

UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA CORPORATE GOVERNANCE REVIEW – UNIVERSITY RESPONSE

Introduction

Introduction from Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor

Effective governance is the foundation of any well-functioning organisation. In the university context, it is essential for careful stewardship of public funding, maintaining rigorous standards for education and research, ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements and supporting the needs of students and staff. It is also central in ensuring that the University is meeting the expectations of the broader community in providing trained professionals and relevant research to underpin economic and social prosperity.

The University of Canberra Corporate Governance Review provides a thorough analysis of the University's governance and related operations, with clear and considered advice for the University's governance bodies and leadership team. Overall, it supports the findings of the previous external review of UC's governance, the Wells Review (2023), that the University's governance arrangements provide a solid base from which to further improve.

The Review provides a range of practical recommendations that will serve to strengthen our approach to governance and ultimately improve the student and staff experience at UC. It provides valuable advice regarding the delineation between academic and corporate governance and the importance of both. It points to a need for a clear and well communicated strategy and greater focus on effective performance and managing risk.

The University welcomes and generally accepts the recommendations. Our responses to the recommendations are detailed in the attached document and will be implemented as a priority.

While not the subject of explicit recommendations, the review also touches on matters that speak to our broader culture and ensuring the trust and confidence of our staff and students. The University has faced a challenging set of circumstances over the past 18 months and has responded with a substantial organisational and financial restructure.

The Review found that, despite recent challenges, there is a high level of support and strong commitment amongst our staff. We appreciate their commitment and resilience and share their determination to deliver a quality education for our students and ensure future success for the University.

The University continues to operate in a dynamic environment, and we must be agile and responsive to ensure our ongoing success. To operate effectively with a smaller staff contingent, we must embrace change in the way we work. We must effectively delegate, and we must place trust in our staff to make relevant decisions, while ensuring appropriate accountability measures are in place.



The Review is the culmination of intensive assessment and consultation across the University. It will shape the way we approach governance and leadership at UC, building a more collaborative and transparent operating environment and returning UC to a position of strength.

We would like to thank Ian Chubb and Sue Chapman for a thorough and thoughtful review which provides us with a strong basis for moving forward.

Lisa Paul

Bill Shorten

Background

Over the course of 2023-24, the University of Canberra experienced a significant deterioration in its operating position, with the impact of financial challenges amplified by instability in University leadership. In 2024, facing a significant decline in revenue and mounting operating costs, the University Council and senior management were forced to adopt a range of difficult measures to reduce expenditure and ensure the return to a balanced budget. These measures included academic and professional staff redundancies, voluntary separations, a hiring freeze and reductions in non-salary operating expenses.

The University of Canberra has not been an outlier in the sector, with the majority of Australian universities in deficit. The higher education sector has experienced declining domestic student demand, a decrease in international student enrolments driven by government initiatives to cap international student numbers and operating expenses increasing at a faster rate than inflation. Universities' domestic enrolments traditionally slow in a full employment economy. At the same time as all these pressures, a rising cost of living would have influenced potential students' decisions.

In addition to declining financial performance, the sector has been grappling with a range of issues, including student safety, 'wage theft', increasing workforce casualisation, widespread redundancies, and perceptions of excessive executive remuneration. This has led to public and political concern about the broader performance of Australian universities, including their governance and management.

Government is focused on improving the accountability of universities through increasing levels of regulation imposed on the sector. While the TEQSA Act and the Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF) provide rigorous standards for university operations, universities now also face increased oversight by external bodies and committees, including the Expert Council on University Governance. A focus on improving university governance is also evident in the recent updating of the Code of Governance Principles and Practice for Australia's Public Universities by the University Chancellor's Committee.

In light of this broader environment and the financial and operational challenges facing the University of Canberra, the ACT Government, through the Chief Minister, supported calls for an independent review of the University of Canberra's governance. It is within this context that the University initiated a review of corporate governance in early 2025.

Process

The University of Canberra Corporate Governance Review was led by Professor Ian Chubb AC, former Chief Scientist and Vice-Chancellor of the Australian National University and Sue Chapman former university executive and Deputy Chancellor at the University of Wollongong. These two independent assessors were supported by the Nous Group. The objectives of the review were to:

- Assess the effectiveness of the current governance framework.
- Examine how the University's governance processes align with the University's goals.
- Identify areas for improvement and recommend changes.
- Ensure compliance with relevant laws, regulations, and standards, particularly Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF) 2021, Domain 6: Governance and accountability
- Enhance transparency, accountability, and stakeholder engagement
- Position the University to respond well to changing laws, regulations, and standards.

The review included a comprehensive document review, interviews, focus groups and roundtables with internal and external stakeholders and sector benchmarking. Its final report was delivered to the University in April 2025 and presented to the 15 May Council meeting.

Response

Overwhelmingly the thrust of the Review and most of its recommendations are supported by Council and executive management. As a necessity, Council has undertaken close oversight of university operations during a period of leadership instability and financial stress, over the past 18 months. However, we are now reestablishing a more traditional delineation between the governance role of Council and the management role of the Vice-Chancellor and executive team.

The University has a clear strategy, *Connected*, released in 2023 and the key values and aspirations it embodies remain at the heart of the University's identity. However, implementation has been impeded by financial constraints, and significant changes to the University and its leadership have left staff unsure of the ongoing relevance and application of *Connected*. A strategy update will be undertaken in 2025 accompanied by a comprehensive communication program to ensure that staff are clear about what our University aspires to be and how we will deliver on our strategic goals.

While Council acknowledges overall responsibility for academic governance, we rely strongly on Academic Board to provide relevant advice and guidance to the Vice-Chancellor and to Council. The key role Academic Board has played over the last couple of years in preparing the University for TEQSA reregistration is acknowledged and appreciated. Having met that milestone, the Board now has increased capacity for addressing broader academic issues and providing relevant advice to Council and the Vice-Chancellor. As the University seeks to review its academic offerings, in response to changing market and community demands, input and guidance from Academic Board will be critical.

We are cognisant of our responsibility to build and maintain our research capacity. We currently have numerous areas of research excellence which we seek to grow and strengthen as well as looking to other areas of value to our community. As with most other universities, a key ongoing challenge is to source the necessary funding to meet our research aspirations.

We are implementing a stronger system of accountability across the university. This includes a focus on improved performance monitoring plus better monitoring and management of risk, both financial and non-financial. A low appetite for risk has contributed to inefficient and onerous bureaucratic processes and widespread staff frustration as noted by the Review. Such risk aversion must change as we seek to meet our strategic goals with fewer staff. We will move to ensure that authority to make decisions is shifted to the appropriate level and staff trusted to make decisions in line with their delegations.

A better information base for decision-making is required. This applies to Council decision-making, but also to decision-making across the University. While the University is taking steps to improve the data and evidence available to Council and key decision-makers, some improvements will not be possible until we have funds available for investment in new and upgraded systems.

Our students and staff are the reason we exist and improving the experience for both groups is a priority. A focus on achieving less onerous processes and improved systems should deliver positive outcomes for both groups. The

Review also made useful recommendations about broader and more effective engagement with students and staff. The University is committed to more effective two-way communication (i.e. both up and down the chain) and is looking at a range of measures to achieve this. Staff need to feel listened to and to feel that their input makes a difference

The University of Canberra has a history of strong engagement with, and support for, First Nations people and this remains a priority. We have recently appointed a First Nations Council Member (in line with Review recommendations) and continue to increase First Nations representation amongst our students and staff as well as in our curriculum. Embracing indigenous knowledge and culture is a key value to which we will continue to adhere.

One of the most welcome findings of the Review was a high level of commitment among staff to the University's success. The Review found that staff are generally optimistic about the future and have confidence in the University's executive leadership to return the University to financial stability.

We acknowledge that recent substantial change and upheaval has taken a toll and that trust in management and governance of the University needs to be repaired. However, we believe we are rebuilding on a solid foundation. We seek to build a culture based on respect, collaboration and ambition to make a difference. The recommendations of this review, particularly around improving transparency, accountability and communication will support greater trust and confidence and a build a positive culture at the University of Canberra.

The Review presented 24 recommendations for consideration. In introducing them, the reviewers said: "The Review believes the right foundations are in place, but there are five key areas the University should focus on to ensure its governance structures, polies and practices are effective, transparent, and aligned with best practice":

- Clarify the role and focus of the Council – now that leadership is settled, and the financial situation is being managed, the focus of Council can lift out of the operational detail and return to measuring performance against its strategic priorities.
- Revise delegations to push decision making to where it is needed – the Vice Chancellor should have the appropriate authority required for the management of the University. The Vice Chancellor will then delegate authority to the appropriate level, supported by a rigorous system of reporting against expectations.
- Develop and implement strategic KPIs to track performance with focus on measuring what matters – active performance monitoring should flow down, and accountability should be clear, unambiguous and, ultimately, the responsibility of and to the Vice-Chancellor.
- Improve transparency – information provided to Council should be transparent and concise and decisions made by Council must be communicated clearly and consistently, fostering greater communication between Council, management and staff to ensure transparency in decision making.
- Embed a culture of confidence and trust – notwithstanding the recent turbulence, there is a high level of support and strong commitment among staff. Clarifying Council's role (distinct from management), revising delegations, monitoring performance and holding individuals accountable and improving transparency are all critical to rebuilding confidence and trust across the University.

Many of the recommendations can be addressed immediately. Others will require time to consult with stakeholders and develop implementation arrangements. Responses to each specific recommendation are set out below. Timing and responsibility for implementation is as indicated.

Implementation Plan

#	Recommendation	Endorse	Response / implementation	Owner	Timing
Council and Senior Management Personnel					
1	Establish that the Council is accountable to stakeholders and the wider community	✓	<p>The role of the University Council and its accountability to stakeholders is clearly defined in the University of Canberra Act, however, it is clear that this is not well understood across the broader community.</p> <p>Across various forums, Council will provide greater assurance to the UC community of the role and function of Council, and what this accountability means in relation to the day-to-day operation of the University.</p> <p>The University will also maintain regular engagement with the ACT Government and local business, industry and community, demonstrating our commitment to Canberra as per the Act.</p> <p>Actions: review UC website and intranet material related to UC governance function; increase visibility of Council members across UC staff; maintain regular communications with the ACT Government, as defined through the Civic Partnership Agreement; maintain regular communication with staff – summary of Council meetings.</p>	Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor	< 3 months
2	Ensure Council understands its responsibility to ensure the Vice Chancellor is effectively managing the University (as opposed to directly managing the University)	✓	<p>Council acknowledges its role is to ensure that the Vice-Chancellor is effectively doing the job of managing the University. Council will ensure all management powers are delegated to the VC, except for reserved powers of Council. Council will consider its current scope of activity (as well as that of its Committees) to ensure that it is not attending to operational and management matters that are delegated to the Vice-Chancellor and the senior management team.</p> <p>Actions: Council to review the University delegations framework (currently being reviewed by University management) and policy to ensure that powers are appropriately delegated.</p>	Chancellor and Council	< 3 months

3	Convert the Planning and Development Committee (P&DC) to an ad hoc committee	x	<p>Given the current and proposed major investments in the University's masterplan, the Council believes it is necessary to have considered oversight of campus development, and that this is best achieved through a standing committee of Council.</p> <p>Action: none taken.</p>	Not endorsed	Not endorsed
4	Clearly define the Academic Board's advisory role separate from management	✓	<p>Academic Board is responsible for the academic governance of the University, reporting to the Vice-Chancellor and Council on matters related to academic quality, integrity and offerings. It plays a crucial role in providing advice and guidance in relation to academic matters, including providing advice to VC on course offerings and strategies to ensure we meet student and broader community needs. Its subcommittees should address detailed reviews of specific academic standards and KPIs.</p> <p>Actions: Ensure clear role definition and good communication between Academic Board, Council and the VC. Ensure broader university processes facilitate Academic Board strategic input on academic matters. Review delegations of AB and subcommittees</p>	Vice-Chancellor / DVC and Chancellor / Chair AB	< 3 months
5	Include at least one Council member with a finance background and one with senior university management experience	✓	<p>The University of Canberra Act requires two external independent members have financial expertise. Senior university management experience is a new requirement, also included in the updated Code of Governance for Australian Universities.</p> <p>The current Council includes members with considerable financial experience, but since late 2024 we have not had a Council Member with formal financial qualifications (e.g. CPA). This will be considered in relation to upcoming Council appointments and will be managed in collaboration with the ACT Government which is responsible for making external appointments.</p> <p>Action: Council to work with the ACT Government to ensure membership includes appointees with appropriate financial expertise and senior university management experience as positions become available.</p>	Council	Ø 6 – 12 months

6	Provide more university-specific governance training to new Council members	✓	<p>Council members receive induction and governance training including participation in the UCC / AICD Foundations of University Governance course. An area for improvement may be for more specific training as to how universities are run and funded.</p> <p>Action: Additional training as to how universities are run and funded to be developed for Council members.</p>	Office of the Chancellor	Ø 6 – 12 months
Performance Management					
7	Agree on a few genuine key performance indicators (KPIs) aligned with strategic objectives and monitor progress	✓	<p>Reform here has begun with recent revision of KPIs and close monitoring by management and Council. The Review recommends further revision to reduce operational and BAU KPIs and focus on high-level, strategic KPIs that are measurable and can be tracked as closely as possible to real time.</p> <p>Actions: Vice-Chancellor/executive to refine primary KPIs to ensure high-level and strategic KPIs for Council approval. Subsidiary indicators at faculty and business unit level to follow. KPIs specific to Academic Board and its subcommittees to be developed. Benchmark University performance / KPIs against sector standards for a comparison measure.</p>	Vice-Chancellor for Council approval	< 6 months
8	Focus Council's attention on strategic financial oversight and avoid detailed financial management	✓	<p>Now that the University's financial situation has stabilised and the organisational restructure is in implementation, Council can pull back from close operational scrutiny. It is the job of the Finance Committee to monitor university finances in detail and advise Council. Council will therefore focus on strategic financial matters and decisions and rely on Finance Committee for more detailed oversight.</p> <p>Action: Restrict finance consideration at Council meetings to strategic matters and rely on advice from Finance Committee as to when and where closer scrutiny may be required.</p>	Chancellor	< 6 months

9	Investigate data system limitations impacting performance reporting	✓	<p>The University currently has a range of data systems and reporting mechanisms, including a performance dashboard, that is presented at each Council meeting. However, limitations in the IT and data systems make it challenging to monitor performance in all areas in an optimal way. Within the limits of its finances, the University will strive for improved capability to support comprehensive and timely reporting against KPIs and better University performance reporting in real time.</p> <p>Action: Vice-Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer to investigate system improvements to improve comprehensive and timely reporting against KPIs.</p>	Vice-Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer	Ø 6 – 12 months
10	Progress on making strategic KPIs visible to the broader University management and leaders	✓	<p>It is clear from this review that University performance measures are not understood across all levels of management and the broader University community. It is important that faculty and business unit level managers accessing the dashboards understand how their unit's performance contributes to the University's strategic goals to ensure broader performance monitoring and accountability.</p> <p>Action: Vice-Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer to investigate performance dashboard / scoreboards visible to University management and leaders with the capacity to be able to drill down to business unit performance</p>	Vice-Chancellor and Senior Management Group	Ø 6 – 12 months

Risk Management

11	Simplify and align risk management approach across governance levels	✓	<p>Elements of the risk management framework have been updated by the COO in 2025. It is agreed that the University needs to provide confidence to Council and staff that risks are being appropriately managed. Risks will be linked to relevant KPIs and better aligned across each level of governance, acknowledging that risk management is a shared responsibility across the university. A high-level strategic risk register will be reported to each Council meeting and the more detailed risk register monitored at each meeting of ARMC.</p> <p>Actions: Assess risk management framework, policies and procedures to ensure links to relevant KPIs, and ensure that risk management is a clear responsibility for all appropriate levels of management, including Faculty Executives and leadership teams. Train staff and stakeholders on risk management in the University context; review terms of reference / charters for governance committees to ensure that risk management against KPIs is incorporated.</p>	<p>Vice-Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer</p> <p>Chair ARMC</p>	Ø 6 – 12 months
12	Consider risks holistically (rather than finance alone), with performance-related risks addressed in each Council meeting	✓	Action: Monitor performance-related risks through the strategic risk register provided at each Council meeting. Vice-Chancellor to report on performance related risks at each Council meeting.	Vice-Chancellor and Chief Operating Officer	Ø 3– 6 months

13	Streamline course approval processes and reduce the governance burden on minor changes	✓	<p>Seek to reduce the administrative burden by reviewing course lifecycle, including course approval processes, to reduce the administrative burden, particularly for minor changes. Design simplified processes that enable more agile and responsive course delivery.</p> <p>Actions: Review the delegations framework to ensure that minor revision and changes can be approved at the Faculty level and Academic Board consider increasing delegations to the Curriculum Committee. Implementation of the new Curriculum Management System from 2026 onwards will also improve processes; Consider delegation of officer responsible for oversight of complete course lifecycle, from development through to review, revision and closure. Review the range of committees, streamline and focus remaining committees.</p>	Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor	Ø 6 – 12 months
Accountability					
14	Explicitly delegate management responsibilities to the Vice Chancellor	✓	<p>Under the University of Canberra Act Council has ‘entire management’ of the university. The Vice-Chancellor is the delegated authority for the overarching management of University operations. The Review advises that Council should be explicit about the delegation of its power for university management to the Vice-Chancellor, and the powers Council retains.</p> <p>Actions: The University Governance Charter and statement of Reserved Powers of Council would seem to clearly define the respective roles of Council and the Vice-Chancellor. An amendment to Section 10 of the University of Canberra Act may assist in clearly defining the governance role of Council. The University will also review its Delegations of Authority to ensure that the Vice-Chancellor’s delegated powers appropriately cover all levels of management of the University.</p>	Vice-Chancellor	< 3 months

15	Ensure clear accountability and monitoring of performance at all levels	✓	<p>The Vice-Chancellor is ultimately accountability for university performance. Effective communication of performance standards and expectations (from Vice-Chancellor down) is required to ensure that staff understand their role in meeting the performance goals of the University. Performance agreements and unit workplans will be utilised to ensure this.</p> <p>Actions: Review performance frameworks (PEAS, PDPs, Senior Manager Performance Expectations) to ensure that all staff understand their accountability in meeting the University 's performance goals. Focus annual assessment of staff performance on against attainment of University goals / KPIs; develop compliance by design framework to ensure accountability across all levels.</p>	Vice-Chancellor	Ø 6 – 12 months
Transparency and disclosure					
16	Provide concise Council papers focused on strategic issues	✓	<p>Council meeting papers generally exceed 500 pages with key issues sometimes buried in dense documentation. This impedes Council in focusing its time and attention on strategic issues. Council requires clear and concise papers from University management which highlight key issues and matters for Council decision or advice. Background information could be provided as attachments or annexes to the papers. Papers should clearly indicate where an issue has been considered and a recommendation made by a Council Committee as this informs the level of additional Council scrutiny required.</p> <p>Actions: Review Council templates to ensure they provide for concise papers focused on strategic issues. Improve quality control of Council papers to ensure they meet required standards and avoid BAU/operational items more appropriate for management attention.</p>	Office of the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and Senior Management Group	< 3 months

17	Streamline Council meeting agendas to a proposed 3-hour standing agenda	✓ In-principle	<p>It is agreed that Council and Committee meetings should be conducted in a timely and efficient way with agendas focused on relevant, strategic issues and matters of governance. Three-hour meetings is agreed as a medium-term goal.</p> <p>However, while this is expected to lead shorter, more focused and possibly less frequent meetings, Council does not expect to move to 3-hour meetings in the immediate term. As required Council meetings may exceed this to ensure appropriate governance. Actions: Review the Council agenda in line with Review recommendations and review the Council Workplan to ensure efficient coverage of relevant items. Review Committee Charters to ensure appropriate delegations of responsibilities.</p>	Office of the Chancellor	< 3 months
18	Improve substantive and timely communication from senior leadership	✓	<p>The University Vice-Chancellor's Group has increased its regular communications with staff and stakeholders to support confidence and trust in University leadership and build a better understanding of the University's strategic direction and decision-making. This is an area for continual improvement and efforts will be ongoing. With a significant shift in our workforce, it is important that University stakeholders are appropriately consulted and buy into our vision and ambition for the future.</p> <p>Actions: Embed clear and ongoing communication from university leadership into BAU operations to ensure a broad understanding of university strategy and the reasons for key decisions. Effectively utilise internal stakeholder engagement channels to give staff a voice on key issues. Establish a regular schedule of Town Halls and staff forums.</p>	Vice-Chancellor and Senior Management Group	ongoing

19	Increase transparency of Council decisions and ensure information flow in both directions	✓	<p>Council actions and decisions should be communicated clearly and consistently to stakeholders. Stakeholder should have a channel to provide feedback to Council.</p> <p>Action: Office of the Chancellor to publish on the Council webpage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Council Agendas at least 3 business days prior to Council meetings; - Information for staff and students who wish to attend Council meetings as observers; - A Communique providing a precis of the outcomes of Council meetings no more than two weeks post the meeting ; - A feedback page inviting staff and students to comment on Council activities and decisions. <p>Other university publications and communication channels should be used to communicate Council activities and decisions.</p> <p>Encourage staff and student representative Council members to engage with the community they represent, seeking input on key topics ahead of Council meetings and reporting back on relevant issues.</p>	Office of the Chancellor; Vice Chancellor	< 3 months
20	Establish clear feedback mechanisms at each layer of governance	✓	<p>The University will seek to make feedback from stakeholders a BAU requirement at all levels of governance. This should include Council and its Committees, Academic Board and Faculty Boards amongst others.</p> <p>Action: Include a requirement to establish a feedback loop for stakeholders in the Charters of University governance committees at all levels.</p>	Office of the Chancellor Office of the Vice-Chancellor	< 3 months

Stakeholder rights

21	Maintain student and staff representation on the Council	✓	<p>Staff and student representation on Council is provided for under the University of Canberra Act and will be maintained. Two members of staff and two student members are elected by their constituents. Council has found the input of staff and student Members highly valuable.</p> <p>Action: Maintain current arrangements.</p>	Chancellor	Current
22	Strengthen engagement and feedback mechanisms with stakeholders	✓	<p>The University Chancellor's Committee Updated Code of Governance Principles and Practices contains specific standards in relation to stakeholder engagement and communication. This Code has been adopted by the University. Compliance against this standard will ensure that the University also meets the recommendation from this Governance Review.</p> <p>Actions: In addition to consultation and feedback mechanisms set out above, establish annual rotational Faculty reporting at Council meetings and ensure regular and defined mechanisms for broad university consultation on matters of strategic importance and high risk/high priority matters.</p> <p>Close feedback loops resulting from staff consultation so that people are informed of outcomes and actions arising.</p> <p>Re-establish a University Leaders' Network; consider maintaining online /Teams environment for information sharing.</p>	Vice-Chancellor and Chancellor (supported by their offices)	< 6 months

Culture

23	Provide training for meeting chairs to support a culture of transparency and trust	✓	<p>Chairs of University Governance committees, including Faculty Boards, should have sufficient training and support to allow them to effectively undertake their duties in line with University expectations</p> <p>Actions: Develop and deliver appropriate training and support for Committee Chairs. Ensure that the professional development requirements of Committee Chairs are met.</p>	Office of the Chancellor	Ø 6 – 12 months
24	Introduce regular independent faculty reviews	✓	<p>It is appropriate and useful for the University to benchmark the academic performance of faculties against external standards. While there are existing mechanisms employed by Faculties to ensure appropriate standards are maintained and measured against external performance, a more systemised approach will further improve our academic functions.</p> <p>Action: Continue with the current cyclical process for faculty review.</p>	Vice-Chancellor and Executive Deans	Ø 6 – 12 months