

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 Adam Shoemaker, Vice-Chancellor and President, and

Sofia Moisisdis, Director, Governance and Secretariat, Victoria University.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing 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.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts and other documents provided to the committee during the hearing will be published on the committee's website.

Thank you so much for joining us today. We really appreciate your time. In the interest of time we are going to just jump straight into questions if we can, but if you could first introduce yourself and maybe your role at the university.

Adam SHOEMAKER: Lovely. It is wonderful to be with you. Thanks for making the time. Adam Shoemaker is my name. I am the Vice-Chancellor at Victoria University – proudly the state university, if you like, of this wonderful state – and I am accompanied by my wonderful colleague too. Would you like to introduce yourself?

Sofia MOISIDIS: Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Sofia Moisisdis. I am the Director of Governance and Secretariat at Victoria University. It is a pleasure being here today.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Thank you so much. Anthony, I am going to go to you first.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Thanks, Chair. Thank you to Victoria University for appearing and Professor Adam for his work of course. I have known Adam for quite some time in my former roles at the City of Brimbank as well.

Adam SHOEMAKER: That is right.

Anthony CIANFLONE: You do incredible work out in the west through Brimbank and obviously the western suburbs that the Member for Tarneit also represents, so I am very familiar with it. But can you just talk us through how Victoria University is implementing those principles from the expert panel? How are they rolling out? What difference are they making to help improve circumstances for staff and students alike? How are they being received, and what further improvements can continue to be made, including through the work of this committee going forward?

Adam SHOEMAKER: Thank you. It is a great question. There are about four parts to it, so I will try and get straight to it. The principles are very good. I actually endorsed them very strongly, as part of the committee which helped devise them, if you like. I just spoke with Melinda on the plane in fact on Thursday about how it is rolling through. The truth is they are very able to be implemented. We are not there yet, but we are implementing them. To give you one concrete example, there is a call for a charter, a governance charter, which in every university should be extremely lucid about responsibilities – everything from onboarding to who can speak and all the rest. We are well on the way to having that done, and we are taking a version of that to our council meeting in about two weeks. I think this is the year when all of the implementation will happen, and I would fully expect to see very high levels of completion by the end of this calendar year.

As for its importance – crucial. It has got to be done. There is no question that capital 'G' governance, not lower 'g', is a topic of great import worldwide, not just here. And this is a state which leads the way. I would say, for example, look at the legislation. It is the sole state to have four dual-sector universities that are changing the way governance works in post-secondary education; it is the sole state to have treaty legislation – important things to do that governance relates to, and we will be there.

Anthony CIANFLONE: I would say as well, it is fair to say that VU would represent one of the most multicultural, diverse regions in all of Victoria. People of all walks of life go to VU.

Adam SHOEMAKER: Correct.

Anthony CIANFLONE: In that context I guess the first question on that is: how many student representatives are on the university council at the moment, and how much more could that be improved with the addition of further student representatives and staff representatives as well from the diverse staff cohort?

Adam SHOEMAKER: If I may, I will go to the diversity side and also to the student side first and then talk about staff, because they are slightly different, but they are all related. The student representative – we currently have one elected. They are fantastic people – always have been for the past five years I have been there. Just to give you an indication of the commitment that students give to this, which is no small thing, the current representative has even fronted an entire town hall meeting of 900 staff members as the MC. They were actually the person in charge of the gathering, so we were just guests in that person's event. That is changing it in the right direction. If there is a recommendation that you come up with to increase numbers, far be it from me to disagree. Our Act permits it. It says 'at least one student representative'. It does not put a limit. It is up to you. I am not speaking for the chancellor, but I am saying on my own behalf that I do not see any reason why there would be any opposition to that. The only thing I would say is just bear in mind that because of the dual-sector nature and the diverse nature, I think it would be very important to consider a designated, for example, First Nation representative on councils. You may have heard this from others perhaps today, but I think that is an essential thing given the treaty legislation and where we are going, and also we have done now two renditions in a row. We have now got our second member of council from that diverse background – incredibly valuable, really transformative. We also have diverse cultural and gender representatives – and age as well, as I have indicated.

For staff, I know that there have been debates about how many and a formula and that kind of thing. What I would say is this: you want not only the best people but the most representative people. Because we also have a TAFE world and we have, for example, the AEU and the NTU heavily involved, I really think it is important to give recognition to other unions that might want to have input into this, the AEU in particular. For example, a designated TAFE representative would be extremely logical in a dual-sector world. Those are just a couple of things to think about there.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Kim.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Thank you. It has been a long few days for us, and it has been really important, because I think even as we are coming up to our last submission it just really strengthens the importance of how we need to work together to make positive change moving forward. Coming from your perspective, what does that change look like for you? Because I know we are hearing lots of things. But what do you see really needs to happen? We have been told there is a crisis across governance. I am going to probably throw a few things at you because I will not get a lot of opportunity. We are also hearing about staff and student complaints, and those processes just seem to be constantly coming back to us and not being effective – so a couple of things there. Number one: what do you feel is something that is perhaps a priority within this inquiry? And then my concerns are absolutely around staff and student complaints and processes. How does that work for you?

Adam SHOEMAKER: I will go to the hardest one first, which is complaints. We are quite a centralised university administratively, although very decentralised culturally. It is interesting. The two do not conflict. What I mean by that is there is a one vu model of running it, and therefore the complaints have a single portal, which in fact, when speaking to the National Student Ombudsman, is deemed to be quite a good thing. Just to give you a bit of a sense of it, though, we have a centralised student complaints and integrity office, which is both across higher ed and TAFE together – it is not separate. Some people might have thought it should be. We do not think so because very often people are studying TAFE after degrees, not before. That is a misunderstanding often. That office does the following: it does triage and actually takes a look at them, data collection if it is needed, institutional reporting regularly to our executive and to me – I get regular reports every month – and engagement with what is called the NSO, the National Student Ombudsman. You might have met the NSO office. They are amazing people. Those reports also go to what is called the academic governance. To make it simple, we have the council, which is the lead body of course, and the academic board, which is the lead body for all courseware – TAFE, higher ed, undergrad, postgrad, online, InPlace, everything – and that is reported there too, plus the audit and risk committee of our council. It goes in two places. It goes to the academic side and the other. Then specific numbers: in 2025 we had 524 matters referred, and those mostly – the vast majority; I think it was about 90 per cent – referred to assessment outcomes, you know, marking,

complaints about results, sometimes about quality of teaching, and very often those are quite defensible, but there are a lot of misunderstandings.

I would say one of our areas is placements. I do not know if you have heard it from others in this inquiry, but the cost of placements, the affordability for students at placements and the fact that sometimes they have to be in locations other than where someone resides are an issue. It is an issue for society. We are throwing a lot of resources into financially and otherwise supporting students at that time of risk; so is the federal government. You probably have heard about the term ‘placement poverty’. That is a real issue for us too, because we are not in a wealthy part of the world. So I would say that is one of the big issues. Those are the numbers, and it is a big deal.

Kim O’KEEFFE: Thank you.

Roma BRITNELL: Can you please tell me what the council is doing regarding whether you are considering publishing council minutes, disclosing conflicts of interest of the council members and executives and improving public reporting on the governing composition, and why the university is considering taking these specific actions and why you are not just implementing it?

Adam SHOEMAKER: Yes. Look, it is a great question. The short answer is yes, yes, yes to all three. Those things are all happening. But to be really specific, why is it more now than before? Why more transparency on those issues than in the past?

Roma BRITNELL: Why isn’t it just happening? Why are you still considering?

Adam SHOEMAKER: Okay.

Roma BRITNELL: What is the concern that you are worried about? Is it privacy? What are the issues?

Adam SHOEMAKER: It is not so much privacy. I think the main thing would be we want to have absolute clarity about the difference between people’s roles as experts, because we have, for example, in our Act mandated that there are a certain number of people with financial expertise or legal expertise and so forth. So you have got to make sure you are giving credence to your act. Secondly, I mentioned before that the First Nations issues have been coming to the fore. Most importantly, though, are you representing the body corporate, if you like, of the whole –

Roma BRITNELL: Is that complicating it? We are just talking about minutes of meetings that many organisations are doing.

Sofia MOISIDIS: If I may supplement, Roma, we certainly have commenced – so part of the ECUG principles talk about the requirement to be more transparent, and council are taking that very seriously. At the beginning of this year they have commenced producing a report publishing the deliberations and decisions that have been made by council, and we will continue to do that moving forward. So that is publicly available on our website, and we send out public communication to our stakeholder groups, both staff and students, so they are aware of it. We also do that with our academic board and our other committees in the academic landscape as well.

Adam SHOEMAKER: So it is happening.

Sofia MOISIDIS: Yes. The answer is yes, it actually is occurring.

The CHAIR: Someone put to us – and I am just going to add to Roma’s thought – yesterday that council, as in local council governments, have a live stream of their council deliberations. Would you be open for something like that then?

Adam SHOEMAKER: I would have to ask the chancellor what he thought, I think. He is the first port of call. In principle, everything that aids your discussion and makes it more participatory and effective you would look at. The thing is technology is all around us and everywhere within. I would not rule it out, but we would certainly have to take it on notice and see what people thought. There are certain parts of council deliberations which are quite private, to do with issues that would not be a public interest directly, but you would have to

balance privacy and secrecy sometimes, just occasionally – in camera things. But I think in principle it is an interesting idea.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you. Dylan.

Dylan WIGHT: Thank you. Thanks, Adam and Sofia, for coming to present today, and thanks for all of the work that Victoria University does more broadly in the west but also in Wyndham as well, where there is a footprint. I know we are talking all the time on how to increase that and make it better. Student and staff representation on council – VU has a really diverse student cohort. I think lots of our universities do, but VU in particular, just considering where it is situated. Would Victoria University support both increased student and staff representation on the council if that was recommended? Do you think it is needed? Do you think it is helpful? Also, is there consideration to what your council looks like from a diversity point of view, not just male and female, which is important, but in terms of multicultural representation as well?

Adam SHOEMAKER: Yes. You are right. I will start with the last first. It is growing all the time in that respect – gender diversity, for example, age diversity, linguistic diversity. But you can never do enough to fully represent when you have 180 different national groups in your – it would be a pretty large council if you had each one, so you have to find ways. But what we do, for example, in our graduations, they are different from any other I have ever seen. Not only is there a very prominent First Nations – it is a very deep and meaningful – opening, but at the end we always do a vox pop with all of the members, about a thousand people in the audience. If you have not seen me, you are more than welcome anytime. We ask, ‘How many of you speak more than one language?’ 90 per cent of the people. ‘How many speak more than two?’ And it goes right up to six languages in the room. We say the following words: ‘This is the modern Australia. Look around you. This is the strength of contemporary Victoria,’ and they all kind of applaud each other as well as the graduands. I just think it is important to recognise not just the population but the talent that represents. Think of it in terms of international trade. Think of it in terms of the way that migrants from India are developing technology companies here. Think of it in terms of all the things you could do better and more intersectionally, which is part of what you are describing. So that is just an example, like a practical example, of the environment we are in.

The second part, though, is the community. You mentioned councils – not just ours but local councils. We have a very close relationship with Maribyrnong, with all of the other councils right out to Melton, and in fact each one is like a community cabinet. We host the community cabinet for Maribyrnong at our campus in Footscray Park. I know others do this sort of thing too, especially in regions, but we are proud to do it because we think that is super important. The Committee for Wyndham has an actual office on our Werribee campus; that is what we do, so we try to make it available. The same thing with mental health organisations; for example, lifeline has an entire building at the St Albans campus inbuilt, and all of our students who are studying psychology and counselling therefore get not only access to doing the work as placements, safe and secure and right next door, but also community can be treated for it too. So that is the model; we call it the flipped campus model.

Dylan WIGHT: There is a campus based in Werribee too.

Adam SHOEMAKER: Yes, same thing – in fact if you think about it, Headspace, which is one of the most important organisations for teenagers and mental health in the world, really, has an entire building also. We have just taken the view that we are a public-purpose, taxpayer-endowed institution, as all members of Parliament would know, and that is who you represent, and we try to give real effect to that with what we call the ‘flipped campus model’, because we are saying unless you have ethical allies who are real partners physically on the campus with you, it is not a campus, so it is quite a radical difference from other places.

Dylan WIGHT: Staff and student representation?

Adam SHOEMAKER: Sorry, I will get to that, yes. They are also represented on all those bodies too, by the way, I should say. It works at all levels, and we could do more in council, as you have identified. But I just want to reassure you, it is not because we are averse to things; it is just that there is a debate about governance and the ideal sizes of council, and it is sort of out there in the world. What is the ideal size? I am not sure, but I do know this: in an academic board, for example, we have a nominated student rep who is from the undergraduate body, a nominated student rep who is from – and it is called VUSU, Victoria University Student

Union – the postgraduate student body, a nominated student rep from the TAFE student body and a nominated student rep from the international student body. Already in a review of our academic board a couple of years ago, it was recommended; we have done, it very active, it has happened. Some of the recommendations have already been done at levels.

The final part in terms of this is that when we do major projects, such as the tower we got it in the city you might have seen, the 23-storey tower, students designed the teaching facilities. What I mean by that is, come and have a look: there are no lecture theatres in the building; there are no tutorial rooms. We do not do lectures. We do every subject intensively, like a master's class, with a group of 25 or 28 students, and each room they designed is a different shape. Each one has writable walls and screens that can be just like you are doing here with simultaneous translation and visualisation. The students can see the very design of the place that they built. That is called the VU Block Model, which we have trademarked, and it is the largest such model in the world, believe it or not. I do not know if you knew that, but it is a chance for me to tell you. I used to work at Monash, so I know they have very strong global footprint; they are not the only ones.

Kim O'KEEFFE: How long has that been going? My daughter went to Vic Uni, but she has not been there for a long time.

Adam SHOEMAKER: It started in 2018 as a big experiment, because at that time people were saying, 'What can we do in the new world that is more affordable where people can balance their life and work?' The biggest thing we are seeing right now, based on war in the Middle East and everything else, is cost of living – serious problems. If we can enable someone to come on a Monday, Wednesday or Friday, just to give you an example – it is about 9 hours of these classes a week – intensively, 3 hours at a time, and it is set, you can then work the number of hours you can get without having to stop because you are doing just one subject – and then after four weeks it is finished. You have a week off and go again. We have 10 such renditions in the year, meaning, interestingly – and by the way, I put this in your packs for you so you will see it. It is on the reverse side. It describes it for you, rather than me – I can paint you a picture but the actual visualisation of it is on page 2. With 10 potential starts a year most people actually finish faster than in the traditional model, even though they are bouncing, because we are working pretty effectively 48 weeks a year. I am sorry. She will have to come back again.

Kim O'KEEFFE: That is great, thank you.

The CHAIR: I have just got one last question. Always when we ask the question around student representation, it ends up being, 'Well, we have this on our academic board, and we've got other avenues,' which is all great. But I am trying to grapple with the council then making decisions, and then it comes to the point where it is 'But that's not an operational decision' or 'That's for the academic board to decide'. So it feels like there is maybe a disconnect – I am not sure; maybe not in your university. What I am trying to grapple with is that an academic board might make a decision, for example, to end a unit –

Adam SHOEMAKER: A course or something.

The CHAIR: A course or something – very disruptive to students, staff and all the rest of it. But we have heard examples where the council or the VC says, 'I didn't know that was going to happen,' like it was not communicated or a decision was a shock to the council. Can you describe how your academic board and your council work together and decisions are made?

Adam SHOEMAKER: Now, that is a great question. We do work – and I think Sofia would know this – on a 'no surprises' policy. I do not think I would ever have been not aware of any course being added or subtracted, because we have a structure which – I will just explain. Some places have a very triangular structure, sadly, in my view, and have rules which – I mean, I am not criticising. I am just saying it is different at VU. We do not have a provost; we do not have a chief operating officer. We are not working in that space. We have an equivalence base where the people who are at the executive table can all substitute for each other if someone is away. The person who is the chief academic officer, John Germov – if he is away, the person who is the chief TAFE officer can just step right in. Now, most places would say, 'How can that be? They're separate worlds.' From the student point of view they are not. So when students apply to VU, we have now made it possible for them to be given two offers for TAFE – could be a diploma, could be a certificate IV – at the same time as two offers in higher ed, simultaneously. You choose what is best for you, and the two things

fold together. So what I am saying is, put really simply – what I would deduce from what you are saying? More needs to be done to have clarity of expectation and information flows. But we have done so by having a really, really extensive invitation. All council members are invited to all events. We had a major launch of VU digital last week. That is on how we are moving into the world of AI enabled without being slaves to AI, shall we put it – you know, human-centred AI. Three of our council members came to that; they do not just come to the meetings. So people are fully versed when the meeting happens. They do the work, we do the work.

It is the same thing with the academic board. You asked about the relationship between the two. The academic board is, if you like, the lead professional area for accreditation. Federally we have more than a hundred different accrediting agencies, actually. Think of Engineers Australia, think of the nursing and midwifery – and on and on. It is not just TEQSA and so on – many, many. All of their reports come through the academic board. Council would go crazy if they got all those reports. The volume would just drive people mad. The only complaint we ever get from council is, ‘Could you cut down the number of pages in the agenda and papers from 800 to 300 or something like that, because we can’t take it in.’ And sadly, because there is so much to do and there are so many accrediting bodies, they all have to do their thing in writing, even if it is online. So what do we do? We have the link. The chair of the academic board at the moment is from the higher ed side, actually, someone who heads up built environment, and the deputy chair is a person from TAFE in our academic board. That is what I call lived dual sector, not just theoretical dual sector. We are actually going to push that envelope further and say: what if a university were triple sector and had schools on each campus in the future? I am just saying to you there are things that could happen which might interest the Deputy Premier as well as you.

The CHAIR: Anthony, in closing.

Anthony CIANFLONE: I have got a question, if that is all right. My impression always of VU, having had the pleasure of working closely over the years as well in a different capacity, is of VU’s willingness to be really open and transparent in outreaching to the broader and surrounding community, not just in terms of student enrolments but in terms of genuine partnerships. Just some of the things that come to mind are around, for example, the new Footscray Hospital that has come online. I mean, from the very get-go to the very now that it is open, VU are literally hand in glove in that whole process, similarly with the campus on Ballarat Road, with the technology hub that we opened a few years ago now. There is the ambulance centre that is there to train the paramedics; the St Albans campus with that digital IT hub and the amazing work, which really was ahead of its time, now that I think about it, in terms of cyberspace, cyber security and AI; the opportunities around Melbourne Airport rail link and the Albion precinct around Sunshine and Albion stations; and the Sunshine energy park proposal by Brimbank council that I know VU has been a part of as well.

Adam SHOEMAKER: That is right.

Anthony CIANFLONE: There is the Werribee economic precinct down the Member for Tarneit’s way. Can you just talk through I guess, coming back to the very purpose fundamentally of a university, why it is that VU appears to really place such a high importance on working with and collaborating with its neighbours and surrounding stakeholders, not just on the campus but beyond the campus as well? Why is that so important?

Adam SHOEMAKER: It is a great question. And thank you – you should be sitting here; your recitation of those things is fantastic. I mean, you know them all. But the truth is we do not always get it right. We make mistakes. But I think in this world – and it is so fraught; let us face it, it is probably more fraught now than ever before – unless we do things differently, with the public interest and, I mean, people at the core, you know, things have got to change. The model has changed; the research has changed. And why is it different? Because our aim is collective, not just individual. We have a very strong community aim, which is to say, we want to be the most impactful university of our type in the world by 2030. That therefore means you have to work with others. We say ‘We care and we act’, but we also cannot do it alone. We never would see ourselves as self-sufficient. Just to give you one concrete example, we are trying our best now to be one of the best or the finest universities anywhere for paramedicine. You mentioned that. Well, the first day I went on the job – and you walk around; you would do the same in your electorates, I am sure – I saw there was an ambulance station physically on one of our campuses and that we taught, in TAFE, the equivalent of non-emergency patient transport, but the two were not linked. They were right next door to each other. So I kind of went and slid down the pole in one and, you know, talked to people in the other and said, ‘Why could we not put this together as an in-flight training centre?’ So lo and behold, four years later the western district headquarters for Ambulance

Victoria is on the campus. It used to be a convention centre, when we had those things. Now it is a national centre of excellence in paramedicine – TAFE and higher ed together – and again, the students designed it. So that is the model.

Anthony CIANFLONE: And the Joan Kirner hospital as well that you guys are part of.

Adam SHOEMAKER: Right.

The CHAIR: Yes, well done.

Adam SHOEMAKER: So, you know, we are with you to try and do our best.

The CHAIR: Yes, that is excellent. I think that is a great way to end our hearings today. Thank you so much for your time. We really do appreciate it.

Sofia MOISIDIS: Thank you.

Adam SHOEMAKER: No problem. Cheers.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Committee adjourned.