

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into Enhancing Victorian University Governance

Melbourne – Friday 15 May 2026

#### MEMBERS

Alison Marchant – Chair

Kim O’Keeffe – Deputy Chair

Roma Britnell

Anthony Cianflone

John Mullahy

Nicole Werner

Dylan Wight

#### WITNESSES

Professor Theo Farrell, Vice-Chancellor and President,

Professor Sue Bennett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, and

Associate Professor Melanie Bish, Pro Vice-Chancellor Regional, La Trobe University.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the public hearings for the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's Inquiry into Enhancing Victorian University Governance. All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the Parliament's website. While all evidence taken by the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, comments repeated outside of this hearing, including on social media, may not be protected by this privilege.

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Thank you so much for joining us today. In the interests of time, we will jump straight into questions. But firstly, maybe if you would like to introduce yourself and your role at the university.

**Melanie BISH:** Good morning, everyone. My name is Melanie Bish, and I hold the role of Pro Vice-Chancellor Regional for La Trobe.

**Theo FARRELL:** I am Theo Farrell. Good morning. I am the Vice-Chancellor and President of La Trobe University.

**Sue BENNETT:** Hi, everyone. I am Sue Bennett. I am the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Thanks for joining us. Anthony, I might head to you first.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you to La Trobe for appearing. I am very pleased that La Trobe is appearing, obviously as a northern suburbs MP, and acknowledge the incredible work overall that the university does for the greater north in supporting education, employment and skills and socio-economic outcomes. So thank you, Professor Theo and Sue and Professor Melanie as well, for being here.

Obviously you heard yesterday or you would have followed yesterday's hearings around the concerns generally being raised around governance and culture across our university sector, but I want to ask about La Trobe University's governance. If you can just talk to how La Trobe University is implementing the principles of the Expert Council on University Governance. I know there is quite a bit of progress already being made from the La Trobe perspective. What considerations should be made by the government and through this committee when proposing any further governance reforms, and just what are your views generally around potential next steps we can look at to further strengthen governance and culture outcomes across the sector, including at La Trobe?

**Theo FARRELL:** Thank you for that question. Our view is really clear on this. For the same reason we welcomed this inquiry, as we said in our submission, we very much welcomed the Expert Panel on University Governance. Anything that can help us improve our governance helps us do our mission to support the communities we serve, so this is very welcome as far as we are concerned. When the report from the Expert Council on University Governance was released in October we did a mapping exercise. Our chancellor John Brumby directed us to do a mapping exercise to assess quite precisely the alignment between the university's existing governance arrangements and what was in the recommendations of the expert council. That showed, as you probably find at most universities, broad alignment, but there are a few areas where we were only partially aligned or we were not aligned. So we brought forward a set of recommendations to the December council, and that managed to sweep up most of the alignment. There are a few outstanding things we have to do which change our regulations in order to have an election for more staff and student representatives on our council. Those recommendations we then took to the March meeting of our council, and they were approved. We are now in the back end of a process of election. We currently have 15 members of council, and that includes two staff members – the chair of the academic board, an elected staff representative – and a student. From the next meeting of council, which will be in June, we will increase that to three staff members – that is the chair of the academic board, an elected academic staff member and an elected professional staff member – and two student representatives, an undergraduate and a postgraduate. That means in terms of staff and student representation we will have 29.5 per cent of our council. That brings us into alignment with most universities in Australia now. You will of course recognise that the expert council report did not actually make a recommendation as to the number, but there was generally a recommendation about improving representation. The view of our

council was that that was a good recommendation, and we wanted to see what more we could do, which is what we have done. So we are now in complete alignment on every single recommendation and subrecommendation in the expert council's report.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Thank you.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** That is really pleasing to hear. Welcome, and it is lovely to see you all. It is always great to have you, but also thank you for always keeping me up to date. The meetings that we have are really important, and I appreciate that, as does our community. It is really great to hear that in regard to your support with further representation, because we heard that a lot yesterday – it was just constant – that there is just not enough representation. We did hear also from some students in regard to: when they are on that council, do they get enough opportunity to actually make a difference, how are their voices valued and what contributions are they making? How will you ensure that the student representatives on council are empowered and able to genuinely engage in debate on issues that impact students and that they feel comfortable to be part of that conversation? Because we are hearing a lot of them are not.

**Theo FARRELL:** Thank you. I think one of the opportunities by having two student members of council is that you do not have one person. I can well see that if you were a single student on council and you do not have a peer with you, then it might feel quite isolating. So I think it is a good thing to have two students on and for them obviously to be supported. We just had council on Monday, and we have got a student representative on council who makes frequent contributions to discussion, so I am not sensing that that person feels inhibited in any way whatsoever. I think if there is any evidence, obviously particularly with regard to La Trobe, that the student reps current or past – I understand why a serving representative on council may or may not – does not feel supported, I would very much welcome that insight.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** That is good to hear.

**Theo FARRELL:** With staff and student reps, they are also invited to serve on the subcommittees, and some do. Sometimes they do not take up that offer because, in regard to students, they have studies, basically. Then you may get into student governance, but we have actually done a lot of work around empowering student governance, around increasing opportunities for students to have leadership roles, around elevation of the student voice. There is a big piece of work we do around students as partners. That is something that my colleague Sue Bennett can unpack if that is of interest.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** That was my next question, about what mechanisms you are working on, so that is really good to hear.

**Sue BENNETT:** Great. I might add to that. In addition to council, there is also academic board, and there is quite a bit of student representation on academic board. There are seven ex officio positions on academic board for students, and there are six elected – three undergraduate, two postgraduate and one HDR. That is another mechanism on the academic governance side, where students are building some of their knowledge and their capacity to engage as well as directly engaging with issues. That board has subcommittees on which there are students. I guess I am giving you a sense of the multilayered and interconnected way that students engage with governance.

On the students as partners side, in 2024 there was a lot of work done, about 12 months of work – this pre-dates my time, but I have got some good information and insights on it – to consult with the student body very extensively on what students would like. The purpose of that program was to uplift student voice. There were six recommendations that came from that, and they included having additional ways for students to engage in addition to those formal ways. They range from a students as partners network, where students volunteer and they are part of a network who we call on to consult with on various issues. There are school-level advisory groups. For some students that is where they want to engage, because often they can see a really direct impact. That is also where we have got the student council that came out of that. That was really a request that there be an additional group. And of course we have got our student-led organisations. They play a really important role, but it is a different and complementary role to all those other mechanisms.

**Theo FARRELL:** If I may just add, one of the recommendations that came out of the expert council was that in camera sessions of council be open to staff and student reps, and of course now they are at La Trobe.

Those are sessions where the members of the executive are not present but student and staff representatives on council, as full members of council, are.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** There has been talk about more transparency as well, so those are important steps to make.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Roma.

**Roma BRITNELL:** In 2024 La Trobe University had 64 consultancy agreements of over \$10,000 in value, spending \$8.7 million in total. It also committed \$3.2 million through those agreements. There were 23 agreements that expended more than \$100,000 in 2024 and three agreements of over half a million dollars. Why is La Trobe University spending such a significant amount on consultancies? One agreement was with a group for strategy and development consulting, which was for over half a million dollars. What were the outcomes of that agreement – what did that achieve, what was the return on investment? The largest proportion of the consultancy agreements were under the purpose of research consulting. Can you provide the details of what was achieved through these organisations and why the same results could not have been achieved in house? Some of that you may want to take on notice and provide details on later; that is quite an involved question.

**Theo FARRELL:** Thank you for that question. One of the things we have been doing at La Trobe is reducing our dependency on consultancy. When I arrived – I am now in my third year as Vice-Chancellor – I was very pleased to see that La Trobe has an internal consultancy called the strategy realisation office, so La Trobe has built that internal capacity, which reduces the university's requirement to receive support for consultancy. So between 2023 and 2025 we have reduced our expenditure on consultancy from \$11.1 million to \$7.7 million. That is a 31 per cent reduction on consultancy. And when you dig in and look at what most of that consultancy was spent on during that period, most of it was on our University City of the Future program. This is a very large program of work. As members of the infrastructure committee will realise, there is a very significant requirement for artefacts to be produced as part of the planning process. Universities normally would not have that capability in house. This is a multibillion-dollar, multidecade-long project –

**Roma BRITNELL:** Is that the strategy and development consulting piece that you are referring to – that was over half a million dollars?

**Theo FARRELL:** I would have to take on notice particular things. If you want to provide particular questions, please, I would certainly take those on notice and respond.

**Roma BRITNELL:** The figures that I have given you are for around 2024. You are talking about 2023 to 2025 reducing. This is during that time period. It is quite a significant investment in consultants.

**Theo FARRELL:** Basically that is the university of the future and a very significant planning process that is required as part of the state planning process. That is our cybersecurity. Like many universities, we have had to very significantly increase our cyber defences. And the third is our sustainability and solar farm work, and that is over that period. So those are the kinds of things that in house we do not maintain very large capabilities for, but we bring in capabilities because they are particular pieces of work that we require.

**Roma BRITNELL:** But you said you are now doing it in house.

**Theo FARRELL:** Sorry. I think often when people think about consultancy, they think about consultants that come in and help to develop strategies or come in and help support change programs, and one of the things that La Trobe has done to reduce our dependence on consultancies for that kind of work is have an internal capability called the strategy realisation office.

**Roma BRITNELL:** But one of these is actually a strategy development consultant.

**Theo FARRELL:** I would have to take that on notice and come back to you on that particular one.

**Roma BRITNELL:** Excellent. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Dylan.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Thank you. One of the points that has come through thick and fast both through submissions and evidence yesterday has been the casualisation of the workforce in the tertiary sector probably over the last two or three decades. Fifty per cent of La Trobe's workforce is on a casual or fixed-term contract. That is huge. I understand the need for some of that given the nature of operations in some of the academic faculties, but 50 per cent is massive and far and away the largest of any university we have spoken to yet, but I understand we are still only in the morning. A casualised workforce lends itself typically to some pretty bad industrial outcomes – vulnerable workers, some exploitation. There has obviously been a case of underpayments at La Trobe between 2015 and 2022 – over 6700 staff to the tune of \$10.7 million. That is significant. Is there a plan by the university to bring more of that employment into full-time equivalent roles, into full-time roles or permanent part-time roles, and to bring that percentage of the casual workforce down?

**Theo FARRELL:** Thank you. It is interesting, because I did note that in the NTEU's submission they noted that at La Trobe 42 per cent of our staff are in insecure roles. We were trying to understand where they got that figure from, and we think it is some composite. There are three kinds of roles: there are continuing contracts, there are fixed-term contracts – both of those would be staffed maybe full-time or part-time, but continuing fixed term – and casual, and we think the NTEU may have combined casual and fixed term to create the 42 per cent. But if I can offer the data that we have –

**Dylan WIGHT:** I have got 50 per cent, but I did say fixed-term and casual contracts.

**Theo FARRELL:** Sure. In essence, if we look at the latest data we have, which is 2025, in terms of FTE 74.4 per cent of our staff are continuing, 22.1 per cent are fixed and casual is 3.5 per cent, so that is equivalent to 108.3 FTE out of 3097 FTE. So it is 3.5 per cent for casual, the percentage. So I just want to suggest that data that you may have before you may not accurately reflect the situation.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Sure.

**Theo FARRELL:** But can I just say something else, by the way. We totally agree that you only use people in casual roles for particular purposes, and we absolutely agree that it is preferable to offer people fixed-term and continuing contracts whenever you can. So we have a casual conversion program as part of our enterprise agreement with the NTEU, and since 2024 we have converted 77.3 FTE people to fixed-term and continuing roles. So when you actually look at the number of FTE on casual contracts at La Trobe, between 2024 and 2025 we dropped it from 140 to 108.3, and the current number is just over 80, so we are chipping it down. But again, it is currently around about 3 per cent of our workforce.

**Dylan WIGHT:** When you talk about insecure work, fixed-term and casual, it includes both of them.

**Theo FARRELL:** I think, just with respect – and this is very interesting – when you look at the NTEU tables, they have got two different tables on security. We have very constructive relationships with the NTEU. In my most recent meeting with the Victorian branch they noted that La Trobe has the best job security in Victoria, and if you look at the later table, we are the highest ranked.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Can I just ask very quickly as well on the underpayments, which I understand now is going back a few years to the back end of that. That is a significant breakdown of governance, obviously.

**Theo FARRELL:** Yes.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Can I just ask what the university has done to make sure the systems are in place so that never happens again?

**Theo FARRELL:** That is absolutely fair. I just want to acknowledge – and this was obviously before I arrived – that we discovered the underpayments ourselves through an independent review in 2020 and we self-reported ourselves to the Fair Work Ombudsman in early 2021, as of course we are obliged to do so. So the university followed all the correct procedure. The unintentional underpayment of casual staff is completely unacceptable. There is no question about that. Quite clearly it is our responsibility to do better. It was the result of quite complex employment arrangements combined with outdated systems and inefficient processes. So what we have been doing is updating our systems, simplifying our processes and, where possible obviously, reducing complexity in the employment arrangements. So it was a systems failure on our part. I would describe it as a governance failure insofar as obviously we are responsible and I am responsible for that, but it is

primarily a systems failure actually. So what we have done is fixed our systems. And then as part of the enforceable undertaking that we agreed to with the Ombudsman in 2025, we have done an independent audit of our workforce to check that staff are correctly classified, that they are being paid correctly and that we are fully complying with our enterprise agreements. We are waiting for the Ombudsman to confirm the findings of our independent audit, but the independent audit has reported back that we are fully in compliance. We are now very focused on this.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** I would like to just ask a question around transparency and accountability, and it is one of the principles that you said you are working on or you said you are meeting. Can I just ask for a start – you said you allow in-camera participation?

**Theo FARRELL:** Yes. Correct. Our staff and student representatives are now attending in-camera sessions of council.

**The CHAIR:** And what would you publish publicly – minutes, agendas? What do you publish publicly?

**Theo FARRELL:** As part of our bringing ourselves into complete alignment with the Expert Council on University Governance, council now issues a communiqué after each council, which is a narrative that describes what was discussed and what was decided by council, and that is now on our website for all staff. Every year I go out to all of our 10 schools and I do a town hall where staff can ask me any questions they want, and I make a point of saying, ‘These are the changes we’ve made to governance. Now go on the website, and you can read for yourself what was discussed.’

**Roma BRITNELL:** Website for staff?

**Theo FARRELL:** Yes.

**Roma BRITNELL:** Is it just specific for staff? Is it an intranet?

**Theo FARRELL:** Actually, no. Anyone – you can go on it.

**Roma BRITNELL:** Right, so it is publicly available.

**Theo FARRELL:** Yes, it is for all. It is open.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. I think that is great, because we are hearing that that was an issue that was not being addressed, so I think it is great that you are making those steps. So how do you then respond to complaints or issues that are being raised that are a bit of a dissenting view? What is the process for people to have those views? You said you do town halls. I suppose I want to know whether people feel confident to raise these things, because a lot of people have said they just do not feel they can, in fear either for their job or their position at the university.

**Theo FARRELL:** Yes. I think there are two things I would say in response to that. There is one around leadership being present and engaging in those consultations, and we have to do more. We know we have to do more work, because the employee experience survey shows that one of the things we are being told by staff is they want more visibility of senior leadership, and so we are now doing that. So, for instance, I go and do town halls every single year to each of our schools and also other academic units. In addition to that, three times a year we do a webinar to all staff, basically, and in it any staff can ask questions and I answer. At the same time we have various processes that provide for staff to raise issues confidentially and for students to raise issues confidentially. And of course the university has an ombudsman, who provides arbitrage in cases where people feel that the processes have not actually met the outcome they want. And the ombudsman, of course, and indeed our own complaints processes, advise students that they can fully go to the federal student ombudsman. So there are multiple mechanisms for people to make confidential complaints, to raise issues confidentially and also publicly in the university.

**The CHAIR:** Do you ever report on that, in terms of what is a formal complaint? If the university had five formal complaints and a report, do you report on that type of data?

**Theo FARRELL:** Yes. We certainly report to the people and culture committee of council, who tracks that. I would have to take on notice exactly the detail of what is in our annual report. But just to be clear, we are making sure that we are fully compliant with the expert council with regard to our annual report, and so for the first time this year in the annual report, for example, we have put in the skills matrix for council, which is one of the key criteria mechanisms council uses in selecting new members of council.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Great. Thank you.

**Theo FARRELL:** One point, by the way: as a university, it is also a regional university. I think that is a really important point to make, because I think there is rightly a big concern for this inquiry around governance and how governance is meeting the needs of stakeholders. But from our point of view, our stakeholders are also the communities we serve. One of the things that we are very focused on particularly are the four areas where we have got regional campuses in those communities. We have regional advisory boards that are comprised of senior members of those communities from all different backgrounds. One thing I just want to draw attention to is when I think about our *Regional Growth and Innovation Strategy*, which I am really proud of, Mel Bish led the process. That started from our regional advisory boards. They triggered the process, they came forward with the core ideas that are embedded in this strategy and then we went through an extensive process which developed that strategy iteratively with them. So I think part of it is quite rightly elevating the voices of staff and students in our governance process. But as universities, our governance process must also capture the views of the community and make sure we develop strategies and we take them forward. The campus implementation plans for this are being co-designed with our regional advisory boards. We listen to community, and that is part of our governance. So I think that is a really important point I want to get across today.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** If I could just segue into that point as well, I had the pleasure when I was in my previous role as a director at Darebin City Council to help form an MOU, because La Trobe's Bundoora campus is situated in the City of Darebin. It was the first time the university, to their credit, and Darebin had formed that formal partnership. But part of that is all the other partnerships that the university has been developing well and truly since then. We have heard some evidence and concerns around some universities not disclosing – or the intent of some of these commercial and other types of partnerships that some argue potentially are diverting the attention of universities. Publicly disclosed on your website are all the various partnerships, including with Football Victoria, the home of the Matildas, the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre, Cisco, the Bureau of Meteorology and the Victorian Virtual Emergency Department as well. I have been there personally to see the nurses that you are training online. And that all, of course, fits into the city of the future, because there have also been arguments around the purpose and use of university facilities and land. But obviously your city of the future vision is about helping housing for students and the community in and around Darebin. Can you talk about, just as an example potentially for other universities, the transparency around those partnerships, the purpose of them and how they are being utilised to benefit the university's original intent, which is to deliver outcomes for the community?

**Theo FARRELL:** Thank you. And it is interesting, we also released last year our strategic plan 2025 to 2030, and one of the things we made a point of emphasising in that is that we stay true to our founding mission, which is to serve communities in north Melbourne and now of course across regional Victoria, with our regional campus network. That is core to our governance and our strategy development. And when I think about the University City of the Future, at the heart of it is this idea that we want to develop that part of north Melbourne to drive economic development and innovation but also to serve the community. So it will have mixed housing with affordable housing, but critically embedded in there is also a world-class sports precinct, which we have already built, which now has half a million visitors per year from the community; and a clinical health building, which we are going to be opening next month, and that is going to provide thousands of low-cost hours treatment for members of the community in allied health.

So when I look at the city of the future, the bits we have built first are what we are doing for community: health care that we are providing in north Melbourne and sporting that we are providing in north Melbourne, in partnership with the local councils Banyule and Darebin. And to follow will be the accommodation for community, elderly care and, for students, low-cost and affordable housing. So it is this kind of vision of the university that serves the community. And one of the things again when I think about our *Regional Growth and Innovation Strategy*, because it serves everything, is that our starting point is community. That unlocks

everything in terms of our mission and what we are about. And so that is one thing I would encourage members of this committee, when you think about governance – and I really welcome the findings that you will bring forward, because it will help us do our job better – is think around how universities serve their communities, how they represent their internal stakeholders but also their external stakeholders.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** That was good, because my question was going to be around – well, it has been raised – having a regional lens on this inquiry, because the needs are very different for regional communities and universities, so I am really glad that you have touched on that, and also making sure that we align with the correct workforce and economic opportunities and all those things, and I know that that document does that very well. I think probably my question to you is: what can be done better, through this inquiry, for regional universities?

**Theo FARRELL:** Look, I really welcome that question.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** It is a big question – maybe prioritise.

**Theo FARRELL:** Thank you, Deputy Chair. I really welcome that question, because it gives me the opportunity to turn to my Pro-Vice Chancellor Regional, perhaps, to address that.

**Melanie BISH:** Thank you. Thanks, Theo. And I think it is a really timely question in terms of what we do better. I think one of the things that we have talked about this morning is the need to make sure that universities remain organisations of public good and that our communities and that our industry partners see us as such, so making sure that our built environment is accessible and that we create and have a leadership role in terms of learning ecosystems. For people living in rural and regional communities it is about opportunity and it is about choice, so how do we as an organisation work with high schools, work with primary schools, work with the VET sector, to make sure that there are cohesive educational opportunities, that people have access in place and that the alignment of those opportunities will result in strong employability outcomes. So it is not only the courses that we offer but how we then integrate with industry, and that comes back to having really strong partnerships to make sure that our students see that if you study in your community, you have the opportunity to have great local mentorship, you have the opportunity to have work-integrated learning and clinical placements, because you are right, the context of regional work is different. So yes, we are servicing jobs and skills shortages, but we are also making sure that the educational experience is layered so that there are understandings of opportunities and that when people enter employment it is not that they reach a ceiling, it is that they have opportunities to go on and further invest in themselves so that they can move through organisations and contribute to regional prosperity, because we know that people being educated through our university are also holding significant leadership roles across communities.

**Theo FARRELL:** If I could give one example there, because I think this is really important around how we build the future skills workforce that Australia and Victoria needs and give opportunity to people. For instance, our largest growth program is our health innovation program, with our strategic goal, which is in our strategic plan, to be the largest producer of graduates into the health workforce in Australia by 2030. But what is the regional part of that? The regional part of that is the dental and oral clinical school we opened in Bendigo last year that is now the largest in Australia, and in that we have 70 per cent of places going to regional students. We have different ATAR levels depending on students coming from Melbourne, because of course we want to support the workforce needs there – but critically regional. We have students coming from all over regional Victoria studying in Bendigo. We know that if you study in a regional setting you are more likely to go back to a regional setting and contribute to the health workforce there. That is one of the ways that we are really focused on our regional mission when we are thinking around that strategic goal of building the health workforce that this state needs.

**Roma BRITNELL:** At the start of the contribution you have made you talked about increasing to two students on the group of 15. Was that the total all up?

**Theo FARRELL:** It will grow to 17 when we get the additional staff and the additional students.

**Roma BRITNELL:** But it will be two students, not one to three with two more – one to two?

**Theo FARRELL:** Yes.

**Roma BRITNELL:** You also said that this person that is the current representative is very vocal and able to confidently speak up. It is all very well to increase to a number. We heard yesterday that some decisions were made at universities – not yours – that the students found out post a decision being made, such as removal of courses or whatever. What will you do to ensure that the outcomes or what the students are proposing are actually actioned on? It is all very well just to have two people there speaking out, but if there is no active listening, it can actually result in no outcome. What is the mechanism you will use to ensure that two out of 17 are actually listened to?

**Theo FARRELL:** I am going to hand over to Sue Bennett to just talk to this, but before I do I just make the point that what we want with student and staff representatives on council is to bring a diversity of views, but they should not be the channel that individual concerns – that should not be the channel that comes up. It may be, because they hear something and they will represent those views, in which case that is all well and fine, but their job is actually to provide a diversity of views. We have extensive channels to hear student voice.

**Roma BRITNELL:** I did hear that, and I accept that, but I am now asking: how do you monitor whether their views will actually result in change?

**Sue BENNETT:** If I could pick this up, I think that there is a really good point here about not merely having the representation, it is about enabling those students to speak up. For the university council and academic board, our governance team have a particular process that they work through to support the students who have those positions. It is about having specific induction sessions so that they understand the nature of the group that they are on, because it can be very intimidating just to be expected to step into that.

**Roma BRITNELL:** Sorry. Just because we are short on time, I hear that you feel they are very confident. What I am focusing on is: is there some sort of transparency around the ideas being brought forward, examined, considered and then either denied or enabled? Is there some sort of transparency so that you can actually track whether there is change? They might bring forward ideas that no-one wants to consider, and you can put that reasonably into writing as to why not.

**Theo FARRELL:** Thank you. Can I just ask a point of clarification: are you saying with regard to council?

**Roma BRITNELL:** With regard to the voices of your students, whether it is in the committees that sit below council or at a council level.

**Theo FARRELL:** On council, obviously that is a matter for our chancellor John Brumby. In reporting on council the convention is you do not identify individual members of council, so that is obviously a convention. It is the responsibility of the chancellor to ensure that all members of council have a fair opportunity to contribute, and council in the round as a collective will make a decision. John Brumby is the kind of character that I think fulfils those duties very well. But you raise a very important point around students at all levels through the university in governance, how their voices are heard and how we respond to them, and that gets back to this students-as-partners very large program of work that we have, which not only provides opportunities to students to be in leadership roles but critically prepares them and supports them for that role, because you are preparing them as future leaders in our society.

**Sue BENNETT:** And we have a program, You Said, We Did, where we are reporting back on exactly those things. I think it is important to separate the way that we support representation and the way that we support student engagement with governance, because I think it is an important distinction that we should not lose sight of.

**Roma BRITNELL:** You Said, We Did. Okay. Good.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. This is a really interesting conversation for us to get a varied perspective, especially the regional perspective, so thank you so much for your time today. We really appreciate it.

**Theo FARRELL:** Thank you. We look forward to your recommendations. Thank you very much indeed.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Witnesses withdrew.**