
University of New England

Council (4:2025)

UNE Sydney, Level 2 Sydney Collab Space, 28 George Street, Parramatta Sydney and Zoom Video
Conference

Thursday 24 Jul 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
Chanel Hopkinson, Council Member
Col Murray, Council Member (by Zoom)
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 (by Zoom)
Prof Chris Armstrong, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Rebecca Cawood, Director, Office of Strategy Management
Radha Thomas, Director Governance and University Secretary
Ross Beaney, Chair UNE Foundation for item 8.2
Sue-Ellen Hogan, Director UNE Metro and Regions for item 12.2.1

Apologies:

Kristy Sillman, Council Member
Russell Evans, 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. In-Camera Session

The meeting was declared open at 8.45am.

OPEN SESSION

2. Procedural Matters

2.1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and declared it quorate. Members were advised that the meeting was recorded for minute taking purposes.

2.2. * Acknowledgement of Country

The Chair undertook an Acknowledgement of Country.

2.3. * Apologies and Quorum

Kristy Sillman and Russell Evans' apologies were received.

2.4. * 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. No conflicts of interest were declared.

2.5. * Order of Business

Resolution: Council ACCEPTED the order of business and ADOPTED non-starred items.
OC/25/04/01

[Note item 8.2 was brought forward during the meeting and considered after item 5.1]

2.6. * Safety Concerns and Risk Management

Members discussed improving visibility and reporting of employee leave entitlements, particularly annual leave and long service leave balances. Members emphasised the importance of encouraging staff to take leave for wellness purposes rather than treating it as a financial liability, noting that employees receive notifications about their balances through HR policy.

Key points raised included the need for Council oversight of excess leave balances (such as cases where employees accumulate extensive unused leave), better tracking of special circumstances leave provisions related to psychosocial welfare, and enhanced reporting on how the University supports

staff through various leave mechanisms. The conversation concluded with reference to planned risk assessment workshop activities.

Action: Chief Operating Officer to provide Council with report on staff with excessive leave accumulations (such as those with significant unused leave) along with management recommendations for addressing these situations.

AOC/25/04/01

Action: Chief Operating Officer to enhance monitoring and reporting of leave provisions related to psychosocial welfare and special circumstances, as these relate closely to the University's duty of care and support mechanisms for staff wellbeing.

AOC/25/04/02

The staff awards ceremony held the previous week was described as having an outstanding response, with approximately 300 staff members attending and the venue reaching full capacity. The event received excellent feedback, with exceptional applause and positive reactions from attendees. A large network of University staff contributed both behind the scenes and during the actual event, demonstrating widespread collaboration to make the ceremony successful. The positive impact extended beyond the University community, with a former employee reaching out via LinkedIn to praise the event as uplifting. He suggested the possibility of holding similar celebrations around research excellence, though it was noted that research awards had already been incorporated. The Chair expressed interest in having Council members attend future annual events to participate in the celebrations with the University community.

Action: Secretariat to advise the Communications and Events Team that 'all staff' invitations should be extended to Council members. (Action completed 24 July 2025)

AOC/25/04/03

3. * Celebrating Success

3.1. Associate Professor Melissa Parsons (Associate Professor in Physical Geography) to present on research work on the Australian Disaster Resilience Index

Associate Professor Melissa Parsons attended the meeting at 9.57 am. The Chair invited Associate Professor Melissa Parsons to speak.

The presenter explained that ADRI originated in 2015 as a competitive research grant from the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, aimed at developing a standardised measure of disaster resilience capacity at a national scale. The project was conducted by a collaborative team from Geography, Planning, and the former Institute for Rural Futures, working alongside stakeholders from Australia's emergency management sector. Following the research phase, the team partnered with UNE CASSIE to develop the ADRI website and mapping interface, which launched in 2020. The website demonstrated significant impact, recording over 65,000 unique views and 600 user accounts from 300 organisations. The data supported policy development, risk assessment, community planning,

and research across federal, state, and local government levels, as well as private sector and NGO applications. The index featured on Treasury's measuring dashboard and New South Wales Treasury wellbeing indicators and was utilised in the National Emergency Management Agency's Risk Profile project. ADRI 2 was launched in June 2024 with updated data, maintaining currency for approximately five to seven years. The Chair expressed enthusiasm about the collaborative nature and external impact of the work, offering to facilitate connections with RACQ's insurance business for potential partnerships.

Associate Professor Melissa Parsons left the meeting at 10.10am.

The item concluded with celebration of recent media coverage highlighting the University's graduate starting salary rankings, particularly psychology graduates achieving number one in Australia.

Action: Secretariat to circulate ADRI website details (<https://adri.naturalhazards.com.au/#/>) and article '[The best and worst universities for graduate salaries revealed](#)' to members. (Action completed 24 July 2025)

AOC/25/04/04

4. Chancellor's Reports

4.1. Chancellor's Report to Council

Resolution: Council NOTED the Chancellor's Report to Council [D25/121205].

OC/25/04/02

4.2. * Council Members University Activities

The Chair expressed sincere gratitude to several Council members for their recent contributions to University activities. Megan Aitken was thanked for putting her name forward for Convocation and achieving success in that endeavour, with an offer of support provided. David van Aanholt and Ian Gillespie were acknowledged for their behind-the-scenes work on budget matters as part of the budget working group and Finance and Infrastructure Committee. The Chair also thanked Council members who participated in the recent strategy session, noting that despite it being a last-minute opportunity with participants working quite late, the session proved to be really valuable.

5. Vice-Chancellor's Business

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

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

The Vice-Chancellor presented a comprehensive report covering student enrolment data, staff engagement survey results, and strategic development progress. Trimester 2 census data revealed strong overall load growth of 3% (130 students above budget), driven by exceptional commencing student performance with 17.6% year-on-year growth for the second consecutive trimester.

However, continuing student retention remained challenging, with approximately 1,900 students leaving and 1,500 reducing their load, highlighting the ongoing focus required on retention strategies.

Staff engagement survey results from a pulse check showed mixed but generally positive trends across the core outcomes. For professional staff, engagement levels reached 71% (3% higher than the 2024 survey), progress satisfaction increased to 43% (7% higher than 2024), while wellbeing remained at 61% (1% lower than 2024). Academic staff demonstrated improvements across all three core measures: engagement at 68% (5% higher than 2024), progress at 46% (6% higher than 2024), and wellbeing at 53% (3% higher than 2024). The survey showed positive movement in several areas, though process efficiency remained a significant challenge for the institution.

The strategic framework development showed substantial progress, with strong positive feedback on the "community first" approach and refined purpose statement emphasising "creating and sharing knowledge." The foundations component had been well-received, providing structure for business-as-usual activities alongside unconventional objectives. The Vice-Chancellor presented detailed analysis of UNE's unique student demographic, characterised predominantly by non-traditional pathways including carers (primarily mothers), underemployed individuals, and those from non-tertiary backgrounds rather than direct school leavers.

Development work included innovative "curiosity courses" designed as low-friction entry points, supported by a native AI learning platform to reduce barriers for potential students. The presentation outlined how controlled entities (UNEP, UNE Foundation, UNE Life) would integrate strategically to support diverse student pathways and career transitions. Future initiatives included plans for a grand alliance around the renewable energy zone, positioning UNE as a lead partner in regional economic development aligned with the University's strategic direction.

Council members expressed continued enthusiasm for the strategic direction, with particular appreciation for the concrete "meta-initiatives" that could attract funding and partnerships. The timeline for Strategic Plan completion included workshops to finalise objectives, staff consultation for gap identification, and Council endorsement targeted for August-September rather than waiting until the September meeting. This would enable transition to detailed operating model discussions without delay over document presentation details.

The discussion addressed workforce wellbeing concerns, particularly regarding distributed staff and work-from-home arrangements impacting the sense of community and belonging. The University had shifted policy requiring good justification for employing staff away from New England, though challenges remained with workforce distribution and campus engagement.

Regarding TEQSA re-registration, the University continued implementing its comprehensive maturity model action plan, maintaining readiness for future engagement. The anti-semitism policy discussion revealed the University's current holding pattern, with University Executive having endorsed the adoption of the GO8 definition distinguishing criticism of Israel from anti-semitism.

A steering Committee was established to review all HR policies comprehensively, prioritising development of a standalone anti-discrimination policy rather than issue-specific responses.

The Vice-Chancellor identified an institutional gap regarding forums for conversations about matters of intellectual and ethical significance, noting limitations in Academic Board's scope for such discussions. Council would receive updates on policy development, communication plans, and implementation approaches at future meetings.

Action: The Director Governance and University Secretary to report on the program of work being undertaken for policies and the related communication plan for the policy program.

AOC/25/04/05

Resolution: The Council NOTED the Vice-Chancellor and CEO's Report. [D25/141168]

OC/25/04/03

Ross Beaney attended the meeting at 11.13 am and provided an update on UNE Foundation. He left the meeting at 11.21 am. (See item 8.1)

5.2. * Business Plan Key Performance Indicators – July 2025 Update

The Business Plan Key Performance Indicators were noted as showing good progress, with the Chair praising the clarity of the report and indicating no detailed discussion was required unless members had specific concerns.

Resolution: Council NOTED the Business Plan Key Performance Indicators – July 2025 update [D25/137325].

OC/25/04/04

6. Student Council Report

The Council extended its thanks to Council member Kristy Sillman and requested that appreciation be passed on to her team for their engagement with different Committees.

Resolution: The Council NOTED the Student Council Report [D25/136354].

OC/25/04/05

7. Chair of Academic Board

7.1. * Chair of Academic Board Report

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

The UNE AI Summit was scheduled for July 28-29, 2025, to address opportunities and challenges of artificial intelligence in teaching, research, and assessment. The Academic Board Chair highlighted two key priorities from his report: the AI summit and Academic Board's focus on addressing AI and

assessment challenges. Planning was underway for an open forum on AI and assessment for all staff, building on the outcomes from the AI Summit. The Chair expressed interest in hearing the results of the AI Summit at the next Council meeting.

Action: Chair of the Academic Board to report on the outcomes of the AI summit at a forthcoming Council meeting.

AOC/25/04/06

Resolution: Council NOTED the Chair of Academic Board's Report to Council for the period from 26 May 2025 to 16 July 2025 [D25/137529] and provided feedback on concerns raised within the report [D25/137529].

OC/25/04/06

7.1.1. 2026 JMP Calendar Update

Resolution: Council:

1. NOTED the changes to Year 4 dates in 2026 JMP Calendar.
2. NOTED the census dates for MEDI units for Semester 1 and 2, 2026 [D25/134045].

OC/25/04/07

Standing Orders were suspended at 11:23 am and resumed at 11:33 am.

8. Presentation

8.1. * Presentation on Research

The Chair invited the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, Professor Chris Armstrong to speak to the report.

The research presentation highlighted strong grant performance with significant diversification needed across funding categories and fields of study. The University currently received approximately 90% category one grants, heavily concentrated in agriculture, creating both opportunity and risk. Notable successes included substantial growth in medicine and health grants, with MRFF and NHMRC funding totalling several million dollars, and two major multinational collaborations in agricultural research - clean breeding for sheep and bluegrass for beef - positioning UNE as leader of a global methane hub across six countries.

Research quality and quantity analysis revealed mixed outcomes, with field-weighted citation indices showing strong performance but some decline in research outputs, particularly in the SABL Faculty. Analysis indicated that high-performing researchers were taking on additional responsibilities, affecting their output levels. Opportunities to leverage the University's vertically integrated research approach was emphasised, combining fundamental research with industry application through technology enablement.

Commercial opportunities were highlighted through partnerships with government and industry, including satellite technology applications for landscape mapping, vegetation analysis, and renewable energy zone development. The European Space Agency partnership for calibration validation using the New England region demonstrated international recognition of capabilities. Examples of world-leading research impact included Professor Fran Cowley's work changing Commonwealth Government methane emission calculations and Professor Amir Kharton's collaboration with Microsoft advancing computational chemistry economics.

Discussion revealed concerns about researchers potentially undervaluing their expertise, competing primarily on price rather than quality, and the need for better storytelling about research achievements. The presentation connected research strategy development with the broader University strategic planning process, emphasising the importance of targeted partnership development and capability analysis.

Council members thanked Professor Chris Armstrong for his presentation.

CLOSED SESSION

