AI, with ideas already formulating from the TEQSA conference. Feedback received was cyclical in nature, with recent complaints concerning campus accessibility and

customer service in particular areas being investigated. The Constitution review process was nearing completion; it was acknowledged it had been a challenging process. The Student Representative noted they were consistently the last person to review documents and suggested earlier involvement of the Student Council in future processes could address delays and streamline the procedure. Concerns were raised about the consultation process more broadly, recognising the University was still adjusting to having a Student Council representative on Committees. The Chancellor emphasised the importance of student voice and encouraged the Student Representative to Council to reflect on the significant progress made throughout the year, with Council expressing appreciation for the work undertaken alongside substantial workloads.

9. Chair of Academic Board

9.1. * Chair of Academic Board Report

The Chair invited the Chair of Academic Board, Professor Adrian Walsh to speak to this report.

Significant work had been undertaken on artificial intelligence throughout the year, including the assessment framework. The Chair of Academic Board highlighted the progress of the policy prioritisation project, noting that work was underway to identify and update outdated University policies. The Chair highlighted upcoming changes to Academic Board reporting to Council, following discussions with the Chair of Academic Board during the PPDR (performance appraisal) process. It was agreed that Minutes would move to the reading room to reduce the volume of papers, with reporting becoming more strategic and focused on key risks, debates, and actions, ensuring Council can fulfil its duty with regards governance of education and research quality.

Resolution: Council NOTED the Chair of Academic Board’s Report to Council and provide feedback on concerns that have highlighted for the period from 26 September 2025 to 20 November 2025. [D25/201524]

OC/25/06/15

Standing Orders were suspended at 11.20 am and resumed at 11.30am.

CLOSED SESSION

