
University of New England
Council Meeting
Education Room 224 + Zoom Video Conference
Thursday 25 Feb 2021

Present:

Mr James Harris, *Chancellor & Chair*
Ms Jan McClelland AM, *Deputy Chancellor*
Prof Brigid Heywood, *Vice-Chancellor & CEO*
Mr David van Aanholt - **ZOOM**
Assoc/Prof Robyn Bartel, *Chair of Academic Board*
Mr Russell Evans - **ZOOM**
Dr Melanie Fillios

Mr Phil Hess
Ms Rosemary Leamon - **ZOOM**
Ms Anne Myers - **ZOOM**
Mrs Jane Schmude
Ms Meredith Symons
Ms Emma Wellham

In attendance:

Prof Peter Creamer, *Chief Operating Officer*
Prof Heiko Daniel, *Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research*
Mrs Anita Taylor, *Chief Financial Officer*
Prof Michael Wilmore, *Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor*
Mrs Gabrielle Price, *Director Governance & University Secretary, Minutes*
Mrs Libby Kettlestring, *Co-ordinator, Council Secretariat*

Observers

Ms Amy O'Toole, *Chief of Staff*
Ms Barb Shaw, *Acting Executive Principal – Student Experience*
Mr Anthony Smith, *Acting Executive Principal – Brand Partnerships & Business Development*
Ms Elizabeth Taylor, *Executive Change Director*
Prof Steve Warburton, *Acting Executive Principal – Education Futures*

1. MEETING OPENING

The Chancellor and Chair, Mr James Harris, welcomed members, attendees and guests to the first Council meeting for 2021, acknowledging in particular that this was Associate Professor Robyn Bartel's first meeting following her election as Chair of the Academic Board. The Chancellor also welcomed observers, many of whom had contributed to the reports being presented to today's meeting.

1.1 * Acknowledgement of Country

The University of New England respects and acknowledges that its people, programs and facilities are built on land, and surrounded by a sense of belonging, both ancient and contemporary, of the world's oldest living culture. In doing so, UNE values and respects Indigenous knowledge systems as a vital part of the knowledge capital of Australia. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land we call New England and pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which this meeting takes place.

1.2 * Apologies

There were no apologies.

1.3 * Conflict of Interest Declaration and Disclosed Register 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).

The Deputy Chancellor declared an interest in the discussion of the terms of reference changes for the Remuneration Committee at item 5.2.

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

1.4 * Order of Business

Council ACCEPTED the order of business and ADOPTED non-starred items.

1.5 * Introduction - Chair of Academic Board, Associate Professor Robyn Bartel

The Chancellor congratulated Associate Professor Bartel on her election as Chair of the Academic Board, noting Robyn has been part of the Academic Board Executive for some years, and while Ms Bartel had been acting Chair of Academic Board, she had chaired her first meeting of Academic Board whilst in her new role, just this week.

Professor Bartel spoke of her passion for and engagement with governance generally and at UNE over the years including with Academic Board and its various Committees, her academic discipline focus areas within the Faculty of Humanities, Arts, Social Sciences and Education, and her involvement in various sector and discipline leadership roles including (one example of many) her role as Chair of the Australian Geographers Society. Professor Bartel also spoke of the opportunity and import of Academic Board’s role in supporting the University to deliver on its object and social contract for the greater good.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

2.1 Confirmation of Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2020 were approved as a true and correct record via email on 18 January 2021. These minutes are available for viewing in the Convene Document Library.

2.2 * Action Items

There was one action item remaining from previous meetings.

Meeting/Item #	Action	Status
Open Council Meeting 31 July 2020; item 5.4 Council Member Induction & Development Plan 2020 #20117	Mr Harris as well as Council members Mr Evans, Ms Myers and Ms McClelland have agreed to trial the program in addition to the newly elected and appointed Council members, who will use the program upon their commencement.	Delayed This matter had been delayed due to staffing constraints but an update to be provided at the next open meeting.

3 STRATEGIC ITEMS

3.1 * Chancellor's Open Report #21042

The Chancellor took the report as read but highlighted key focus areas for the University Chancellors Council (UCC) including International students; general governance and Universities Australia role and performance. The Chancellor explained:

- the COVID-19 pandemic impact on International student mobility and the associated impact on operations and income remained a significant issue for a number of institutions;
- general governance issues, in particular the role of Chancellors and Vice-Chancellors in regards to relations with Universities Australia (UA) and Federal and State Governments had been discussed; and
- concerns and raised regarding the approach and value add of UA as a result of the efficacy of the relationship of that body with the sector and with key Government stakeholders, and consideration of the role of UCC in terms of stakeholder engagement and sector advocacy.

The Vice-Chancellor explained that engagement and advocacy of UA for the regions had not been clearly visible with no representatives from Universities Australia having visited UNE in over a decade. As a result of similar concerns of other universities, UA had undergone a health check review and there were plans for a full review which considers both the role of vice-chancellors and chancellors, of Councils and Senior Management as flagged by the Chancellor. Also being considered are the outcomes from investment in the UA body from the perspective as a sector and as an individual entity.

The Chancellor mentioned face-to-face delivery of the Universities Australian Institute of Company Directors course was planned for Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, noting there was a risk that these plans would be disrupted due to the unpredictable COVID-19 situation.

Council NOTED the Chancellor's Open report to Council, report #21042.

3.2 * Vice-Chancellor's Open Report #21047

The Vice Chancellor & CEO, Professor Brigid Heywood highlighted the immediate issue of lower than expected student load and then led a discussion regarding Academic Focus.

Regarding student load, it was reported:

- load at the time of this report was tracking 5% lower than forecast, and while down for both online and on-campus student cohorts, the observed deficit was higher (down approx. 12%) for the on-campus cohort;
- lower than expected enrolments were evident despite their having been a positive and increased applications for direct and early entry to UNE. This suggests UNE is being considered as an option but is in some cases being ranked more frequently as 2nd or 3rd preference which is a concern;

- other universities are indicating they are experiencing increased domestic enrolments at this time suggesting this trend if continues may impact UNE's overall market share;
- reasons for the change and root cause are being investigated with factors being reviewed including:
 - impact on UNE's traditional markets, of an employment uptick and erratic working environment due to COVID-19 pandemic;
 - impact of other universities shifting their marketing focus from international students to domestic market, supported by significant advertising spend (particularly by those online providers and universities targeting the greater Sydney market) and investment in online offerings; and
 - impact of Higher Education Commonwealth Supported Places pricing reforms to encourage enrolments in STEM programs and provide a disincentive for humanities, arts, business and law programs, may indicate greater price sensitivity for UNE's particular mature age student cohort; and
- strategies being investigated included:
 - the expected impact of UNE increasing marketing spend to support T2 enrolments, given the highly competitive market; and
 - the potential to promote and fund additional student scholarships including for those students impacted negatively by current employment market/regional location.

Council members questioned what might be the full year impact should this competitive intensity be sustained through 2021 and the quantum of investment necessary to intervene to support enrolments in T2 or T3? Also raised was the opportunity for FSBI to model various scenarios for income against forecasted budget.

- The Vice-Chancellor explained:
 - modelling of impact of increased marketing and Brand awareness would be undertaken as would a review of the current trends at a more granular level (i.e. mode, program, commencing and continuing students etc); and
 - there was a need to understand whether student choice was impacted by longer term factors such as the state of UNE infrastructure (e.g. particularly STEM facilities, college facilities and online product/learning systems). Where this was a factor in student choice and UNE value proposition this could limit the potential returns from short term marketing spend. Although key infrastructure projects/investments have been flagged as a priority, these will take time to plan, finance and fully implement so as to realise the benefits.

The Vice-Chancellor and CEO introduced the thematic discussion re UNE Academic Focus, noting

- it was appropriate to commence the year focusing on the core business of the University which is education and knowledge development;

- the objective for the UNE Academic Engine included business as usual delivery of quality assurance educational offerings, identifying key issues and agreeing areas of focus and action to support UNE's success; and
- the methodology used, confirming the process to describe the 'academic engine', consider what and how we deliver academic programs and to whom, strengths and weaknesses, a model within which to determine priority risk/focus and action areas and then agree key priorities and steps, had been a positive and collaborative experience with contributors from many areas. It was proposed that this approach, with some maturation over time, would be followed for future Council thematic discussions.

The Vice-Chancellor referred to the supporting slides describing:

- the evident commitment of the team to ensure a quality assurance approach and support a cultural transformation consistent with Future Fit Strategic Plan focused on stakeholder experience and outcomes;
- the key descriptors for academic resources, academic offerings; research and students; and
- the value of focusing discussion and reflection on the key statistics, for example:
 - the number of courses (169) and units (1716) on offer – indicate the significant investment UNE has made in course content and materials, while also exposing the complex and resource intensive nature of UNE's current model, bringing into question whether this model is delivering for our coursework students (e.g. when study pathways within a course are complex to navigate and/or student experience is impacted when a student is in a low enrolment unit);
 - the percentage of research fields where UNE rates at world standard levels and above, and the gap compared to what UNE is aiming to be in response to the challenge inherent in the Coaldrake report and so as to add value to external stakeholders has been identified as a key focus area. Reflection has supported conversations regarding prioritising our research efforts and how to leverage the academic workload model to deliver excellence in research outcomes;
 - In terms of the Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis, the discussions have allowed focused conversations, for example regarding:
 - the importance of moving from the current 80% of teaching revenue to 70% to make UNE less sensitive to changes in governance policy; and the need to commence programs now to replace the approx. \$12m in hypothecated funding that will be removed from all universities by 2024;
 - that the student of the future might be different and what models or approach UNE needs to take to help anticipate and prepare for future changes;
 - which opportunities UNE needs to chase – to secure some short term and some long term benefits;
 - the challenges of our current position and what are key risks and the key change UNE needs to enable through, for example:

- the new academic workload framework in development and consultation including with unions (i.e. with opportunity to better support high quality research while enabling quality curriculum and resourcing quality teaching effort; to engage some focused teaching only positions; and to recognize and support scholarship);
- a potential reframing of assessment methodologies and the academic calendar to enable the achievement of student learning outcomes and in the case of the calendar provide a better balance of learning time and academic teaching time and time for ‘life’ and wellbeing; and
- improving retention generally – through the actions already discussed but also applying good practice in some units/courses to other courses where that practice is relevant.

The Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Mike Wilmore, noted the academic workload model is a key part of the broader academic framework – with interconnections to the new course design framework for a refreshed and cohesive curriculum, as well plans to enable high quality scholarship opportunities for students and staff. Where UNE is doing things well in one area we need to better recognize and share this. The framework outlined in today’s slides supports the modelling of academic plans and proposals and their impact (e.g. of adding, removing or reviewing a particular activity) on other parts of the academic operations, and planning for that changes to be better understood and supported.

Professor Steve Warburton, Acting Executive Principal Education Futures, reflected on potential connections between current Academic Calendar model (which did not support a break between Trimesters or over the Christmas Break, potentially burdening students and the academy) and the other factors cited as contributing to attrition or lesser experience (e.g. students not receiving assessment results in time to plan next Trimester; students taking a break from enrolment/progression) to explain why the calendar program was a priority. There had been a proposal endorsed by Academic Board for a short term intervention – to reduce the teaching weeks within existing calendar and allow a short non-teaching period; while a long term calendar solution was researched a proposal put forward.

The Council and management further discussed the UNE Academic descriptors and slides noting:

- the key role of Academic Board within the governance structure to ensure academic activities were delivering quality academic outcomes;
- the importance of improving retention for UNE’s cohort – supporting student outcomes; exploring lead metrics and enabling an intervention based model that is more timely and relevant for student cohorts;
- the impact and value of the new Course and Unit Catalogue (the design of which is informed by research conducted by the Marketing team) to support students design personalised academic journeys;

- the importance of ensuring key facilities such as education support systems and UNE's use of them is fit for purpose and supports student stakeholders;
- the need to continue to engage and have conversations with students – to involve them in governance and have opportunities for involvement and co-creation of content (relevant to student cohorts);
- the importance of reviewing and looking for improvements in the model of funding and delivery of research activities at UNE, including to:
 - consider ways to reduce the level of teaching income subsidy;
 - improve engagement around research impact on community;
 - have focused expertise areas that supports recruitment of HDR students (both via internal pathways and external students);
 - undertake a planned restructure of research support as a tactical investment to improve research outputs to the required delta to support achievement of world standard output
 - leverage the Personal Performance and Development Review (PPDR) process to support research staff to develop requisite skills and outcomes in research;
 - promote the PhD Innovation – which provides new ways to deliver programs with international partners.
 - Enable longer term investments in, for example, aging Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) infrastructure via a 'precinct without walls' and support – collaborative research – research outcomes leveraging partnerships and adjunct staff, noting planning is required to recognise changes over the next 12 months in some of the key agencies we partner with;
- Supporting the shift of focus to engagement with external stakeholders including for example experience working with partners for work integrated learning options and scholarship – and implementing practices and a culture to enable this;

Council members also commented on:

- the utility of presentation and dashboard including that it provided clarity and enabled identification and interrogation of the big problems and helped articulate the connections between some supported programs and the bigger issues;
- the value of focusing on the vital few activities that can be achieved (eg. top 4 or 5) rather than the 'vital many or non-negotiables' that will limit outcomes; and
- that the actions identified, including around the academic calendar, were required to address and streamline/simplify business as usual practices, and provide a solid foundation to support both consistent quality practice, and enables staff and student life balance and wellbeing – and through this better outcomes.

Council and management discussed the significance of the academic calendar change including that the transition from one model to another could have short term negative implications for revenue (Year 1) but also significant longer term upside from a simplified model delivered within a single calendar year, which fitted more comfortably into the rhythm of the community and student / family life.

The Deputy Chancellor, Ms Jan McClelland, queried how UNE can ensure changes to business as usual practice does not cause management to lose sight of these numbers and to progress the culture change that is critical, asking also if staff would be rewarded for 'stepping into' the change and/or that the right approach be recognised in promotion criteria?

- The Vice-Chancellor discussed that a new simplified PPDR process would be a key instrument to help inform, guide and report on cultural change and also that the process of senior managers having a second in charge would also assist in supporting knowledge development and sharing.

The Chancellor thanked management on behalf of Council for the discussion, noting the importance that the academic operations and academic voice is heard and that Council looked forward to seeing the impact of this work in numbers both lead and lag indicators.

Council NOTED the Vice-Chancellor's Open report to Council, report #21047.

4. RELATED BUSINESS REPORTS

Nil.

5. BUSINESS AS USUAL REPORTS

5.1 * Chair Academic Board Report #21022

The Chancellor invited the Chair of Academic Board, Associate Professor Robyn Bartel, acknowledging the work on this report by Professor Perry's contribution and inviting the new Chair to provide relevant updates from Monday's Academic Board meeting.

Associate Professor Bartel acknowledged the collegiate approach and wonderful contribution Professor Perry had made to Academic Board during difficult times and through the response to COVID-19 pandemic (C19).

The Chair of Academic Board also acknowledged the key contributions from other outgoing board members including Deputy Chairs Associate Professor Brenda Wolodko (HASSE) and Associate Professor Amy Lykins (M&H) as well as Professor Hugh Barrett (outgoing Chair of Research Committee) and Associate Professor Adam Hamlin (outgoing Chair of Animal Ethics Committee).

Associate Professor Bartel explained that Academic Board were embarking on an evolution in practice, including:

- a greater focus on risk (academic risk register) and issues, moving from passive information monitoring to using information in an active way, agreeing how to determine when success is achieved either via specific measures – or observation of other quality assurance outcomes;
- a clear alignment of activity with the achievement of the HESF standards to inform and support TEQSA re-registration;
- linking personal academic standards and public good to ensure academic focus and input is explicitly 'future fit' and focused on areas of priority need;
- approaching activities including course reviews or health checks as a positive opportunity for feedback and continuous improvement that also provides assurance of compliance;

- reviewing impact of past decisions (including how the C19 group of ABSC was able to respond) to inform future practices which are flexible or agile in their delivery and to reflect on best practice and research informed activity to support UNE to style and frame curriculum in different ways for the future; and
- to leverage feedback and issues such as the issues raised in grievance report – following up that complaints are dealt with appropriately and systemically.

Associate Professor Bartel provided other updates including:

- following discussion of the Code of Conduct changes at Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) that policy will return to the Academic Freedom Working Group of Academic Board;
- significant work continues in terms of policy and framework to guide expectations and provide clarity and in ensuring UNE's outward information is consistent with Higher Education Standards Framework;
- the discussion of the principal dates, changes to academic calendar are welcome and critical;
- a focus on debriefing with outgoing members and formal welcome induction of new members has been positive as has the return of students to campus with the Commencement ceremony;

Council members queried:

- whether information was being captured and acted upon in terms of student grievances and issues and how complaints are channeled into the unit?
 - Ms Barb Shaw, Acting Executive Principal Student Experience, explained that grievances were directed to the Student Grievance Unit and that an annual report on activity and actions was produced each year (middle of the year);
- Did the Board use benchmarks to measure success of programs and determine what success looks like and the outcome?
 - The Chair of Academic Board confirmed that a combination of sector and internal benchmarks would be used to monitor progress, so that UNE had relevant monitoring of its specific cohorts but nevertheless could compare progress and/or improvements against sector trends.

The Chair thanked Associate Professor Robyn Bartel for her report on behalf of the Council.

Council:

- 1) NOTED the UNE Animal Ethics Committee Terms of Reference; and
- 2) NOTED the Chair of Academic Board's report to Council, report #21022.

5.2 * Minor Updates Terms of Reference for select Council Committees #21097

The Director Governance and University Secretary noted a number of minor updates were proposed to the Terms of Reference of Council Committees following organisational structure changes and discussion regarding Remuneration Committee membership last year.

Key changes proposed relate to replacement of Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor position with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor role in the membership for the Honorary Degrees Titles and Tributes

Committee, and the inclusion of the Deputy Chancellor as an official member of the Remuneration Committee of Council.

The Director Governance and University Secretary explained that potential changes to Committee functions would be considered as part of Council and Committee review processes in 2021.

The Deputy Chancellor abstained from voting on the second resolution.

Council:

- 1) APPROVED the administrative updates to the Terms of Reference for Honorary Degrees Titles and Tributes Committee; and
- 2) APPROVED the addition of the Deputy Chancellor to the membership of Remuneration Committee of Council Terms of Reference, as per report #21097.

5.3 UNE Council WHS - Due Diligence Obligations #21102

Council NOTED the UNE Council WHS - Due Diligence Obligations report, #21102.

6. * GENERAL BUSINESS

There were no matters of general business.

7. MEETING FINALISATION

7.1 * Next Meeting and Close

The Chancellor informed members the next open meeting of Council was scheduled for Friday 25 May 2021, thanking all for their attendance and contributions today. With there being no further business, the Chair declared the open session closed at 11.00am.

Signed by:



Mr James Harris
Chancellor

28 April 2021
Date