



Legislative Assembly
Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into enhancing Victorian university governance

July 2026

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About the Committee

Functions

The Committee is established under the Legislative Assembly Standing Orders and can examine any matters or issues connected with these departments and their related agencies:

- Department of Education
- Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
- Department of Transport and Planning
- Department of Treasury and Finance.

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Terms of reference

Inquiry into enhancing Victorian university governance

On 3 December 2025, the Legislative Assembly agreed to the following motion:

That this House refers an inquiry into enhancing Victorian university governance through:

- (a) greater accountability, transparency, and elevated community, staff and student voice at the highest governance level; and
- (b) implementing the Principles of the Expert Council on University Governance; and the agreed priorities of the Commonwealth, State and Territory ministers responsible for higher education; and
- (c) when considering the distinctive objectives of each university, the Committee will inquire into the ways by which universities are giving, and intend to give, effect, in a timely fashion, to the Final Report of the Expert Council on University Governance, with specific reference to how each university will:
 - (i) strengthen accountability for university performance and outcomes;
 - (ii) increase the transparency and representation of university council appointment processes, composition and decision-making;
 - (iii) support councils with greater higher education expertise and a range of staff, student and community perspectives and representation; and
 - (iv) ensure that university council decision-making is inclusive of and responsive to staff, students and other stakeholders

to the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee for consideration and report no later than 31 May 2026. The reporting date was extended to 31 July 2026 by resolution of the Legislative Assembly on 18 March 2026.

Chair's foreword

I am pleased to present this report on the Inquiry into enhancing Victorian university governance.

Universities play a vital role in Victorian society. As public institutions, they contribute to the public good through teaching, research, and community engagement.

However, in the last few years, the tertiary education sector has experienced a national reputational crisis that has led to concerns about the priorities of these institutions.

Throughout the Inquiry, it became clear that this crisis of confidence has affected all Victorian public universities. Restoring public trust in the sector is critical.

The Committee heard from all major stakeholders and experts in the tertiary education sector including Vice-Chancellors, staff and student unions, and individuals. Stakeholders provided their insights into the current state of tertiary education and provided suggestions on how to enhance university governance.

While staff and students advocated for legislative reforms to increase their representation on university governing bodies, universities did not share the same view and are reluctant to suggest any changes to the current legislative system. These competing perspectives highlight a central challenge facing the sector: how to strengthen the voice of staff and students in university governance and ensure that institutional decision-making remains focused on the interests of the university community.

Evidence received during the Inquiry highlighted concerns regarding the transparency of decision-making processes and the accountability of university governing bodies. The Committee found these concerns to be both significant and widespread. In response, the Committee has made a series of recommendations aimed at improving transparency, strengthening accountability, and enhancing staff and student representation on university Councils. These reforms seek to rebuild trust and confidence in Victoria's universities.

On behalf of the Committee, I thank the organisations and individuals who made submissions and attended public hearings to provide their views and expertise. We greatly appreciate the time, effort and knowledge contributed by all participants. Their evidence has been invaluable in enhancing the Committee's understanding of the current tertiary education landscape in Victoria and informing the recommendations contained in this report.

I extend my thanks to the Deputy Chair, Kim O'Keeffe MP, and my fellow Committee Members who worked on this Inquiry—Roma Britnell MP, Anthony Cianflone MP, John Mullahy MP, Nicole Werner MP, and Dylan Wight MP.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the staff of the Parliament, including the members of the Committee's Secretariat and many others, who provided essential support throughout this process.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alison Marchant". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Alison" and last name "Marchant" clearly distinguishable.

Alison Marchant MP
Chair

Executive summary

University governance and the role of university Councils have been under scrutiny at a national level in Australia, and subsequently in Victoria. Concerns have arisen over the last few years regarding the underpayment of staff, spending on executive salaries and consultants, transparency around decision-making and potential conflicts of interest, and cuts to staff and courses. Due to these concerns, various investigations and consultations have been conducted at national level to identify areas of improvement to strengthen university governance.

The university governance crisis has also had significant implications for Victorian universities. Through this Inquiry, the Committee investigates the impact of these issues in Victoria, identifies areas requiring reform, and develops recommendations to improve governance arrangements across the sector.

In this report, the Committee addresses the role of universities in society to understand the reputational crisis they are experiencing and how universities are responding to this crisis to restore trust in their role in Victorian society. The Committee focused on the role and composition of university Councils, and the appointment processes for their members, including the role of the Victorian Government in appointing members within Councils.

The report discusses the findings of the Expert Council on University Governance (ECUG) Final Report to understand how Victorian universities are implementing the Principles of the ECUG report to enhance governance processes. It also notes the overlap between the Victorian and Commonwealth jurisdictions to acknowledge that changes made on a national level will impact Victorian university governance.

The Committee also analysed the concerns of staff and students with regards to transparency, accountability, and representation on Councils. In response, it makes recommendations to strengthen university governance through targeted legislative changes, including increasing the number of staff and students' representatives in Council. These recommendations aim to increase transparency within governing bodies, to enhance the accountability of public universities, and to strengthen the voice and influence of staff and students on Victorian university Councils.

Findings and recommendations

1 Introduction

FINDING 1: University Councils of public universities in Victoria are governed by a complex legislative and governance framework including university charters, state legislation, Commonwealth legislation, and voluntary codes.

6

2 The Council, legislative framework, and the university's mission

FINDING 2: There is limited public information about how the Government-appointed members are selected. The Department leads only one of the Government-appointed members (of which there are a minimum of four, per Council), while the universities lead the process for the remaining appointments.

23

RECOMMENDATION 1: That the Victorian Government, in consultation with Victorian public universities, publish clear guidance on the process for appointing Government-appointed members to university Councils, including skills matrices, composition of selection panels, and role of universities in the process, to improve transparency and public understanding of the appointment process.

23

FINDING 3: All Victorian universities use skills matrices to appoint their Council members. While most Victorian universities have recently published their matrices, it remains unclear how Councils are faring against their skills matrices.

24

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Victorian Government amend the enabling Acts for all Victorian universities to require them to publish their skills matrices, and their assessment of Council members against the skills matrix, in their annual reports.

25

FINDING 4: The appointment process of Council members has not been sufficiently scrutinised over the years.

25

RECOMMENDATION 3: That the Victorian Government consider a mechanism to conduct a review on the appointment processes of university Councils' members.

25

RECOMMENDATION 4: That the Victorian Government require that universities conduct inductions and governance training for Council members where appropriate. 25

FINDING 5: All Victorian Vice-Chancellors support the Principles in the Final Report of the Expert Council on University Governance. 27

FINDING 6: All Victorian Vice-Chancellors reject the need for Victorian legislative changes to increase representation of staff and students within universities' Councils. 27

FINDING 7: Many stakeholders, including the National Tertiary Education Union, National Union of Students, and Council for Postgraduate Associations, are in favour of legislative changes to enhance transparency within university governing bodies. 28

RECOMMENDATION 5: That the Victorian Government support the adoption of the Expert Council on University Governance Principles and expect Victorian universities to publicly report against these principles under federal legislation. 28

RECOMMENDATION 6: That the Victorian Government have a coordinated approach with the Commonwealth's regulations of university governance; specifically, integration with the regulatory processes of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency. 28

FINDING 8: Broadly, Vice-Chancellors believe that universities are fulfilling their mission in society, to serve the public interest through research and education. They question the claim that the university sector is facing a crisis and that economic and commercial benefits are driving the decisions made by the governing bodies. 33

FINDING 9: Key stakeholders including staff, students, and unions believe the university sector is facing a major crisis due to a shift in priorities within governing bodies which prioritises economic and commercial interests over education, research and service to the community. 35

3 Concerns and impacts of university governance on staff

FINDING 10: Staff claim a lack of transparency in universities' communication of strategic and operational decisions, namely: restructures, institutional changes, and the financial standing of universities, including consultancy expenditure. **47**

FINDING 11: Staff members and organisations recommended improving transparency to clarify the process of how Council members are appointed to Council, for both Government-appointed members and Council-appointed members. **49**

FINDING 12: Staff and organisations emphasised the importance of understanding the criteria by which Council members are appointed, and the different areas of expertise that universities are looking for in Council members. They recommended that universities publish their skills matrix. **49**

FINDING 13: Staff and organisations overwhelmingly recommended that Councils publish meeting agendas and outcomes, and rationales for major decisions that impact staff and students. **50**

RECOMMENDATION 7: That the Victorian Government require Victorian universities to publish agendas and key outcomes of Council meetings with a communique as soon as is practical. Items that cannot be published due to confidentiality reasons can be redacted. **50**

RECOMMENDATION 8: That the Victorian Government mandate Victorian universities to maintain a publicly disclosed 'public-of-interest' registry for all Council members. **50**

FINDING 14: While Victorian universities provide basic information around consultancy expenditure in their annual reports, staff do not feel it is sufficient, notably regarding information around what consultancy projects achieve. **51**

RECOMMENDATION 9: That the Victorian Government amend the enabling Acts for all Victorian universities to require them, in their annual reports, to include additional information regarding consultancy expenditures including the purpose, justification, and where possible, outcomes. **51**

FINDING 15: Staff note that accountability mechanisms to hold Council members to account are insufficient. Examples include the inability for staff to remove a Council member, the lack of public forums for Council members to answer questions by staff, and the unclear and insecure complaints processes.

54

FINDING 16: Staff are concerned over the Council's lack of accountability in response to poor actions of the university, such as wage underpayment or an investigation of leadership. The lack of perceived ownership of outcomes is compounded when considering the high remuneration levels of Vice-Chancellors.

59

FINDING 17: Several Victorian universities discussed how they are strengthening accountability, referencing town hall forums and other ways they are increasing communication to staff.

61

FINDING 18: Universities are reluctant to establish new accountability mechanisms and instead recommended that existing levers be used to strengthen accountability. These include: TEQSA regulatory frameworks, meetings between the Vice-Chancellors and Minister for Skills and TAFE, and dialogue with Parliament around the tabling of the universities' annual reports.

61

RECOMMENDATION 10: That the Victorian Government establish more formal arrangements between Government ministers and universities as an accountability mechanism.

61

FINDING 19: To strengthen accountability mechanisms, staff and organisations suggest increased reporting on a variety of metrics, including wage violations, complaint volumes and resolution timeframes, and Indigenous activities.

63

FINDING 20: To strengthen accountability mechanisms, staff and organisations recommend more external reporting of university governance performance and effectiveness.

63

FINDING 21: Staff recommend strengthening opportunities to provide feedback to Council members, such as establishing regular public forums and clarifying feedback processes.

65

FINDING 22: Staff do not believe that complaint processes at universities are transparent, robust or secure, and expressed not feeling safe and supported throughout the process.

65

RECOMMENDATION 11: That the Victorian Government conduct a review into universities' complaint processes for staff to better understand the process, its independence and efficiency, and develop clear mechanisms for escalation and accountability.

65

FINDING 23: Some staff and organisations recommend that, to strengthen accountability, senior leadership (notably Vice-Chancellors) be democratically elected by the university community, and remuneration caps and benchmarks be established.

67

RECOMMENDATION 12: That the Victorian Government amend the enabling Acts of all Victorian universities to add the publication of an annual remuneration report for Council members, with performance benchmarks, under the responsibilities of the Council.

67

FINDING 24: A single-elected staff member cannot represent the varying staff cohorts in Council, is at higher risk of mistreatment, and often does not receive appropriate workload relief. These conditions make it more difficult when there is a sole staff member to participate and influence Council decisions.

71

FINDING 25: As of June 2026, La Trobe University and Deakin University have committed to increasing the number of staff-elected representatives on Council to two. Other Victorian universities are considering an increase, but listed concerns such as the lack of guarantee in diverse perspectives, and Council size.

73

FINDING 26: Staff and organisations recommend increasing the number of elected staff representatives on Council. While an additional elected staff member on Council would not address every aspect of representation raised by staff and organisations, it would encourage diversity of perspectives.

74

RECOMMENDATION 13: That the Victorian Government amend the enabling Acts of all Victorian universities to require all Victorian university Councils to have a minimum of three elected staff members (this can include Chair of the Academic Board) on Council.

76

4 Concerns and impacts of university governance on students

FINDING 27: Students cite a lack of transparency in decision-making processes on Council, and in Council's explanation of major decisions to students. The result of current transparency levels has led to an erosion of trust by students in the university. **80**

FINDING 28: Student organisations unanimously recommend that Victorian universities strengthen transparency through publishing Council agendas and outcomes of meetings, including the rationale used to reach major decisions that impact students. **82**

FINDING 29: Students and student associations are concerned that universities do not sufficiently publicly report on outcomes that impact students. Students also state that reporting lines are not always clear resulting in weak accountability of governing bodies. **84**

FINDING 30: Complaints processes at universities can be lengthy, bureaucratic, centralised, and result in fear of reprisal against students. For these reasons, complaints processes are not always trusted and contribute to a perceived lack of accountability in governing bodies. **85**

FINDING 31: To strengthen accountability, students and student associations recommend additional performance metrics in annual reports, and clearer reporting lines in terms of Council responsibility. **87**

FINDING 32: Students and student associations recommend strengthening complaints processes for students and ensuring their independence so that students are protected. **88**

RECOMMENDATION 14: That the Victorian Government conduct a review into universities' complaints processes for students to understand the process, its independence and efficiency, and develop clear mechanisms for escalation and accountability. **88**

FINDING 33: One single student representative on Council cannot provide diversity of perspectives because one student is unable to represent the perspectives of the varying cohorts, and the experiences of all students at the university. **91**

FINDING 34: Indigenous students face additional barriers in universities. The Toorong Marnong Higher Education Accord is a partnership between Victorian universities and Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated and aims to improve higher education retention rates and outcomes.

92

RECOMMENDATION 15: That the Victorian Government work with Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated and universities to include Indigenous activities, engagement, and other supports being offered for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their annual reports.

92

FINDING 35: Students and student organisations are concerned about the elected student's experience on Council, as there have been claims of student representatives being ignored, mistreated or overworked.

94

FINDING 36: Universities are open to increasing the number of student representatives on Council. However, they emphasise the need to ensure that students are enabled to participate fully, including through inductions and providing opportunities to build relationships with Council members.

99

FINDING 37: Students and student organisations unanimously recommend increasing the number of elected student representatives. Some included specificities, such as two graduate students (one coursework and one research), or student union presidents.

101

RECOMMENDATION 16: That the Victorian Government amend the enabling Acts of all Victorian universities to require all university Councils to have a minimum of two elected student members across various qualification levels on Council.

101

RECOMMENDATION 17: That the Victorian Government conduct a review, after three years, into the impacts and effectiveness of the legislative changes to the enabling Victorian Acts of all universities, made as a result of this report.

102

Acronyms and terms

APU	Academics for Public Universities
ACU	Australian Catholic University
ATEC	Australian Tertiary Education Commission
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CAPA	Council of Australian Graduate Associations
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
ECUG	Expert Council on University Governance
HESP	Higher Education Standards Panel
MGA	Monash Graduate Association
NTEU	National Tertiary Education Union
NUS	National Union of Students
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
UCC	University Chancellors Council
VAGO	Victorian Auditor-General's Office
VTHC	Victorian Trades Hall Council
YWC	Youth Workers Council

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3 Concerns and impacts of university governance on staff

Figure 3.1 2025 Consultancy expenditures

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3 Concerns and impacts of university governance on staff

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4 Concerns and impacts of university governance on students

Table 4.1 Victorian university student numbers for 2025, enrolments 78

Chapter 1

Introduction

The systems and processes through which universities are led, managed, and held accountable collectively constitute university governance. At the heart of this framework is the university Council (the Council).

In recent years, university governance and the role of Councils have been under scrutiny, as concerns have arisen regarding underpayment of staff, spending on executive salaries and consultants amid transparency around decision-making and potential conflicts of interest, and cuts to staff and courses.¹ Due to these concerns, since 2023, federal bodies have conducted various investigations and consultations to identify areas of improvement to strengthen university governance.² At the same time, parliamentary inquiries have been established at federal and state levels to understand the changes required to enhance university governance and address the reputational crisis the universities are facing.

In December 2025, this Committee received Terms of reference to conduct an Inquiry into enhancing Victorian university governance. The national scrutiny and the findings on university governance prompted questions about how governance practices could be strengthened among Victorian universities, which include:

- Deakin University
- Federation University
- La Trobe University
- Monash University
- Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University
- Swinburne University of Technology
- The University of Melbourne
- Victoria University.

The Australian Catholic University (ACU) and University of Divinity also have campuses in Victoria. However, ACU is multi-jurisdictional, and the University of Divinity is a private institution. Therefore, the Committee does not consider their governance as part of this report.

1 Parliament of Australia, Education and Employment Legislation Committee, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers: Interim report*, Canberra, September 2025, p. 3.

2 Australian Government, Department of Education, *Australian Universities Accord Interim Report*, Canberra, 2023, pp. 13, 21; Melinda Cilento, Sharan Burrow, Bruce Cowley, *Final Report and Principles | Expert Council on University Governance*, Canberra, August 2025, p. 7; Parliament of Australia, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers*, n.d., <https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/UniversityGovernance> accessed 23 March 2026.

The Terms of reference asked the Committee to consider how Victoria could implement the Principles from the Expert Council on University Governance (ECUG), considering the distinct objectives of each Victorian university. Specifically, the Committee was to focus on accountability for university outcomes, transparency of university Council appointment processes, decision-making and composition, increased staff, student and community representation on Councils, and ensuring that university Councils' decision-making was inclusive and responsive to stakeholder concerns.

During the Inquiry, the Committee received evidence from universities, unions, academics, students, staff and student associations, and the Government. The Committee heard confirmation that the university sector is facing a crisis with significant implications for the role and reputation of universities. Key stakeholders, including staff and students, provided testimony on the lack of transparency and accountability within university governing bodies. The Committee also heard from senior university leaders, including the University Chancellors Council (UCC) and Vice-Chancellors.

In this report, the Committee makes a number of recommendations to strengthen university governance in Victoria through targeted legislative changes. These recommendations aim to increase transparency within governing bodies and enhance the accountability of public universities.

1.1 Regulation of university governance in Victoria

This Inquiry primarily focuses on enhancing governance through the main governing body, the Council. Victorian university Councils are chaired by the Chancellor, and comprise of top executives, including the Vice-Chancellor and the Chair of the Academic Board, members appointed by the Council, members appointed by the Victorian Government, staff representatives, and student representatives. Councils typically meet between five and eight times a year. They are regulated by multiple mechanisms, such as charters, state legislation, Commonwealth legislation, and voluntary codes. The most relevant mechanisms are discussed below.

1.1.1 University charters

Councils have self-adopted charters, which dictate their functions. Charters are guidelines, and Councils are not legislatively bound to follow them. While the contents vary, most charters detail how Councils work within the university's governance system, the appointment processes, roles and responsibilities of members of Council, Council committees, and procedures around Council meetings.

Some of the details found in Council charters include:

- publication of Council meetings' dates, frequency of meetings, and publication of minutes
- processes to assess Councils' performance, including external reviews

- circumstances for removal of Council members
- matters requiring Councils' decisions or reviews, e.g. approving the strategic direction and strategic plan, appointing the Vice-Chancellor, approving the university's Annual Report
- matters subject to confidentiality for legal or commercial reasons.³

1.1.2 State legislation

At the state level, Victoria's public universities and their governing Councils are established under state Acts of Parliament. In 2009 and 2010, the Victorian Government re-enacted Acts of Parliament for each public university, for the purpose of 'rationalising obsolete and disparate legislation ... [and] reflecting best practice and a consistent approach to governance and reporting for universities in Victoria'.⁴

The Victorian Acts regulating university Councils are the following:

- *Deakin University Act 2009 (Vic)*
- *Federation University Australia Act 2010 (Vic)*
- *La Trobe University Act 2009 (Vic)*
- *Monash University Act 2009 (Vic)*
- *Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Act 2010 (Vic)*
- *Swinburne University of Technology Act 2010 (Vic)*
- *University of Melbourne Act 2009 (Vic)*
- *Victoria University Act 2010 (Vic)*.

These Acts have the same structure, with Part 2 titled 'Constitution and governance of the University', and Division 2 titled 'The Council'.⁵

Division 2, 'The Council' sets out the powers and function of the Council, Council membership, limitations on membership, responsibilities of Council members, remuneration, procedure, power to delegate, and indemnities.⁶ The requirements of

³ The University of Melbourne, *Council Charter*, 18 March 2026, <https://about.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/480029/Council-Charter-v10.pdf> accessed 2 June 2026; The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, *RMIT Council Governance Charter*, 5 March 2020, <<https://www.rmit.edu.au/content/dam/rmit/documents/about/committees/council-governance-charter.pdf>> accessed 2 June 2026; Deakin University, *Council Charter*, 4 February 2026, <<https://policy.deakin.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=230>> accessed 2 June 2026; Federation University, *University Council Charter*, 10 December 2025, <https://federation.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/546131/Charter-Council-2024-December.pdf> accessed 2 June 2026.

⁴ *University of Melbourne Act 2009 (Vic)* s 1; *La Trobe University Act 2009 (Vic)* s 1; *Swinburne University of Technology Act 2010 (Vic)* s 1; *Deakin University Act 2009 (Vic)* s 1; *Federation University Australia Act 2010 (Vic)* s 1; *Monash University Act 2009 (Vic)* s 1; *Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Act 2010 (Vic)* s 1; *Victoria University Act 2010 (Vic)* s 1.

⁵ *University of Melbourne Act 2009 (Vic)* pt 2 div 2; *La Trobe University Act 2009 (Vic)* pt 2 div 2; *Swinburne University of Technology Act 2010 (Vic)* pt 2 div 2; *Deakin University Act 2009 (Vic)* pt 2 div 2; *Federation University Australia Act 2010 (Vic)* pt 2 div 2; *Monash University Act 2009 (Vic)* pt 2 div 2; *Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Act 2010 (Vic)* pt 2 div 2; *Victoria University Act 2010 (Vic)* pt 2 div 2.

⁶ Ibid.

Council membership, in terms of composition and term limits, are the same for each Victorian public university:

- ex-officio members: the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, and the Chair of the Academic Board
- government-appointed members: at least four, for a term of up to three years
- Council-appointed members: at least four, for a term of up to three years
- elected staff representative: at least one, for a term of up to three years
- elected student representative: at least one, for a term of up to two years.

This composition of the Council and the appointment of Council members will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2.

Part 5 of the Acts of Parliament for the Victorian universities allows Councils to make university regulations regarding Council, subject to Ministerial approval.⁷ Some universities enacted such regulations and are subsequently governed by them. These regulations were approved by the Council. Regulations include specificities about Council operations and procedures. They usually go into further detail from the information provided in the Acts of Parliament. These can include changes to the number of members (meeting the minimum required as per the Act) or the length of terms (meeting the maximum required as per the Act).

Since universities are public entities, they are also subject to comply with other legislation including the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)*, the *Financial Management Act 1994 (Vic)*, the *Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic)*, and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)*.

1.1.3 Commonwealth legislation

Victorian universities are also governed by Commonwealth legislation, the most relevant of which to this Inquiry is the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (TEQSA Act) and the legislative instrument beneath it: the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*.⁸

The purpose of *TEQSA Act* is 'to provide for national consistency in the regulation of higher education', and it states the basic requirements for higher education providers to be accredited higher education providers.⁹ It does not discuss university governance or Council, although it does note that providers need to comply with the *Threshold Standards*, which have a section on governance.

⁷ *University of Melbourne Act 2009 (Vic)* pt 5; *La Trobe University Act 2009 (Vic)* pt 5; *Swinburne University of Technology Act 2010 (Vic)* pt 5; *Deakin University Act 2009 (Vic)* pt 5; *Federation University Australia Act 2010 (Vic)* pt 5; *Monash University Act 2009 (Vic)* pt 5; *Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Act 2010 (Vic)* pt 5; *Victoria University Act 2010 (Vic)* pt 5.

⁸ Australian Government, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, *TEQSA Act*, 13 October 2022, <<https://www.teqsa.gov.au/how-we-regulate/acts-and-standards/teqsa-act>> accessed 23 March 2026.

⁹ *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (Commonwealth).

The *TEQSA Act* established the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), the independent national regulator for Australian higher education. TEQSA registers higher education providers and conducts compliance and quality assessments, to ensure they are meeting the national standards.¹⁰ TEQSA re-registers universities every seven years. To successfully re-register universities must demonstrate that they meet the requirements of the *TEQSA Act* and the *Threshold Standards*.¹¹

The *Threshold Standards* were last updated in 2021 and contain seven domains. These domains are:

1. student participation and attainment
2. learning environment
3. teaching
4. research and research training
5. institutional quality assurance
6. governance and accountability
7. representation, information and information management.¹²

The sixth domain, ‘Governance and accountability’, notes corporate governance requirements—such as members needing to be ‘fit and proper persons’, and mandating that the Council ‘takes steps to develop and maintain an institutional environment in which freedom of speech and academic freedom are upheld and protected’. It also states that the governing body must be assured that the provider is operating ‘effectively and sustainably’.¹³

1.1.4 Voluntary codes

Finally, Victorian universities adhere to standards set by the University Chancellors Council (UCC), a representative body whose members are the Chancellors of Australian universities. Its mission is to ‘support and elevate best practice in university governance to drive stronger outcomes for the Australian university sector’.¹⁴ The UCC has two codes of best practice: the Code of Governance Principles and Practice for Australia’s Public Universities, and the Code of Executive Remuneration Principles and Practice for Australia’s Public Universities.¹⁵

¹⁰ Australian Government, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, *Our role*, 21 October 2022, <<https://www.teqsa.gov.au/about-us/teqsa-overview/our-role>> accessed 23 March 2026.

¹¹ Universities Australia, *Regulation and accreditation*, 2026, <<https://universitiesaustralia.edu.au/policy-submissions/teaching-learning-funding/regulation-and-accreditation>> accessed 23 March 2026; Australian Government, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, *Application guide for renewal of registration*, 6 August 2024, <<https://www.teqsa.gov.au/guides-resources/resources/application-guides/application-guide-renewal-registration>> accessed 23 March 2026.

¹² *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (Cth)*.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.

¹⁴ University Chancellors Council, *University Chancellors Council*, 2025, <<https://ucc.edu.au>> accessed 23 March 2026.

¹⁵ University Chancellors Council, *Voluntary Codes for Australian Universities*, 2025, <<https://ucc.edu.au/codes>> accessed 23 March 2026.

These codes are subject to Commonwealth and state laws, and are intended to provide 'broad guidance' to universities and their governing bodies.¹⁶ The Code of Governance Principles and Practice for Australia's Public Universities was updated in 2024 to reflect the findings of the Australian Universities Accord, which aimed to provide recommendations to improve the quality and accessibility of the higher education system.¹⁷ The Accord is discussed in detail in the next section. The Code's best practice includes having Councils achieve gender balance, reflect the diversity of the Australian community, and First Peoples membership. It recommends that Councils have a program of induction and professional development for members, and that Councils undergo an internal performance review every three years, and an external one every seven years.¹⁸

The Code of Executive Remuneration Principles and Practice for Australia's Public Universities provides guidelines for Vice-Chancellors and senior executives' remuneration. It recommends that universities publicly disclose salaries, and that salaries reflect ethical considerations. It also recommends that Vice-Chancellors have measurable performance objectives endorsed by the Councils, and that they are subject to regular performance reviews.¹⁹

While the Codes are voluntary and self-administered, Victorian universities have publicly committed to them and report on compliance in annual reports, to note any changes that align with best practice of governance.

FINDING 1: University Councils of public universities in Victoria are governed by a complex legislative and governance framework including university charters, state legislation, Commonwealth legislation, and voluntary codes.

1.2 University governance in recent years

In recent years, public debate concerning the role of universities has increasingly focused on concerns that these institutions have moved away from their core purpose of serving and advancing society and the public good. The purpose of universities is summarised by the ECUG as 'the pursuit of knowledge through research, and its transference through teaching and scholarship'.²⁰ As universities seemingly become

¹⁶ University Chancellors Council, *A Code of Governance Principles and Practice for Australia's Public Universities*, 2024, p. 1.

¹⁷ University Chancellors Council, *Voluntary Codes for Australian Universities*, 2025, <<https://ucc.edu.au/codes>> accessed 23 March 2026.

¹⁸ University Chancellors Council, *A Code of Governance Principles and Practice for Australia's Public Universities*, 2024.

¹⁹ University Chancellors Council, *A Code of Executive Remuneration Principles and Practice for Australia's Public Universities*, 2025.

²⁰ Melinda Cilento, Sharan Burrow, Bruce Cowley, *Final Report and Principles / Expert Council on University Governance*, Canberra, August 2025, p. 9.

more corporatised, their ability to fulfill those two purposes—research and education—is put at risk.²¹

Issues concerning the purpose of universities were discussed in the Australian Universities Accord, which was announced in 2022 by the Commonwealth Department of Education to review Australia's higher education system.²² The Accord aimed to provide recommendations to improve the quality and accessibility of the higher education system, to increase its resilience and ensure 'long term security and prosperity for the sector'.²³ The functioning of governance was discussed within its Interim Report, which noted the trends of decreasing Council size, and the appointment of individuals with non-university business expertise to Council.²⁴ The Interim Report concluded that 'systemic [governance] issues persist ... including widespread underpayment of staff, suggesting governance arrangements could be improved'.²⁵

The Interim Report also made five priority actions. The first four priorities were to increase access to tertiary education, eliminate the 50% pass rule for students, ensure that First Nations students were eligible to a funded place at university, and provide funding certainty for universities into 2024 and 2025.²⁶ The fifth recommendation was:

Through National Cabinet, immediately engage with state and territory governments and universities to improve university governance, particularly focusing on:

- universities being good employers
- student and staff safety
- membership of governing bodies, including ensuring additional involvement of people with expertise in the business of universities.²⁷

During this time, the Fair Work Ombudsman also conducted investigations into universities regarding underpayment of casual staff, which resulted in several enforceable undertakings to repay staff. This included three Victorian universities: University of Melbourne (in December 2024), La Trobe University (in March 2025), and Monash University (in December 2025).²⁸

21 Parliament of Australia, Education and Employment Legislation Committee, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers: Final report*, Canberra, December 2025, pp. 12–15; National Tertiary Education Union, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, p. 25; Professor Greg J Bamber, Associate Professor Brian Cooper and Dr Sean O'Brady, *Submission 80*, received 1 March 2026, pp. 1–2; Name withheld, *Submission 45*, received 24 February 2026, p. 1; Professor Rob Watts, RMIT, *Submission 64*, pp. 1, 5–6.

22 Australian Government, Department of Education, *Australian Universities Accord*, 28 February 2025, <<https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord>> accessed 24 March 2026.

23 Ibid.

24 Australian Government, Department of Education, *Australian Universities Accord Interim Report*, Canberra, 2023, p. 130.

25 Ibid., p. 129.

26 Ibid., pp. 11–12.

27 Ibid., p. 13.

28 Australian Government, Fair Work Ombudsman, *2024 to 2025 enforceable undertakings*, n.d., <<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/compliance-and-enforcement/enforceable-undertakings/2024-2025-enforceable-undertakings>> accessed 24 March 2026; Australian Government, Fair Work Ombudsman, *2025 to 2026 enforceable undertakings*, n.d., <<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/compliance-and-enforcement/enforceable-undertakings/2025-2026-enforceable-undertakings>> accessed 24 March 2026.

Deakin University voluntarily disclosed the underpayment of sessional staff to the Fair Work Ombudsman in May 2024 and pledged to backpay casual staff underpaid in November 2025.²⁹ RMIT University also reached an agreement with the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) in 2021 to remedy previous underpayment of casual staff.³⁰

Priority Action 5 of the Accord, alongside the publicised underpayment investigations, highlighted the need for further focus and reform of higher education governance. Subsequently, several inquiries were commissioned at both federal and state levels.

1.2.1 Federal response

Two actions were taken at the federal level in response to university governance concerns:

- the establishment of the Expert Council on University Governance
- the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee's inquiry into Quality of Governance at Australian Higher Education Providers.

Expert Council on University Governance

As stated earlier in the Chapter, the ECUG was established at the April 2024 Education Ministers Meeting, to respond to Priority Action 5 of the Universities Accord which called for improved university governance.³¹ The Ministers drafted ten priority areas for reform and three key risk areas, based on the Accord's findings.³² The ECUG was tasked with drafting principles and recommendations for university governance in response to the priority and risk areas, and its Final Report and Principles was accepted and published in October 2025.³³

The ECUG identified eight Governance Principles (the Principles) to strengthen governance at Australian public universities. The Principles are explicitly stated *not* to be intended as a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. However, the ECUG stated that any major changes from the Principles should be explained by the university, in an 'if not, why not' approach.³⁴ The Principles are intended to replace the UCC Voluntary Codes, and to function in accordance with Commonwealth and state legislation.³⁵

²⁹ Deakin University, *Deakin addressing sessional academic payments*, 29 May 2024, <<https://www.deakin.edu.au/about-deakin/news-and-media-releases/articles/deakin-addressing-sessional-academic-payments>> accessed 19 June 2026; NTEU, *Deakin University admits underpaying staff almost \$3 million*, 11 November 2025, <https://www.nteu.au/News_Articles/Media_Releases/deakin_underpaying_staff.aspx> accessed 19 June 2026.

³⁰ RMIT University, *Academic judgement casual payment dispute*, 10 February 2023, <<https://www.rmit.edu.au/news/academic-judgment>> accessed 24 March 2026.

³¹ Melinda Cilento, Sharan Burrow, Bruce Cowley, *Final Report and Principles / Expert Council on University Governance*, Canberra, August 2025, p. 7.

³² Ibid., pp. 73–74.

³³ Ibid., p. 7.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 35.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 39–40.

The Principles are:

1. Accountability: Governance structures and accountabilities are well-defined, effective and transparent.
2. Diversity of perspectives: Composition of the governing body enables purpose and performance.
3. Independence: Academic standards and freedom are respected and protected.
4. Transparency: Purpose, strategy and performance are clear and openly communicated.
5. Truthworthy: The university operates lawfully, ethically, responsibly, and consistent with its public purpose.
6. Inclusive + Responsive: Expectations of the university's community and stakeholders are understood, respected and responded to.
7. Sustainable: Risks are understood and managed effectively.
8. Responsible: Workforce and remuneration are structured fairly and responsibly.³⁶

Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee's inquiry into the Quality of Governance at Australian Higher Education Providers

The Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee agreed to the inquiry into the Quality of Governance at Australian Higher Education Providers in January 2025, in the 47th Parliament. Parliament lapsed in March, and in July 2025 the inquiry was re-adopted, with a tabling deadline of December 2025. The inquiry's objective was to examine whether TEQSA had the powers to perform its role in identifying and addressing corporate governance issues at Australian higher education providers. The Committee published an Interim Report in September 2025, and a Final Report in December 2025.³⁷

The Interim Report discussed university governance in Australia, accountability and transparency in governance, remuneration of senior university staff, and strengthening TEQSA.³⁸ Throughout the report, the gap in perception between university management and the university community was a crucial issue:

‘universities maintained that the current systems, processes, and policies are largely sufficient and do not require wholesale intervention or amendment ... this is in stark contrast to the many submitters outside of the management branch of universities’.³⁹

³⁶ Melinda Cilento, Sharan Burrow, Bruce Cowley, *Final Report and Principles / Expert Council on University Governance*, Canberra, August 2025, p. 41-52, pp. 41-52.

³⁷ Parliament of Australia, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers*, n.d.; Parliament of Australia, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers*, n.d., <https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Education_and_Employment/UniversityGovernance48> accessed 24 March 2026.

³⁸ Parliament of Australia, Education and Employment Legislation Committee, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers: Interim report*, Canberra, September 2025.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 113-114.

The Interim Report highlighted that the issues of accountability and transparency were ‘at the heart of the lack of trust in institutions across Australia’, and made twelve recommendations.⁴⁰ The first recommendation was for universities to improve the transparency and accountability of governing bodies by, for example, publishing Council meeting minutes, maintaining a public conflict-of-interest register for senior executives, and publishing annual remuneration reports for senior executives.⁴¹

The Final Report examined the corporatisation of Australia’s universities, academic influence in universities, university employment practices, education equality and the student experience, and the integration of regulation across jurisdictions.⁴² It concluded that the central theme underpinning all the aforementioned topics was the role and purpose of Australian universities, and the tension between universities operating for the public good and having to secure funding from private sources.⁴³ The Final Report also supported the announcement that the Principles would be written into the amended *Threshold Standards*, and welcomed the establishment of the Australian Tertiary Education Commission,⁴⁴ which will be discussed in the next sub-section. This Final Report made eight recommendations.⁴⁵

Legislation

There have been several proposed and enacted changes in Commonwealth legislation in response to both the Accord and the concerns around university governance generally. The changes most relevant to this Inquiry are:

- the *Education Legislation Amendment (Integrity and Other Measures) Bill 2025*,
- the *Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Bill 2025*,
- the *Threshold Standards*.

The *Education Legislation Amendment (Integrity and Other Measures) Bill 2025* received Royal Assent in December 2025. The Bill amended the *TEQSA Act*, strengthening TEQSA’s powers so that it can authorise and regulate the provision of higher education courses outside Australia, and will require providers engaging in offshore delivery to submit an annual report to TEQSA detailing their activities.⁴⁶

The *Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Bill 2025* was introduced to the House of Representatives in November 2025 and received

⁴⁰ Parliament of Australia, Education and Employment Legislation Committee, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers: Interim report*, Canberra, September 2025, pp. 115–121.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. xi.

⁴² Parliament of Australia, Education and Employment Legislation Committee, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers - final report*, Canberra, December 2025.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 122.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 123.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 123–130.

⁴⁶ Parliament of Australia, *Bills Digest No. 24, 2025–26: Education Legislation Amendment (Integrity and Other Measures) Bill 2025*, 23 October 2025, <https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/bd/bd2526/26bd024> accessed 25 March 2026; Australian Government, Department of Education, *Fact sheet: Changes to offshore higher education delivery*, Canberra, 2025.

Royal Assent in April 2026.⁴⁷ Through this Bill the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) was established. The ATEC provides strategic advice and recommendations on the tertiary education system including:

- manage the allocation of Commonwealth supported places at higher education providers;
- provide independent advice to Government on the tertiary education system
- report annually on the state of the tertiary education system.⁴⁸

Before the implementation of ATEC, the Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) conducted consultations on proposed amendments to the Higher Education Standards Framework (*Threshold Standards*) 2021.⁴⁹ The proposed amendments focused on several areas, one of which is ‘Incorporating the University Governance Principles and transparency requirements’ into the *Threshold Standards*.⁵⁰ However, since 29 April 2026, ATEC has responsibility for advice on the *Threshold Standards*.⁵¹

The above-mentioned Senate’s inquiry into the Quality of Governance at Australian Higher Education Providers included a recommendation to incorporate the ECUG Principles into the *Threshold Standards*, and as such this legislative amendment will respond directly to that recommendation.⁵²

Since the Principles are expected to be incorporated into the *Threshold Standards*, this Committee anticipates that Victorian universities will comply with them once they are formally adopted. For this reason, this Inquiry will not analyse all the Principles but will focus on the areas identified in the Terms of reference for this Inquiry: transparency, accountability, and strengthening staff and student voice. These are areas in which state legislation can play an important role in promoting consistent governance practices across Victorian universities.

State responses

Australian states have also commissioned inquiries into university governance. Tasmania, in late 2024, completed its inquiry into The Provisions of the *University of Tasmania Act 1992*, which looked at governance issues, among others—its terms of

⁴⁷ *Universities Accord (Australian Tertiary Education Commission) Bill 2025*.

⁴⁸ Australia Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC), *What we do*, <<https://www.atec.gov.au/about-atec/atecs-role-and-functions>> accessed 27 January 2026.

⁴⁹ Government of Australia, Department of Education, *Consultation on amendments to the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*, 29 April 2026, <<https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-standards-panel-hesp/consultations/consultation-amendments-higher-education-standards-framework-threshold-standards-2021>> accessed 6 June 2026.

⁵⁰ Higher Education Standards Panel, *Higher Education Standards Panel Consultation Paper 2026*, Canberra, 2026, p. 5.

⁵¹ Government of Australia, Department of Education, *Consultation on amendments to the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*, 29 April 2026, <<https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-standards-panel-hesp/consultations/consultation-amendments-higher-education-standards-framework-threshold-standards-2021>> accessed 6 June 2026.

⁵² Parliament of Australia, Education and Employment Legislation Committee, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers - final report*, p. 128.

reference included examining ‘The constitution, role, powers and obligations of the Council and Academic Senate’.⁵³

In its Final Report, the Committee noted several concerns regarding the University of Tasmania’s Council, including the shrinking of the Council size, the lack of representation of staff and students, and the lack of accountability of the Council to the university and wider community.⁵⁴ It recommended that the Act be amended to mandate the Council include a minimum of two students, two academic staff members, and two professional staff members.⁵⁵ The Tasmanian Government has not provided a formal response to this inquiry as of June 2026, as it stated that it is waiting on national developments to ensure its response is aligned with any national frameworks.⁵⁶

The Standing Committee on Social Issues in New South Wales Legislative Council received an inquiry into the New South Wales University Sector in August 2025.⁵⁷ The inquiry is governance-focused, with the terms of reference including the role of governance structures in safeguarding the public mission of universities, and the accountability of university Councils.⁵⁸ An Interim Report was tabled in April 2026 with some initial findings and recommendations.⁵⁹

1.3 Scope of the Inquiry

As mentioned earlier in this Chapter, the Legislative Assembly’s Economy and Infrastructure Committee in Victoria was referred this Inquiry on 3 December 2025. The Terms of reference for this Inquiry required the Committee to examine how best university governance in Victoria could be enhanced through the following ways:

- greater accountability, transparency, and elevated community, staff and student voice at the highest governance level
- implementing the Principles of the ECUG, and the agreed priority areas of the Education Ministers
- how Victorian universities plan to put the recommendations of the ECUG Final Report into practice, with specific reference to how they will:
 - strengthen accountability for university performance and outcomes

⁵³ Parliament of Tasmania, Legislative Council Select Committee, *Final Report on the Provisions of the University of Tasmania Act 1992*, Hobart, 2024, p. 6.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 21–23.

⁵⁵ Parliament of Tasmania, Legislative Council Select Committee, *Final Report on the Provisions of the University of Tasmania Act 1992*, Hobart, 2024, p. 18.

⁵⁶ Meg Webb, Independent Member for Nelson, *Question & Answer – University of Tasmania Act – Government Response to Legislative Council Report*, 17 March 2026, <<https://megwebb.com.au/question-answer-university-of-tasmania-act-government-response-to-legislative-council-report>> accessed 25 March 2026.

⁵⁷ Parliament of New South Wales, *New South Wales university sector*, n.d., <<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?>> accessed 25 March 2026.

⁵⁸ Legislative Council, Standing Committee on Social Issues, *Inquiry into the New South Wales university sector: Terms of reference*, Sydney, 18 August 2025.

⁵⁹ Parliament of New South Wales, *New South Wales university sector*, n.d., <<https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?>> accessed 25 March 2026.

- increase transparency and representation of university council appointment processes, composition and decision-making
- support Councils with more diverse representation
- ensure that Council decision-making is inclusive and responsive to stakeholders.⁶⁰

1.3.1 Topics this report will not cover

The Committee collected evidence regarding concerns related to the decision-making process within universities and the impacts these decisions have on staff and students. The issues presented through evidence were wide-ranging, but due to the limitations in scope of this Inquiry, cannot all be analysed by the Committee.

One such issue is the casualisation of the university workforce, which had been widely reported in the media.⁶¹ The Committee heard evidence that precarious employment conditions can adversely affect both teaching performance and the quality of learning outcomes.⁶² The widespread use of casual and insecure employment arrangements provides limited long-term job security for teaching and research staff. In addition, uncertainty about ongoing employment was identified as a significant factor affecting staff wellbeing. This was relayed to the Committee through both submissions and public hearings.⁶³ The Committee expressed concerns about this ongoing issue and its impact on staff and students.

While a number of additional matters were raised during this Inquiry and are relevant to the university sector, they are not considered in this report because they fall outside the scope of the Inquiry. These topics are:

- the role of student unions
- the allocation of Student Services and Amenities Fees
- the role of non-Council university governing bodies
- the role of non-Council engagement with staff and students
- staff member hiring and promotion practices

⁶⁰ Legislative Assembly, Economic and Infrastructure Committee, *Terms of reference: Inquiry into enhancing Victorian university governance*, Melbourne, 3 December 2025.

⁶¹ Madi Chwasta, 'University of Melbourne to repay \$72 million to staff after 'unlawful' conduct across a decade', *ABC News*, 9 December 2024, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-12-09/university-of-melbourne-underpayment-fair-work-ombudsman/104701012>> accessed 8 June 2026; David Martin-Guzman, 'Uni settlement makes courts an investment opportunity for unions', *Australian Financial Review*, 28 November 2025, <<https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/workplace/uni-settlement-makes-courts-an-investment-opportunity-for-unions-20251128-p5njap>> accessed 8 June 2026.

⁶² Professor Joo-Cheong Tham, Assistant Secretary Victoria Division, National Tertiary Education Union, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 3–4; Yolanda Robson, Director, Young Workers Centre, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 9, 11–12; Felix Hughes, President, National Student Union, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 52.

⁶³ National Tertiary Education Union Monash University Branch, *Submission 77*, received 1 March 2026, p. 5; Name withheld, *Submission 71*, received 28 February 2026, p. 2; Oscar Kaspi-Crutchett, Senior Research Organiser, Victorian Trades Hall Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 15.

- the underpayment of casual staff
- the use of AI.

Despite not investigating these issues in this report, the Committee urges the governing bodies of Victorian universities to work with staff, students, and the unions to guarantee collaboration and transparency in all the decisions that will affect these stakeholders, the quality of the teaching and learning, and research outputs.

1.4 Inquiry process

The Committee called for submissions to the Inquiry in December 2025 by writing directly to over 100 stakeholders and advertising on LinkedIn, X, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. The invited stakeholders included universities, government entities, governance organisations, university staff and student groups, unions and professional organisations, business and industry peak bodies, and underrepresented groups.

The Committee received 114 submissions, which are listed in Appendix A. Over half of the submissions were from staff (mainly academics) mostly associated with Victorian universities. Other submissions were from unions and associations, staff and student groups, individual students, and universities. The Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions also provided a submission.

The Inquiry was initially required to report to Parliament by 31 May 2026, but in March 2026, received an extension of two months. This allowed for additional time to conduct public hearings and complete the report.

The Committee held two days of public hearings on 14 and 15 May 2026 and one closed hearing on 5 June 2026. All hearings were held in Melbourne. Appendix A lists the witnesses who gave evidence at the public hearings. The public hearings were publicised on the Parliament of Victoria's website and social media feeds. Public hearings were broadcast live on the Parliament of Victoria's website.

1.5 Report outline

This report comprises four chapters.

This Chapter, Chapter 1, introduced the Inquiry, outlining its objectives. It details the various mechanisms through which universities are regulated, the current issues relating to university governance, and how the broader national debate informed the establishment of this Inquiry.

Chapter 2 analyses the composition and role of university Councils, identifying opportunities to strengthen transparency and accountability of the main governing body. This Chapter also discusses the ECUG Principles and the Senate inquiry findings applied in the Victorian context. Finally, this Chapter explores the purpose of public universities in Victoria and the reputational challenges they have experienced in recent years.

Chapter 3 examines concerns about university governance from the perspective of staff, focusing on issues of transparency, accountability, and the diversity of perspectives represented in decision-making processes. It also considers measures to strengthen staff participation and engagement in university governance.

Chapter 4 explores concerns about university governance from the perspective of students, with particular attention to transparency, accountability, and the representation of diverse viewpoints. Consistent with Chapter 3, it considers options for strengthening student voice and representation on university Councils.

Throughout this report, the Committee provides its findings and recommendations aimed at improving university governance and enhancing the transparency and accountability of governing bodies across Victorian universities.

Chapter 2

The Council, legislative framework, and the university's mission

Public universities play a significant role in the state's social, economic and cultural life in Victoria. As well as educating hundreds of thousands of students every year, they undertake research that contributes to innovation and are a major employer within their communities.

Victorian universities serve a diverse student population, including students from regional areas, students with disability, Indigenous students, and international students. Given their scale, public purpose, and influence, strong governance arrangements are critical to ensuring universities are accountable, transparent, and responsive to the communities they serve. As explained in Chapter 1, university Councils are the main governance body and operate within a complex legislative framework.

This chapter analyses the role and composition of university Councils, and the appointment process of their members, notably the role of the Government in appointing members within Councils. This Chapter also discusses the findings of the Expert Council on University Governance (ECUG) Final Report and the Senate report to understand how Victorian universities are implementing the principles of the ECUG report. Lastly, this Chapter addresses the role of university Councils in society to understand the reputational crisis universities are experiencing and how universities are responding to this crisis to restore trust in the role of universities in Victorian society.

While Victorian universities expressed support for the implementation of the ECUG Principles, they also defended the performance of their governance bodies and existing processes, rejecting the need for any legislative changes to enhance university governance. The Committee noted this discrepancy.

2.1 The university Council

In Victoria, the structures and primary responsibility of university Councils are outlined in the eight enabling Acts of Parliament, one for each public university. University Councils are made up of members, including:

- ex-officio members: the Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor, and the Chair or President of the Academic Board
- council-appointed members

- government-appointed members
- elected members: staff-elected and student-elected.

The composition of the Council is one of the primary objects of interest for this Inquiry, as the Committee received a significant number of submissions discussing the structure of the Council, the appointment of members, and the unbalanced representation of staff and students in the Councils.

2.1.1 Composition and appointment process of university Councils

In this section, the report describes the composition and appointment processes of university Councils' members to highlight issues the Committee identified within the existing appointment processes.

Ex-officio members

The Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, and Chair or President of the Academic Board comprise the ex-officio members of a university Council. The two most prominent roles are the Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor. While the Chancellor is the Chair of the Council, the Vice-Chancellor is charged with the strategic leadership of the institution.

The Chancellor is the formal head of a university and chair of the Council, responsible for governance and embodying the institution's values. The role of the Chancellor mirrors that of a company board chair—with the Vice-Chancellor as the equivalent of Chief Executive Officer.

Key responsibilities of the Chancellor include:

- **governance**—promoting ethical, transparent, and collaborative decision-making, and ensuring governing body members understand their roles
- **representation**—presiding over ceremonies like graduations and acting as a symbol of the university's mission and standards
- **advocacy**—championing the university's interests using deep institutional knowledge and external networks
- **Vice-Chancellor oversight**—overseeing the appointment, performance, and remuneration of the Vice-Chancellor in conjunction with the governing body.¹

The Vice-Chancellor is the highest-ranking executive officer of an Australian university and, as above mentioned, is appointed by the Chancellor and governing body. This process has been increasingly subject to scrutiny from the national regulator, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), to ensure transparency and good governance.

¹ University Chancellors Council, *Governance of Australian Universities*, <<https://ucc.edu.au/university-governance>> accessed 8 June 2026.

While the governing body holds central authority for decision-making across all aspects of university life, the Vice-Chancellor leads the institution's academic, operational, and financial performance on a day-to-day basis, and drives its long-term development.² They also represent the university internally and externally, engaging with government, industry, staff, students, and the broader community.

It should be noted that the relationship between the two most senior leadership positions represents a crucial aspect in successful governance. While the topic was not investigated in detail during this Inquiry, media have reported cases where tensions between the two leadership figures have created complex environment for successful governance.³

Staff and student-elected members

As stated in Chapter 1, Victorian legislation dictates that each university must have a minimum of one student-elected member and one staff-elected member in its Council, for a maximum term of two and three years respectively.

The enabling legislation for universities does not place restrictions on who the elected staff and student members are, but individual universities may through their statutes and regulations. The enabling legislation for each Victorian university states that:

- (4A) The elected members are —
- (a) one or more persons elected by and from the staff of the University in accordance with the university statutes and any university regulations; and
 - (b) one or more persons elected by and from the students of the University in accordance with the university statutes and any university regulations.⁴

During this Inquiry, the Committee heard the difficulties staff and students have in representing the interests of their cohorts within the Council. One of the key concerns raised during this Inquiry is that one representative per cohort has limited power to influence the decision-making process within the Council. As of June 2026, some universities have already increased the number of representatives on Council in accordance with their statutes.⁵ This topic will be discussed in detail in Chapters 3 and 4, where the Committee makes recommendations to improve the current system.

² University Chancellors Council, *Governance of Australian Universities*, <<https://ucc.edu.au/university-governance>> accessed 8 June 2026.

³ Sumeyya Ilanbey, 'Swinburne vice-chancellor quits amid investigation into chancellor', *Australian Financial Review*, 26 March 2026, <<https://www.afr.com/policy/health-and-education/swinburne-vice-chancellor-quits-amid-investigation-into-chancellor-20260326-p5ziyk>> accessed 8 June 2026.

⁴ This text is found in all enabling Acts of Victorian universities. See sections 4A. For example, *Monash University Act 2009*, Div 2, Section 11(4A).

⁵ Professor Theo Farrell, Vice-Chancellor and President, La Trobe University, public hearing, Melbourne 15 May, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20; Deakin University, *Submission 4a*, received 1 June 2026, p. 1; The University of Melbourne, *Submission 62*, received 27 February 2026, p. 4.

Council and Government-elected members

Victorian legislation states that each Council must elect at least four members, for a term of up to three years. Similarly, the Victorian Government must elect at least four members, for a term of up to three years. Terms can be renewed.

Of the individuals appointed by the Victorian Government and Council, the following expertise is required as per universities' enabling legislation:

- (a) at least 2 must be persons with financial expertise with relevant qualifications or experience in financial management; and
- (b) one must be a person with commercial expertise at a senior level.⁶

There is also an expectation that these appointed members have:

- (a) the knowledge, skills and experience required for the effective working of the Council;
- (b) an appreciation of the values of a university relating to teaching, research, independence and academic freedom; and
- (c) the capacity to recognise the needs of the external community served by the university.⁷

During this Inquiry, the Committee heard concerns around the process of appointing members, and the perceived emphasis on appointing individuals with private sector expertise, for business interests—with the result being fewer individuals with academic expertise, or explicit connection to the university, on the Council. These concerns feed into a lack of trust between the university and its staff, students, and community, and the broader commentary around the corporatisation of universities. Both topics will be subsequently discussed in this report.

Appointment process of members

The Committee heard substantial evidence discussing the appointment processes by the Victorian Government and by the Council. Stakeholders emphasised their lack of understanding of the process, and it was clear to the Committee that there has not been enough information provided publicly about how members are appointed to Council.

⁶ This text is found in all enabling Acts of Victorian universities. For example, see *Monash University Act 2009*, Div 2, Section 11A(6)(a)(b).

⁷ This text is found in all enabling Acts of Victorian universities. For example, see *Monash University Act 2009*, Div 2, Section 12(3)(a)(b)(c), and *Monash University Act 2009*, Div 2, Section 13(2)(a)(b)(c).

In its submission to the Committee, the Government stated it applies best-practice principles when appointing members, and referenced two Victorian Government guidelines documents: the *Appointment and Remuneration Guidelines*, and the *Diversity on Victorian Government Boards Guidelines*.⁸ The Guidelines outline standard processes for appointing individuals to government boards and offices, and are not specific to the university sector.⁹

The Government does not publish precisely how it appoints members to Councils. During the hearings, the Committee inquired about the process of the Government appointing members. The Deputy Secretary of Skills and TAFE, in the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, Lill Healy, provided the following background:

[T]he department plays a supportive role to the minister and to government through the four government-appointed members that are required, one appointed by the minister and three then through the Governor in Council process. In doing that, we have a responsibility for working within established policy of the government focused around merit and probity requirements, and we work to the Victorian appointment and remuneration guidelines and also the diversity on Victorian government boards guidelines. The role the department plays in supporting that process, including providing advice to the minister to ensure that quality appointments are made – we work through a pretty rigorous process.¹⁰

She further explained that the Ministerial appointments, of which there is one per Council, follow this process:

1. Advertise appointments through the 'Join a public board' site.
2. Run an interview selection process (with the support of an external agency, and an independent selection panel).

The Governor-in-Council appointments (the remaining three, at minimum, members) are led by the university. The university recommends the individual to the Department, who then recommends it to the Minister. While the above statement from the Deputy Secretary emphasised both appointment processes as being done within the policy around public boards, much of the process remains unclear, especially around how universities arrive at a recommendation for the Department. The Committee is concerned about the shared responsibility between the Government and universities in appointing the three Governor-in-Council appointments.

⁸ Victorian Government, *Submission 109*, received 2 March 2026, p. 4.

⁹ Victorian Government, *Board appointment, remuneration and diversity guidance*, 5 February 2026, <<https://www.vic.gov.au/guidelines-appointment-remuneration>> accessed 1 May 2026.

¹⁰ Lill Healy, Deputy Secretary, Skills and TAFE, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 1.

With limited information available on how the Government appoints members, it can lead stakeholders to question the suitability of the appointments. Dr Tim Moore, a retired academic who worked at both Swinburne University of Technology and Monash University, discussed this in his submission. While noting that corporate representation on Council was typically 40 to 50% in Victorian universities, he commented that from anecdotal experience, appointments made by the Government primarily came from Council executives' recommendations and were simply 'rubber-stamped' by the Government. Critically however, Dr Moore wrote:

This may not in fact be an accurate picture. The problem however, is that with no transparency around these processes, hardly anything is known by the university community about how their councils are put together, and whether those appointed are in fact suitable for the important role they are empowered to play.¹¹

While stakeholders' perception of the appointment processes is a concern, and will be discussed further in Chapter 3, the outcomes of these appointments processes are also a concern to the Committee. In particular, the Committee sees the presence of individuals with limited experience in higher education or public administration a matter of concern. While the Committee does not dispute the capacity and expertise of those on Council, the governance crisis that the sector is facing cannot be divorced from Council composition.

As public institutions established under Victorian legislation, Victorian universities exist to serve the public good. University Councils play a critical role in ensuring those institutions are governed in the best interests of students, staff, communities and the state. While universities currently retain a role in identifying and recommending suitably qualified candidates for the Victorian Government appointed members, there is also a strong public interest in ensuring those appointments are transparent, merit-based, and inspire confidence in the governance of our universities.

Based on the information provided by George Lekakis, who conducted on behalf of the Government a major review of multicultural affairs in Victoria, the Government plays an important role for guaranteeing diversity when appointing members of boards, including universities:

the politics of appointments is critical in your consideration, but it takes ministers who are committed to multicultural affairs to push them forward. They are the ones that actually direct the public servants to make those determinations and those decisions. It is up to the politicians of the day in their portfolios to make it happen.¹²

The point made by George Lekakis can be expanded to other groups within Victorian society that should have representation in universities governing bodies, including Indigenous populations and members of regional communities. This topic will also be further elaborated in Chapter 3.

¹¹ Dr Tim Moore, *Submission 89*, received 1 March 2026, p. 3.

¹² George Lekakis AO, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

FINDING 2: There is limited public information about how the Government-appointed members are selected. The Department leads only one of the Government-appointed members (of which there are a minimum of four, per Council), while the universities lead the process for the remaining appointments.

RECOMMENDATION 1: That the Victorian Government, in consultation with Victorian public universities, publish clear guidance on the process for appointing Government-appointed members to university Councils, including skills matrices, composition of selection panels, and role of universities in the process, to improve transparency and public understanding of the appointment process.

The process of appointing members to university Councils by the Council itself is through a Council committee that handles appointments and remuneration issues, which all Victorian universities have. All nomination committees have terms of reference, which typically state the committee's responsibility to develop and review criteria for Council membership, and the process for membership. However, the process is rarely described in detail and, as with the Government-appointed members, the Committee heard that there was a general lack of understanding by stakeholders in how Councils appoint their members. This will also be discussed further in Chapter 3.

The Committee understands that Councils use skills matrices to appoint members. Skills matrices list expertise areas and other criteria to appoint members (such as international expertise, commercial expertise, higher education expertise), which are used to ensure the skills and capabilities of Council members are balanced.

Prior to this Inquiry, only one university—Deakin University—had published its skills matrix.¹³ Deakin University's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Iain Martin,¹⁴ discussed this during the hearings:

We have a publicly available skills matrix – I was very pleased to see the NTEU recognise that it is out there and publicly available – that we work with as the basis of all our appointments. We have currently got a council that has nine women, six men, a First Nations representative, two members from culturally and linguistically diverse communities and somebody who is young.¹⁵

¹³ Deakin University, *Compliance with Code of Governance Principles and Practice for Australia's Public Universities*, 2025, p. 8.

¹⁴ Professor Iain Martin was the Vice-Chancellor and President at Deakin University at the time of the public hearing, on 15 May 2026. He resigned from the role on 9 June 2026. See Gemma Carter, 'Deakin University Vice-Chancellor Iain Martin resigns, effective immediately', *Herald Sun*, 10 June 2026, <<https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/geelong/deakin-university-vicechancellor-ian-martin-resigns-effective-immediately/news-story/297ad065d63bfff58c49a442a6001bf6>> accessed 10 June 2026.

¹⁵ Professor Iain Martin, Vice-Chancellor and President, Deakin University, public hearing, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8.

The Committee was pleased to see that while this Inquiry was conducted, more universities have published their skills matrices used to appoint Council members:

- Federation University¹⁶
- La Trobe University¹⁷
- The University of Melbourne¹⁸
- Monash University¹⁹
- Swinburne University of Technology.²⁰

As of June 2026, RMIT University and Victoria University have not published their skills matrices. However, RMIT references the approval of a skills matrix in stating the role and responsibilities of the Nominations, Remuneration, People and Performance Committee.²¹ Victoria University also referenced its skills matrix in its submission to the Committee. It stated the matrix outlines 12 key areas: finance, human resources, tertiary education, cyber security, legal compliance and risk, industry and community, commercial, health, digital technologies, asset management and First Nations.²²

While publishing skills matrices is a positive first step in transparency and accountability, it remains unclear how Councils are faring against the skills matrix, and what areas of expertise Councils are lacking in. During the hearings, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) argued that while accessing the matrix is useful, it is also important to see the assessments of the Council against the matrix.²³ The Committee agrees with this sentiment. To assess the validity of appointments, it is necessary to understand whether appointees are responding to expertise gaps in Council. To ensure consistency across universities with respect to publishing skills matrices and assessments against such matrices, the Committee believes legislative change is required.

FINDING 3: All Victorian universities use skills matrices to appoint their Council members. While most Victorian universities have recently published their matrices, it remains unclear how Councils are faring against their skills matrices.

¹⁶ Federation University, *Federation University Australia Council Skills Matrix*, 2026.

¹⁷ La Trobe University, *2025 Annual Report*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 34.

¹⁸ The University of Melbourne, *The University of Melbourne Council Skills Matrix – December 2025*, 2025.

¹⁹ Monash University, *2025 Annual Report*, Melbourne, 2026, pp. 100–101.

²⁰ Swinburne University of Technology, *Skills Matrix*, 2026, <<https://www.swinburne.edu.au/about/our-structure/leadership-governance/council>> accessed 5 June 2026.

²¹ RMIT University, *Role and responsibilities of the Nominations, Remuneration, People and Performance Committee*, 2026, <<https://www.rmit.edu.au/about/governance-management/governance/council/nrppc>> accessed 20 May 2026.

²² Victoria University, *Submission 68*, received 27 February 2026, p. 7.

²³ Professor Joo-Cheong Tham, Assistant Secretary Victoria Division, National Tertiary Education Union, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

RECOMMENDATION 2: That the Victorian Government amend the enabling Acts for all Victorian universities to require them to publish their skills matrices, and their assessment of Council members against the skills matrix, in their annual reports.

The publication of skills matrices is not an issue unique to Victoria—it became one of the topics of interest in the ECUG report, proving that concerns over the transparency of the process and the appointment outcomes have not received the required level of attention and security over the past years.

While there is no doubt the federal initiatives have encouraged the publication of key documentation regarding appointment processes for Council members, the Committee has concerns on the quality of these matrices. The Committee questions how appointments made over the years could have re-shaped the priorities within Councils and shifted focus from teaching and learning, research output and impact to society to a more corporatised approach.

Despite recent actions by universities towards transparency, and the Government's explanation during the hearings of its appointments process, the Committee believes more should be done to guarantee transparency for and accountability of all appointments made within the university Council. Furthermore, it appears that universities have not been sufficiently scrutinised over the years. For this reason, the Committee believes Council appointment processes should be reviewed to ensure there is a transparent and fair process.

FINDING 4: The appointment process of Council members has not been sufficiently scrutinised over the years.

RECOMMENDATION 3: That the Victorian Government consider a mechanism to conduct a review on the appointment processes of university Councils' members.

RECOMMENDATION 4: That the Victorian Government require that universities conduct inductions and governance training for Council members where appropriate.

2.2 The Expert Council on University Governance Principles and legislative changes

During this Inquiry, the Committee heard that all Victorian universities support the findings in the ECUG Final Report and will implement all the changes required following the Principles highlighted in the report. Victorian Vice-Chancellors made their position clear to the Committee:

As outlined in our submissions, Victoria's universities fully support the Final Report of the Expert Council on University Governance (ECUG) and its Principles. We expect that the Principles will be written into Commonwealth regulation through the Higher Education Threshold Standards, and that universities will be required to report annually on compliance with the Principles on an 'if not, why not' basis to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). We would welcome a recommendation from the Committee that Victorian universities fully adopt the ECUG Principles.²⁴

While Victorian universities welcomed the findings of the ECUG and showed full support for changes to enhance governance of their institutions, they rejected the need for legislation changes in Victoria, arguing that TEQSA, the national regulator, already conducts work on reviewing university missions in the reaccreditation process.²⁵ In both submissions and during the public hearings, Vice-Chancellors stated the current legislation framework (both federal and state legislation) is appropriate to implement the changes required to meet the ECUG Principles. Vice-Chancellors stated their preference to use existing mechanisms for to enhance transparency and accountability, rather than establish new ones.

Professor Alec Cameron, Vice-Chancellor of RMIT University, explained:

We can look at the recommendations of the Expert Council on University Governance and the changes that are proposed there, and I would argue that all of those can be achieved within our existing legislation. Our existing legislation is prescriptive in areas, but it still gives us room for movement, particularly in terms of appointments of council members and constitutions and so forth. As I said, we do not perceive a change that requires legislative change. There is an ability for us to act within the constraints of our legislation and move in areas that have been identified by the expert council.²⁶

Professor Sharon Pickering, the Vice-Chancellor of Monash University, also stated, in response to a question about potential legislative changes in Victoria:

With the greatest of respect, we are regulated by TEQSA. That is our fundamental regulator. Putting the Expert Council recommendations to that, led by Melinda Cilento and Sharan Burrow, they have really agonised, and I think they have had the same

²⁴ Letter from all Vice-Chancellors, *Submission 114*, received 22 May 2026, p. 1.

²⁵ Professor Glyn Davis, Interim Vice-Chancellor, The University of Melbourne, public hearing, Melbourne 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 33; Professor Sharon Pickering, Vice-Chancellor and President, Monash University, public hearing, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 55.

²⁶ Professor Alec Cameron, Vice-Chancellor and President, RMIT University, public hearing, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

concerns as you have had – and rightly so. To my mind, I am not disputing that there are matters to contend with, and that is why we very much supported the principles and recommendations of ECUG. That is where the legislative instrument needs to sit.²⁷

Victorian universities' Vice-Chancellors reiterating their lack of support for any legislative changes arising from this Inquiry in a jointly signed letter sent to this Committee (see Appendix B):

We acknowledge the Committee's interest in ensuring that the voices of students and staff, in all their diversity, are well understood and considered within universities' governance structures including their Governing Bodies. We note that the current legislative settings already provide us with the flexibility to increase the number of elected staff and student members within our respective University Councils.²⁸

Despite universities stating that the current legislation enables them to change Council membership and increase the number of elected representatives, prior to December 2025, no universities had done so. As such, while the Committee acknowledges that the current legislative framework allows for the increasing of staff and student representation, the actions of Victorian universities thus far have not been consistent in implementing changes to increase the representation. As such, while the Committee appreciates the reasoning provided by university leaders in rejecting the need for legislative changes, it is simultaneously concerned about whether Victorian universities understand the premises of the work conducted at federal and state levels on the university sector.

It has been clearly documented that the university sector in Australia is facing a governance crisis and that, amongst various factors, the lack of mechanisms to guarantee transparency and accountability have contributed to the current perspective of universities in society. The Committee believed legislative changes are part of the process to strengthen the sector. Other accountability mechanisms will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 where the Committee will provide further recommendations.

FINDING 5: All Victorian Vice-Chancellors support the Principles in the Final Report of the Expert Council on University Governance.

FINDING 6: All Victorian Vice-Chancellors reject the need for Victorian legislative changes to increase representation of staff and students within universities' Councils.

²⁷ Professor Sharon Pickering, Vice-Chancellor and President, Monash University, public hearing, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 55.

²⁸ Letter from all Vice-Chancellors, *Submission 114*, received 22 May 2026, p. 1.

Other key stakeholders, however, support changes to legislation. The NTEU believes that there is scope for a review of the current Victorian legislation to enhance governance transparency through new mechanisms. In particular, the NTEU requested a legislative change to enable the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) to conduct audits on university governance processes:

Authorise the Victorian Auditor-General (VAGO) to assess the effectiveness of governance processes and internal assurance against the minimum implementation requirements, using the suites of powers available under the *Audit Act 1994 (Vic)*.²⁹

This suggestion was also made by Academics of Public Universities (APU), an organisation established to analyse the challenges facing Australian higher education, who recommended VAGO as a vehicle for additional, publicly available reporting: 'the mandate of the Victorian Auditor-General should be strengthened to include regular performance audits of university governance systems'.³⁰

The Committee believes governance reporting certainly needs improving to identify and mitigate risks. Once principles are incorporated into TEQSA's *Higher Education Threshold Standards*, universities should be publicly reporting and publishing the results of its compliance processes.

FINDING 7: Many stakeholders, including the National Tertiary Education Union, National Union of Students, and Council for Postgraduate Associations, are in favour of legislative changes to enhance transparency within university governing bodies.

RECOMMENDATION 5: That the Victorian Government support the adoption of the Expert Council on University Governance Principles and expect Victorian universities to publicly report against these principles under federal legislation.

RECOMMENDATION 6: That the Victorian Government have a coordinated approach with the Commonwealth's regulations of university governance; specifically, integration with the regulatory processes of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency.

Before analysing the perspective of these key stakeholders in the next chapters, it is crucial to understand why the university sector is facing a crisis. In the next section, the report discusses the role of universities in society to understand the primary factors that led to the divergent positions between universities' Vice-Chancellors and key stakeholders regarding the need for legislative changes and, ultimately, the role of universities in society.

Through the Inquiry, the Committee determined legislative changes are part of the process to strengthen the sector.

²⁹ National Tertiary Education Union Swinburne University of Technology Branch, *Submission 79*, received 1 March 2026, p. 48.

³⁰ Academics for Public Universities, *Submission 105*, received 4 March 2026, p. 23.

2.3 The purpose of universities

The ECUG report noted that trust for public universities and their governing bodies had eroded, and as part of rebuilding trust, governing bodies needed to ‘reflect the public purpose and responsibilities of the university’.³¹ Furthermore, the purpose of universities themselves ‘should be a powerful driver of decision-making and activity, and reflecting its contribution to the public good’.³² Principle 5–*Trustworthy*—in the report reflects on the role of universities and their purpose in the Australian society: ‘The university operates lawfully, ethically, responsibly, and consistent with its public purpose’.³³

The Senate inquiry final report included a very similar discussion. Many of their submissions— from academics, unions, and universities alike—had stated the primary purpose of a university was ‘the provision of education, research and community engagement as a public good’.³⁴ Submissions noted that their concern of the corporatisation of universities, and how this was ‘eroding this understanding of the public good as central to the mission of universities’.³⁵

According to the report, in becoming profit-focused, universities were effectively relinquishing their purpose as a public good in place of making money and ‘serving the capitalist market’.³⁶ Ultimately, corporatisation was resulting in tension between the conflicting goals of a university: to serve the public, and to make money.³⁷

Corporate governance models (also known as the managerial model) were argued as not necessarily being best suited to a university. The Senate report noted that corporate governance had resulted in executives in governing bodies focusing on corporate principles relating to financial goals—while other principles, such as accountability and transparency, were overlooked.³⁸ The report emphasised that universities should not be governed like corporations, and that the seeming disregard for the traditional purpose of universities was highly concerning.³⁹ One of the recommendations (Recommendation 2) of the Senate final report reinforced this discussion:

The committee recommends that the duties of council members should reflect the primacy of education for the public good, and assessments of the performance of university councils should reflect their role in ensuring the primacy of public research and education as the core functions of universities.⁴⁰

³¹ Melinda Cilento, Sharan Burrow, Bruce Cowley, *Final Report and Principles / Expert Council on University Governance*, Canberra, August 2025, p. 27.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 62.

³⁴ Parliament of Australia, Education and Employment Legislation Committee, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers: final report*, Canberra, December 2025, p. 12.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–15.

⁴⁰ Parliament of Australia, Education and Employment Legislation Committee, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers: final report*, Canberra, December 2025, p. xi.

Box 2.1 Models of university governance

There are two main models of university governance: collegial (sometimes called collaborative) governance and managerial governance.

Collegial governance is a system whereby substantial power is held by academics who are democratically elected to be in governance bodies. In Australian universities, this governance model was in place throughout most of the 20th century, until Commonwealth policy reforms in the 1980s resulted in significant shifts for higher education providers. These shifts included:

- proportionally reduced government funding, and subsequent increased reliance on tuition fees for funding (especially international fees)
- the role and purpose of universities moving towards facilitating economic growth and filling workforce shortages (as opposed to providing a public good through research and education)
- smaller governance bodies, and a removal of academic representation from those governance bodies.

These shifts led to a more corporate model of governance: managerial governance. Managerial governance is a system whereby decisions are made in a top-down manner by a smaller group of individuals—a managerial class. The managerial class is made up of senior leaders who often do not have experience in academia but come from private sector backgrounds. Many submissions to this Inquiry commented on the managerial class and its impacts on university governance, and some recommended a return to collegial governance. These discussions will be referenced throughout the report.

Sources: Professor John Quiggin, 'Reforming university governance in Australia: Treating education and research as a public good to fix a broken sector', *The Australia Institute*, April 2025, pp. 4–7, 14; Professor John Quiggin, University of Queensland, *Submission 6*, pp. 5–6; Professor Rob Watts, RMIT, *Submission 64*, pp. 1, 2; Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 67*, pp. 3–4; National Tertiary Education Union, Victorian Branch, *Submission 52*, pp. 39–41.

The findings of the Senate inquiry and the ECUG report have informed the Committee for this Inquiry with the aim to better understand the perception on public universities in Victoria and identify areas of improvement.

2.3.1 Perception of public universities in Victoria

Several submissions to this Inquiry discussed the role of universities in Victoria and identifying critical issues in universities' shortcomings to fulfill their role. In this section, two key perspectives are provided. The first perspective includes how the eight public universities see their role in Victoria. The second is the perspective of stakeholders (organisations and individuals), who raised significant concerns about the role of Victorian universities.

Victorian universities see their role as serving the public interest

All eight public universities in Victoria contributed with a submission to this Inquiry. Universities referenced their purpose or role as a public institution, and some linked it specifically to actions they had done. The list below offers the relevant perspectives highlighted by each university when discussing their roles in society:

- **Deakin University** noted 'as major public institutions, Victoria's universities have an obligation of service ... it is only through this ... that universities are granted the social contract'.⁴¹
- **Federation University** noted governance was 'essential to ensuring each university serves the public interest'.⁴²
- **La Trobe University** noted it looked forward to working with the Victoria Government 'to better deliver to their core functions of teaching and research for the benefit of the Victorian population'.⁴³
- **Monash University** affirmed its support of the ECUG Principles, 'to promote the public good through education, research and innovation, and community engagement'.⁴⁴
- **RMIT University** stated it is 'guided by a social contract ... encompassing a responsibility to make a positive social contribution'.⁴⁵
- **Swinburne University of Technology** stated it was committed to 'ensuring governance arrangements remain consistent with the University's public purpose'.⁴⁶
- **The University of Melbourne** stated 'as a public university, we see it as our civic duty to share our knowledge, resources and activities with the wider community'.⁴⁷
- **Victoria University** stated its governance actions were 'intended to support a stronger social license, consistent with the expectations of a public institution'.⁴⁸

Several of the universities referenced a 'social contract', showing awareness of their role and the need to maintain a social licence. Deputy Secretary Lill Healy reminded the Committee that the Vice-Chancellors' forum meets regularly with Ministers and the Department to discuss, among other things, how universities can strengthen their social license within the state.⁴⁹ It should be noted that the role of these meetings were

⁴¹ Deakin University, *Submission 4*, received 19 January 2026, p. 2.

⁴² Federation University, *Submission 57*, received 27 February 2026, p. 3.

⁴³ La Trobe University, *Submission 108*, received 2 March 2026, p. 1.

⁴⁴ Monash University, *Submission 107*, received 3 March 2026, p. 1.

⁴⁵ RMIT University, *Submission 49*, received 25 February 2026, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Swinburne University of Technology, *Submission 84*, received 1 March 2026, p. 2.

⁴⁷ The University of Melbourne, *Submission 62*, received 27 February 2026, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Victoria University, *Submission 68*, received 27 February 2026, p. 9.

⁴⁹ Lill Healy, Deputy Secretary, Skills and TAFE, Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

challenged during the hearings. Monash University stated the Minister 'occasionally' attended the Victorian Vice-Chancellor meetings.⁵⁰

However, despite the concerns raised in the federal bodies' reports, none of the Victoria university submissions discussed issues on why their social license is at risk, i.e. the supposed corporatisation and its tension with the primary purpose of universities. The Committee is concerned on the lack of recognition by universities of the crisis universities are facing in relation to social license during this Inquiry.

The NTEU, in contrast with the universities' position, highlighted the need to reflect on this issue and perspectives of other key stakeholders within the sector:

a survey that the University Chancellors Council ran of all the chancellors who were asked the question: do you feel there is a crisis of university governance? An astounding 87 per cent said yes.⁵¹

Professor John Pollaers confirmed that Chancellors identified social licence as one of the major areas of concern among Chancellors in Australia.⁵² When questioned by the Committee during the public hearing, Professor Alec Cameron, Vice-Chancellor and President of RMIT University, admitted there is a problem of social licence at national level but rejected the idea this issue is linked to Victorian universities in particular:

Well, let me answer. I do not really want to speak about other universities. Clearly there have been some governance challenges at some universities, which have pulled down the reputation of the sector. I do not think that applies to the majority of universities or certainly all universities, and I certainly do not believe it applies to RMIT. Is there a social licence issue at the moment? Yes, but I would say that is due to the actions of a small number of universities which have been on the front pages of the newspapers in recent times. At the same time, I look around the sector in Victoria and I would say we would be very satisfied with the level of governance that is being provided to Victorian universities that are not on the front pages.⁵³

Professor Alec Cameron admitted that the academic sector is facing a crisis, but that it is a crisis of perception 'based on the actions of a small number of universities rather than actually pointing and stating that we have a problem across the sector'.⁵⁴

Vice-Chancellors also reject the arguments made by key stakeholders throughout this Inquiry that economic and commercial outcomes have been prioritised over social, cultural and educational need. According to the Deakin University Vice-Chancellor, if financial gain was a priority, some regional campuses would not exist:

⁵⁰ Monash University, Inquiry into enhancing Victorian university governance, response to questions on notice received 29 May 2026, p. 2.

⁵¹ Professor Joo-Cheong Tham, Assistant Secretary Victoria Division, National Tertiary Education Union, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 2.

⁵² Professor John Pollaers, Convenor, University Chancellors Council, closed hearing, 5 June 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

⁵³ Professor Alec Cameron, Vice-Chancellor and President, RMIT University, public hearing, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 37.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

I am going to be blunt here: if we were driven by money and a return on investment, we would not operate the Warrnambool campus. It loses the university \$10 million a year. I am not saying we are not worried about that; of course we are worried about it, but we do not believe we can fulfil Deakin's mission without investing resources from other parts of the university's activities in what happens in south-west Victoria, because we think that is part of the complex suite of things that we do.⁵⁵

The University of Melbourne also rejected the argument suggesting that academic leadership of universities has been handed over to executives or to corporations:

Speaking as a lifelong academic who is running a university, I do not see that. I have heard it argued lots of times. I would remind you the University of Melbourne has gone broke several times, requiring government assistance, so there is some downside in not having people who have financial expertise heavily involved in accounting. Some of our governance structures reflect the fact that we have run into crises in the past where we have not had the expertise in our governance and we have run into severe problems. So the current structure you see is, in a sense, a response to the historical record.⁵⁶

FINDING 8: Broadly, Vice-Chancellors believe that universities are fulfilling their mission in society, to serve the public interest through research and education. They question the claim that the university sector is facing a crisis and that economic and commercial benefits are driving the decisions made by the governing bodies.

Despite the explanations provided by the Victorian universities to explain their fulfilling of their role in society, the Committee heard significant amount of evidence that contradicts the positions of Victorian universities.

Other stakeholders perspectives

Most stakeholders involved in the university space that submitted to this Inquiry raised concerns about the role of universities in Victoria. The NTEU, which represents higher education and university employees in Australia, discussed the corporatisation of universities, which it stated referred to processes where decisions were made prioritising financial or operational objectives.⁵⁷ According to the NTEU, decisions often prioritise short-term gains over long-term sustainability, and stand in contrast to universities acting in accordance with their purpose. Corporatisation and managerialism go hand in hand, as senior managers make decisions for the university in a closed information loop with little accountability to the university community.⁵⁸ The NTEU emphasised that university governance needed to be anchored in the 'core public mission of Australian universities'.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Professor Iain Martin, Vice Chancellor and President, Deakin University, public hearing, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 10.

⁵⁶ Professor Glyn Davis, Interim Vice-Chancellor, The University of Melbourne, public hearing, Melbourne 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30.

⁵⁷ National Tertiary Education Union, Victorian Branch, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, p. 24.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

The Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC), a representative body of trade union organisations, also registered its concern that universities were moving away from their purpose as a public good, as they were being governed by ‘a new managerial class ... which sees its role as maximising institution’s market share and financial performance’.⁶⁰ In the current governance system, the VTHC stated ‘higher education is a commodity: campus is capital, academics are a resource, and students are consumers’.⁶¹

VTHC also stated the impacts of this shift, that:

Victorian workers and the public at large will increasingly hold these institutions in the same regard as they hold most large corporations and business conglomerates: not as paragons of inspiration but as cynical entities undercutting themselves and each other for the sake of capital accumulation.⁶²

Tensions between the corporate priorities of university management and the ‘ethical heart that should underpin Australian public tertiary education’ are discussed in many submissions.⁶³ For instance, Stop Woodside Monash, a group of students, staff and alumni from Monash University who campaigned for Monash University to end its partnership with Woodside Energy (which Monash University agreed to, in 2025),⁶⁴ argued that universities were not transparent in their dealings with partnerships that may not be popular with the university community, and this lack of openness ‘allow[ed] for a prioritisation of corporate interests at a public institution which is of great concern’.⁶⁵

Academics for Public Universities argued in its submission that governing bodies ‘prioritise financial performance and reputational management over ... the public purposes of higher education’.⁶⁶ Consistent with NTEU evidence, APU described a ‘closed governance circuit’ in which power is concentrated within corporate-minded governance bodies with little public accountability. APU and the NTEU emphasised that these priorities, particularly among senior leadership, are not always consistent with the public purposes of higher education.⁶⁷

One academic wrote that despite enjoying their job, there were aspects of university governance ‘that greatly concern [them]’—‘our universities no longer behave like public institutions ... their spending priorities reflect their position as competitions in a market rather than as institutions serving a public purpose’.⁶⁸ After describing

⁶⁰ Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 67*, received 27 February 2026, pp. 2–3.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., p. 8.

⁶³ Stop Woodside Monash, *Submission 91*, received 1 March 2026, p. 9.

⁶⁴ The Guardian, *Woodside Energy’s partnership with Monash University to end after protests by staff and students*, 13 November 2025, <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/nov/13/woodside-energys-partnership-with-monash-university-to-end-after-protests-by-staff-and-students>> accessed 9 June 2026.

⁶⁵ Stop Woodside Monash, *Submission 91*, received 1 March 2026, p. 11.

⁶⁶ Academics for Public Universities, *Submission 105*, received 4 March 2026, p. 2.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Name withheld, *Submission 45*, received 24 February 2026, p. 1.

perceived governance issues, the submission concluded by the author noting that it was 'increasingly hard to respect our universities as institutions given the ways in which they often abrogate their public duties'.⁶⁹

Professor Rob Watts of RMIT University, who has over 50 years of experience working in Victorian universities and was on RMIT University's Academic Board in the early 2020s, stated Australian universities 'are hybrid entities, at once universities, bureaucracies and corporations even though they are increasingly run by senior managers as if they are essentially corporations'.⁷⁰ Professor Watts argued that senior managers are primarily responsible for revenue raising, which is justified by the larger universities being multi-billion dollar enterprises involving thousands of people.⁷¹ This is a departure from the traditional purpose of universities, and the consequences are clear—'a loss of regard for traditional intellectual or professional capabilities on the part of both teaching staff and students'.⁷²

Professor Greg Bamber, Associate Professor Brian Cooper and Dr Sean O'Brady wrote a joint submission arguing that 'at present, universities are 'corporatised, financialised, managerialised, marketised and commercially-oriented ... seek[ing] to maximise their revenues rather than serve as disinterested, public-spirited institutions'.⁷³ They noted that improving university governance would 'be beneficial for universities' primary domains: education, research and service'.⁷⁴ It would also help universities 'improve their social license with the public',⁷⁵ which implies that reputations have suffered as the purpose of universities has shifted to creating revenue.

Ultimately, while universities were clear in their submissions about their intent to serve the public interest and to act as a public good, they did not address the concerns raised by their key stakeholders: that universities are increasingly becoming corporatised and focusing on revenue raising above their traditional goals of research and teaching. This risks the perception of universities as public institutions, and the social license that universities are granted by the community.

FINDING 9: Key stakeholders including staff, students, and unions believe the university sector is facing a major crisis due to a shift in priorities within governing bodies which prioritises economic and commercial interests over education, research and service to the community.

⁶⁹ Name withheld, *Submission 45*, received 24 February 2026, p. 3.

⁷⁰ Professor Rob Watts, *Submission 64*, received 27 February 2026, p. 2.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., p. 2.

⁷³ Professor Greg Bamber, Associate Professor Brian Cooper and Dr Sean O'Brady, *Submission 80*, received 1 March 2026, p. 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

2.4 Conclusion

Victorian public universities expressed strong support for the Expert Council on University Governance Principles, indicating that many elements of those Principles were already embedded in their processes or will be integrated in their governance processes through changes in the federal legislation. For this reason, Victorian universities do not support changes in the Victorian enabling legislation, cautioning the Committee against duplicating national frameworks or introducing additional state-based governance requirements that could result in regulatory overlap or inconsistency.

While universities described their governance arrangements as robust and subject to ongoing improvement, evidence provided to the Inquiry by staff, students and other stakeholders raised concerns regarding accountability, transparency and the extent of stakeholder voice in decision-making processes. In particular, the Committee noted that the processes for the appointment of Council members have not been subject to sufficient public scrutiny. This lack of visibility may have contributed to declining trust in university governing bodies and has prompted broader questions about whether sufficient weight is being given to the public purpose of universities alongside economic and performance objectives.

Chapter 3

Concerns and impacts of university governance on staff

University governance influences many aspects of working conditions within universities. The Committee heard from university staff, particularly academic employees, about how governance arrangements had shaped their workplace experiences and how perceived governance shortcomings had diminished their trust and confidence in the motivations and decision-making of university leadership.

This Chapter will discuss the stated concerns and impacts of the current university governance system on university staff. The main issues commonly cited by staff echo the commentary throughout the Expert Council on University Governance (ECUG) report, as well as the final report from the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee.¹ There are no major departures from said commentary with regards to the Victorian landscape—rather, the evidence provided throughout this Chapter affirms that the issues in the ECUG and Senate reports are occurring in a widespread fashion throughout Victorian universities.

Before discussing the findings, it should be noted that there are two groupings of staff that work at universities: professional staff and academics. Professional staff are non-academic employees who work in areas such as administration, student services, IT, and human resources. Academic staff teach, conduct research, and occupy scholarly-based roles. Some of them occupy managerial roles within faculties or other bodies within universities. Due to the evidence received by the Committee, this report primarily addresses the concerns and impacts of university governance on academic staff.

In line with the Terms of reference and the topics discussed in the submissions received from staff, this Chapter will cover the following concerns and related impacts:

- transparency
- accountability
- representation on Council.

Within each topic, this Chapter discusses what staff are experiencing, followed by what they recommended to address their concerns. The Committee notes how universities stated they are addressing the concerns and, taking all evidence into account, provides recommendations to the Victorian Government.

¹ Melinda Cilento, Sharan Burrow, Bruce Cowley, *Final Report and Principles / Expert Council on University Governance*, Canberra, August 2025; Parliament of Australia, Education and Employment Legislation Committee, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers: final report*, Canberra, December 2025.

3.1 Profile of staff at universities

Before discussing the above-mentioned issues, this section provides a brief overview on the staff classification and numbers at Victorian universities.

The number of staff at Victorian universities are reported in their annual reports, typically tabled in Parliament every May, regarding the previous calendar year. Universities categorise staff by the following demographics: gender, age, executives, ongoing, fixed-term, casual, full-time, part-time, and total number (headcount). They do not distinguish between professional and academic staff. For 2025, Victorian universities had the following staff numbers:

Table 3.1 Victorian university staff numbers for 2025, headcounts

University	Ongoing	Fixed-term	Casual	Total employees
Deakin University	3,871	1,775	863	6,509
Federation University	1,292	235	332	1,859
La Trobe University	2,501	854	610	3,965
Monash University	5,641	4,101	1,062	10,804
RMIT University	5,128	2,008	6,174	13,310
Swinburne University of Technology	2,120	535	173	2,828
The University of Melbourne	9,286	2,655	1,889	13,830
Victoria University	1,535	482	546	2,563

Source: Deakin University, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 72; Federation University, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 53; La Trobe University, *2025 Annual Report*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 48; Monash University, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 75; RMIT University, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 41; Swinburne University, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 62; The University of Melbourne, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 55; Victoria University, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 71.

Universities in Victoria are major employers in the state with over 55,000 employees. The role of staff is crucial for universities to succeed in their mission. In particular, academic staff play a key role in achieving teaching, learning and research outcomes which contribute to international ranking placement of universities. Despite their key role, the Committee heard university staff have a limited role within governing bodies.

3.2 Lack of transparency in university Councils

The Committee heard from university staff who were concerned with transparency in Victorian university Councils. Staff argued that lack of transparency occurred in varying ways, but most evidence centred on appointments to Council, and strategic and operational decisions.

3.2.1 Appointments to Council

As discussed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.1.1), university Council members are appointed in one of three ways:

1. by the Victorian Government
2. by the Council
3. by staff or students, in an election.

Submissions to this Inquiry spoke to the lack of transparency by both the Victorian Government and by Council in the appointment process. Associate Professor Shumi Akhtar wrote that:

The appointment process—frequently described by management as ‘highly competitive’—is marred by opaque selection mechanisms. Despite the rhetoric of transparency, the reality is a closed-loop system of cronyism and professional reciprocity. The failure to disclose voting data or selection criteria confirms that these processes are often a mere façade, designed to ratify pre-selected candidates who align with the managerial status quo rather than institutional excellence.²

Academics for Public Universities (APU) argued similarly, noting that the legislative absence of consultation requirements for Council appointments resulted in ‘appointment processes remain[ing] largely disconnected from university communities’.³

Another submission stated ‘appointments can occur without competitive process of clear explanation’, explaining that when this occurs, ‘staff stop trusting that performance and capability matter ... it damages council and leadership credibility when the institution talks about transparency and accountability’.⁴

Other submissions raised concerns over Government-appointed members of Councils, questioning the lack of clarity around processes used by the Government in appointing members, the outcomes of these processes and the limited importance given to academic expertise for appointments made both by the Government and each Council.⁵ The lack of transparency for Government appointments ‘may occur without mandatory independent assessment, published selection criteria, or a public explanation of how appointees meet governance requirements’.⁶

The same point was registered about Council members being appointed by existing Council members. Dr Marija Taflaga, Dr Francis Markham and Distinguished Professor Keith Dowding from the Australian National University wrote in their submission that ‘when appointment processes are largely controlled by existing council members, with

² Associate Professor Shumi Akhtar, *Submission 102*, received 3 March 2026, p. 3.

³ Academics for Public Universities, *Submission 105*, received 4 March 2026, p. 39.

⁴ Name withheld, *Submission 12*, received 5 February 2026, p. 2.

⁵ Name withheld, *Submission 47*, received 24 February 2026, p. 1.

⁶ Samuel Eaton, *Submission 1*, received 17 December 2025, p. 6.

limited input from those embedded in the academic mission, the criteria for selection may privilege corporate experience or network familiarity over substantive knowledge of teaching and research'.⁷

In its submission, the Monash University Branch of the NTEU referenced an incident where a Council member departed the Council and was replaced, with no announcement or explanation around the exit and subsequent entrance of a Council member.⁸ They described this incident as demonstrating a lack of transparency, going against the interests of Monash University's staff, students, and public mission.

The evidence collected highlights a culture of distrust towards the Council, which undermines confidence that Council members are best placed to govern the university. Given that the background of most appointees is not an academic one, this results in the questioning of the selection process and the priorities of Council and Government. On this matter, the Committee made recommendations in Chapter 2.

3.2.2 Strategic and operational decisions

In their submissions, staff discussed the lack of transparency around the content of university Council meetings, with staff perceiving secrecy around how strategic or operational decisions were made by the Council.⁹ The NTEU addressed this issue in the public hearings, stating that transparency, in terms of the Council's decision-making, was a major concern, and that 'there should be more information with material decisions ... some context and commentary about why major decisions are made'.¹⁰ These decisions were primarily related to restructures in the workforce and education offerings, or larger institutional changes.

Restructures

Restructures have been a regular topic in the higher education sector in recent years in Victoria. Several universities have undergone redundancy processes. The latest was announced in June 2026, when Deakin University communicated a restructure process impacting hundreds of jobs.¹¹ However, following the resignation of the Vice-Chancellor, the university scraped the redundancy plan.¹² In late 2024, the NTEU noted in a media release that the Swinburne University of Technology, La Trobe University, and Federation University had announced redundancies, and that Monash

⁷ Dr Marija Tafлага, Dr Francis Markham and Distinguished Professor Keith Dowding, *Submission 86*, received 1 March 2026, p. 4.

⁸ National Tertiary Education Union Monash University Branch, *Submission 77*, received 1 March 2026, pp. 9–10.

⁹ Young Workers Centre, *Submission 66*, received 27 February 2026, p. 3; Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 67*, received 27 February 2026, p. 6; Associate Professor Shumi Akhtar, *Submission 102*, received 3 March 2026, p. 1.

¹⁰ Professor Joo-Cheong Tham, Assistant Secretary Victoria Division, National Tertiary Education Union, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

¹¹ Lucy Crock, 'Deakin University axes jobs in 'hunger games' restructure', *Geelong Advertiser*, 5 June 2026, <<https://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/education/regions/victoria/deakin-university-axes-jobs-in-hunger-games-restructure/news-story/6ceae2240a4bd008deb378fc5263327b>> accessed 10 June 2026.

¹² National Tertiary Education Union, *Union saves Deakin jobs after management pulls damaging plan*, 18 June 2026, <https://www.nteu.au/News_Articles/Media_Releases/union_saves_deakin_jobs.aspx> accessed 23 June 2026.

University and The University of Melbourne had signalled cuts to casual staff.¹³ The year prior, in 2023, Victoria University had called for voluntary redundancies for staff numbers equalling to 16% of its workforce.¹⁴ While redundancies in of themselves are not a topic for the Committee to comment on, submissions referred to the lack of transparency around the decision made to restructure.

Several staff members referenced how they had been subject to these redundancies with no consultation by the Council and had no understanding about how these decisions were made by university leadership.¹⁵ The limited communication provided to staff affected by restructures made them question the lack of transparency throughout the process.¹⁶

Academics also discussed the lack of transparency around academia-related restructures—such as where courses were cut, departments combined, research allocations shifted—and the limited explanations provided when these decisions were made. One submitter simply put that ‘decisions about ... subject coordination, and research allocations are made without staff consultation or explanation’.¹⁷ Another stated the main problem with university governance being that ‘big decisions taken by university management are often impenetrable or taken without reference to the people who usually know about the matter at hand, usually academics’.¹⁸ They cited the decision of The University of Melbourne to incorporate veterinary science into the science faculty as one such example, as well as the closing of the Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute. They noted the impact of restructures was ‘debilitating for people’.¹⁹ Another academic wrote of an instance where a teaching unit was abolished that directly impacted their work, but they were not made aware of the decision until its formal announcement.²⁰ A professor from RMIT University wrote that ‘staff at RMIT have never been consulted about changes to curriculum, staffing levels, program design, or new online systems for over a decade and a half in my experience’.²¹

¹³ National Tertiary Education Union, *14,000 higher education jobs at risk: what to know, what's next and what you can do*, media release, 12 November 2024, <https://www.nteu.au/News_Articles/Local_News/VIC/international_caps_uni_jobs_at_risk.aspx> accessed 23 June 2026.

¹⁴ Nicole Precel, ‘Victoria University announces 300 job losses in \$40m saving move’, *The Age*, 28 June 2023, <<https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/victoria-university-announces-300-job-losses-in-40m-saving-move-20230628-p5dk5l.html>> accessed 3 May 2026.

¹⁵ Dr James Walker, *Submission 19*, received 13 February 2026; Dr Fiona Kelly, *Submission 27*, received 19 February 2026; Name withheld, *Submission 37*, received 23 February 2026.

¹⁶ Dr James Walker, *Submission 19*, received 13 February 2026, pp. 1–2; Dr Fiona Kelly, *Submission 27*, received 19 February 2026, pp. 1–2; Kirsty Waring, *Submission 65*, received 27 February 2026, p. 1.

¹⁷ Name withheld, *Submission 9*, received 4 February 2026, p. 2.

¹⁸ Name withheld, *Submission 15*, received 9 February 2026, p. 1.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Name withheld, *Submission 98*, received 2 March 2026, p. 4.

²¹ Professor Rob Watts, *Submission 64*, received 27 February 2026, p. 7.

Several of the NTEU Victorian university branches wrote about both these types of restructures (workforce and departmental or subject), and the impacts those had.²² Federation University's NTEU Branch listed various redundancies that had taken place between 2020 and 2025—five—categorising them as 'erratic, constant organisational change'.²³ It also noted that in 2022, Federation University announced a decision to cut the entire Bachelor of Arts program, which had been made without a formal consultation process.²⁴ While the decision was reversed, it does not eliminate the fact that such a large decision was made without consulting staff.

Swinburne University of Technology's NTEU Branch also referenced its members' 'persistent concerns about the adequacy of genuine consultation in change management process', specifically regarding redundancies and changes to courses.²⁵ La Trobe University's NTEU branch opened its submission by stating that La Trobe University was 'in a constant state of crisis, characterised by rolling restructures with little transparency'.²⁶ It noted that there had been four major restructures since 2016, and each one had been 'characterised by a lack of meaningful staff consultation, with staff and students consistently reporting that feedback provided during these processes is not genuinely taken into account'.²⁷

Institutional changes

Decisions on institutional changes were criticised as lacking transparency. Two instances, in particular, were referenced in evidence provided to the Committee: the closing of the Monash Sustainable Development Institute, and the announcement of a new Monash University campus in Malaysia.²⁸

The Monash Sustainable Development Institute (MSDI) was disestablished in 2025 after 18 years of operation and was referenced by multiple submitters as an example of poor governance, where a lack of transparency was shown regarding this major strategic decision.²⁹ Two submissions focused on this case study, and both were aligned in their critiques.³⁰ Former MSDI staff described the process of disestablishment, questioning the legitimacy of the process as they believed it was not following the Monash Institute Procedures, which would have enabled a more transparent and staff-involved process.³¹ The timeline is described in detail in Box 3.1 below:

22 National Tertiary Education Union Federation University, *Submission 83*, received 1 March 2026; National Tertiary Education Union Swinburne University of Technology Branch, *Submission 79*, received 1 March 2026; National Tertiary Education Union La Trobe University Branch, *Submission 81*, received 1 March 2026.

23 National Tertiary Education Union Federation University, *Submission 83*, received 1 March 2026, p. 2.

24 Ibid.

25 National Tertiary Education Union Swinburne University of Technology Branch, *Submission 79*, received 1 March 2026, p. 3.

26 National Tertiary Education Union La Trobe University Branch, *Submission 81*, received 1 March 2026, p. 2.

27 Ibid., p. 4.

28 Name withheld, *Submission 14*, received 5 February 2026; Name withheld, *Submission 61*, received 27 February 2026; Name withheld, *Submission 15*, received 9 February 2026; National Tertiary Education Union Monash University Branch, *Submission 77*, received 1 March 2026; Name withheld, *Submission 50*, received 25 February 2026.

29 Name withheld, *Submission 14*, received 5 February 2026; Name withheld, *Submission 61*, received 27 February 2026; Name withheld, *Submission 15*, received 9 February 2026.

30 Name withheld, *Submission 61*, received 27 February 2026; Name withheld, *Submission 14*, received 5 February 2026.

31 Name withheld, *Submission 61*, received 27 February 2026, pp. 3–5.

Box 3.1 Timeline of disestablishment of the Monash Sustainable Development Institute (MSDI)

1. June 2025: MSDI staff were advised that the Institute would be moved to a different faculty, and would have a change in its reporting line.
2. June to September: options with faculties were discussed, and MSDI staff were informed an option was almost secured.
3. 18 September: MSDI staff were informed the Institute would be disestablished, broken up into different faculties and staff moved around. A plan was presented to this effect.
4. September to October: a staff consultation period opened up for four weeks total. During this period, MSDI staff wrote a unified statement of opposition. 120 responses were recorded from the staff consultation.
5. 17 October: a representative from the NTEU presented university leadership with a collective response to their plan for disestablishment, and reiterated their concerns about the lack of transparency in the process.
6. 12 November: Monash leadership confirmed its decision to implement its plan, with minimal changes in response to the opposition.
7. 1 January 2026: the plan was implemented, and all MSDI staff were relocated to other faculties.

Source: Name withheld, *Submission 61*, received 27 February 2026.

According to the submission, the disestablishment plan was announced without providing a clear rationale for why and how the decision had been made. The consultation process occurred after a plan was already in place, and the implementation of the plan did not include substantive changes to the original plan. The submission concluded that this process lacked transparency, and the impacts included an 'extreme loss of trust among staff in senior leadership's willingness to manage the University in a way that respects transparency', alongside lost time, performance, and mental health and wellbeing issues.³²

The other submission did not describe the process in detail, but concluded similarly that it 'lacked transparency, an evidence base, and meaningful consultation. Staff were given no insight into the operational needs of receiving faculties or their likelihood of ongoing employment'.³³ It also stated the cost to staff was significant and included 'sustained uncertainty ... loss of morale'.³⁴

The second instance of institutional change referenced in the submissions was the announcement of a new Monash University campus in Malaysia, which occurred in

³² Name withheld, *Submission 61*, received 27 February 2026, p. 6.

³³ Name withheld, *Submission 14*, received 5 February 2026, p. 1.

³⁴ Ibid.

September 2025. Monash University approved a \$1 billion investment for a new campus in Kuala Lumpur, but submissions noted the lack of transparency in this decision. One submitter noted the substantive risk analysis for this investment remained non-public, ‘violating the principle that risks to a university’s ‘social license’ must be understood and managed’.³⁵

The NTEU’s Monash University Branch described this instance emphasising the decision as significant and the lack of consultations with staff or students prior to its announcement. They argued that the level of investment, combined with the implications for the university’s direction through this decision (that it is expanded its teaching operations outside of Melbourne), meant that there should have been an opportunity for stakeholders to provide input prior to the decision being made. They concluded that ‘this is not a transparent way to run a major public university’ and emphasised that Monash University students and staff should have the right to be involved in such an important strategic and operational decision.³⁶

Financial standing of universities

While these strategic and operational decisions were typically made for purported financial reasons (i.e. savings), staff also reported a lack of transparency and thus understanding around the overall financial situation of the university itself, resulting in uncertainty and loss of trust. Academics felt that there was not enough information provided around the finances of the university, which bled into their concerns when such decisions occurred with little rationale.³⁷ While universities provide statutory-required financial reporting in their annual reports as per the *Financial Management Act (1994)*, it is high-level and thus not readily accessible to most staff members.

One submitter aptly stated:

There is not enough transparency in the system. Staff, let alone the public, do not have the ability to see how the university spends its money (at least, not at a meaning level of detail). Annual reporting includes opaque categories that can’t be meaningfully disaggregated. Everything is drenched in spin. As a result it’s impossible to understand how much the university is spending on this or that new building, overseas campus, or strategic venture. This means that university staff and students - who have the best interests of the organisation at heart - can’t be involved in conversations with management about the overall direction of the university and its resources.³⁸

The NTEU’s Victoria University Branch wrote about financial transparency, and that their staff felt they did not sufficiently understand the university’s financial situation. The submission stated a ‘significant governance concern relates to the consistency and trustworthiness of management’s financial reporting to staff’, and that in previous

³⁵ Name withheld, *Submission 50*, received 25 February 2026, p. 1.

³⁶ National Tertiary Education Union Monash University Branch, *Submission 77*, received 1 March 2026, p. 7.

³⁷ Name withheld, *Submission 45*, received 24 February 2026, p. 3; Name withheld, *Submission 39*, received 23 February 2026, p. 2.

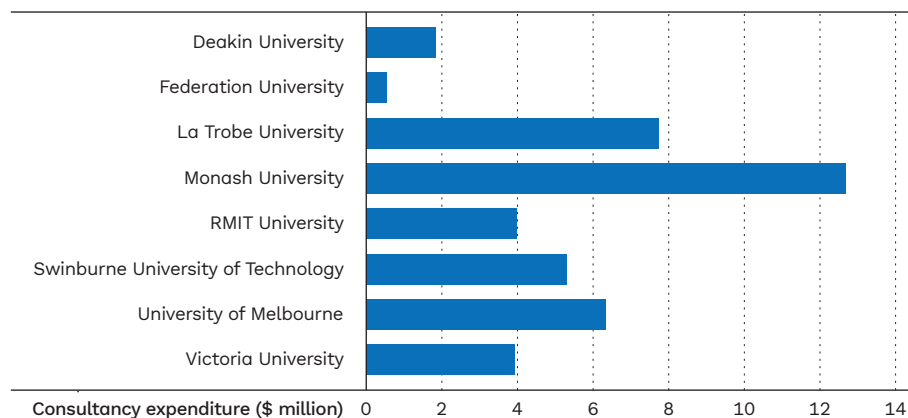
³⁸ Name withheld, *Submission 45*, received 24 February 2026, p. 2.

town hall meetings, ‘financial difficulty was emphasised to staff and used as context for bargaining and workforce decisions, while the actual financial trajectory of the institution was substantially more positive than staff were led to understand’.³⁹

As some university staff feel there is not enough transparency around the general financial situation of the university and rationales for cost-cutting measures, this occurs alongside major publicised expenditures—such as senior leadership salaries, and consultancies. While Victorian universities do not always explicitly report their senior leadership salaries by role, annual report detail remuneration bands for Council members. However, there is little information regarding the how remuneration is linked to, or reflects upon, performance. This will be touched upon as it relates to accountability, in Section 3.3.3.

The consultancy expenditure of universities has also been a topic of public interest recently.⁴⁰ Victorian universities are required to report consultancy contracts over \$10,000 as per the *Financial Management Act 1994*, and they do so in their annual reports. For 2025, the universities had the following consultancy expenditures:

Figure 3.1 2025 Consultancy expenditures



Note: numbers include *only* the expenditures, not any amounts committed in 2025.

Source: Deakin University, *Payments to Consultants in 2025, 2026*, <https://www.deakin.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0028/260587/2025-payments-to-consultants.pdf> accessed 27 May 2026; Federation University, *Annual Report 2025*, Mt Helen, 2026, p. 63; La Trobe University, *La Trobe University Consultants 2025, 2026*, <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1835379/LTU-Consultancy-List-2025.pdf> accessed 27 May 2026; Monash University, *Consultancy Disclosure 2025, 2026*, <https://www.monash.edu/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/4276123/Consultancy-Disclosure-2025-Supplementary-Disclosure-linked.pdf> accessed 27 May 2026; Monash University, *Supplementary Disclosure for Consultants over \$10k, 2026*, <[https://www.monash.edu/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/4275325/Supplementary-Disclosure-for-Consultants-over-\\$10K-2025.pdf](https://www.monash.edu/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/4275325/Supplementary-Disclosure-for-Consultants-over-$10K-2025.pdf)> accessed 27 May 2026; RMIT University, *Consultancies, 2026*, <<https://www.rmit.edu.au/about/governance-management/annual-reports/consultancies>> accessed 27 May 2026; Swinburne University of Technology, *2025 Consultancies, 2026*, <<https://www.swinburne.edu.au/about/strategy-initiatives/annual-report/2025>> accessed 27 May 2026; The University of Melbourne, *2025 UOM Consultancy Disclosure, 2026*, <https://about.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0035/484766/2025-Consultancy-Disclosure.pdf> accessed 27 May 2026; Victoria University, *CONSULTANT EXPENDITURE GREATER AND LESS THAN \$10,000 - FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2025, 2026*, <<https://content.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/2026-05/vu-consultancy-engagements-2025.pdf>> accessed 27 May 2026.

³⁹ National Tertiary Education Union Victoria University Branch, *Submission 96*, received 1 March 2026, p. 3.

⁴⁰ Steve Cannane, Jonathan Miller and Lara Sonnenschein, ‘Universities’ \$1.8b spend on consultants and contractors shocks experts and politicians’, *ABC News*, 30 March 2026, <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-03-30/university-consultants-fees-uts-kpmg-four-corners/106499192>> accessed 8 May 2026; Rick Morton, ‘Mind-boggling stupidity’: The consultancy that captured universities’, *The Saturday Paper*, 14 June 2025, <<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/education/2025/06/14/mind-boggling-stupidity-the-consultancy-that-captured-universities>> accessed 8 May 2026.

While the reporting of the figures for consultancy expenditures places Victoria ahead of most other Australian jurisdictions with respect to transparency, the reporting only provides the consultant's name, description, and cost. Universities do not report specifics on the projects, and the 'description' is limited—'business advisory services' or 'strategic development advisory services' are common descriptions. In 2025, for example, Monash University had the highest consultancy expenditure of any Victorian university, at just under \$12.7 million.⁴¹ However, its descriptions of services are vague. Its top two contracts, \$1.9 million expended to Nous Group Pty Ltd and \$1.2 million expended to Newmarket Advisory, were for 'Management Consulting Services' and 'Commercial Infrastructure Advisory Services' respectively.⁴² No further information was provided, and the outcomes of those projects are not stated.

This lack of information was remarked upon in several submissions by NTEU university Branches. The NTEU's Swinburne University of Technology Branch discussed that given the millions spend on consultancy contracts, 'staff, students and the broader community are entitled to understand what outcomes those investments have produced, and how they have translated into improvements ... That connection is not currently visible'.⁴³ The NTEU's Federation University Branch also commented on consultancy expenditure, noting that it had drastically increased and decreased over the years—going from \$250,000 in 2017 to \$7.1 million in 2023, then back down to \$643,000 in 2024. The reasons for the 'significant shift' were not explained to staff.⁴⁴ Finally, the NTEU's Victoria University Branch discussed the lack of transparency around consultancy spending relating to conflicts of interest, vague descriptions of services, and the concentration of spending on certain consultancy groups.⁴⁵

During the hearings, La Trobe University, the University of Melbourne and RMIT University spoke about hiring consultants for expertise that they do not have in-house.⁴⁶ Universities did not generally explain the reasons behind hiring consultants regarding strategy and did not provide information around the outcomes of consultancies.

Overall, the lack of transparency in communicating major decisions that impact staff, the perceived lack of transparency in where universities are spending their money, and the high expenditure in senior leadership and consultancy, understandably are a worrying combination, and contribute to an atmosphere of distrust between university staff, especially academics, and governing bodies. This precise conclusion was reached by the Senate inquiry.⁴⁷ The Committee also found this with Victorian universities.

41 Monash University, *Consultants Disclosure 2025, 2026*, <https://www.monash.edu/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/4276123/Consultancy-Disclosure-2025-Supplementary-Disclosure-linked.pdf> accessed 24 May 2026; Monash University, *Supplementary Disclosure for Consultants Over \$10k 2025, 2026*, <[https://www.monash.edu/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/4275325/Supplementary-Disclosure-for-Consultants-over-\\$10K-2025.pdf](https://www.monash.edu/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/4275325/Supplementary-Disclosure-for-Consultants-over-$10K-2025.pdf)> accessed 24 May 2026.

42 Ibid.

43 National Tertiary Education Union Swinburne University Branch, *Submission 79*, received 1 March 2026, p. 5.

44 National Tertiary Education Union Federation University Branch, *Submission 83*, received 1 March 2026, pp. 2–3.

45 National Tertiary Education Union Victoria University Branch, *Submission 96*, received 1 March 2026, pp. 9–10.

46 Professor Theo Farrell, Vice-Chancellor and President, La Trobe University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22; Glyn Davis, Interim Vice-Chancellor, The University of Melbourne, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 30; Alec Cameron, Vice-Chancellor, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 35.

47 Parliament of Australia, Education and Employment Legislation Committee, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers: final report*, Canberra, December 2025, pp. 123–124.

FINDING 10: Staff claim a lack of transparency in universities' communication of strategic and operational decisions, namely: restructures, institutional changes, and the financial standing of universities, including consultancy expenditure.

3.2.3 Strengthening transparency in university governance

The Committee agrees that improving transparency is critical, as a key focus of this Inquiry. It is deeply concerned that staff members at universities do not feel informed about the actions of their Councils, and the general perception by staff that university Councils operate in secrecy. Councils are in place to serve the university, and staff members are a key stakeholder in universities. They are entitled to feel informed about their Councils.

Commonwealth overlap

In October 2025, the Commonwealth released a statement in response to the publishing of the Expert Council on University Governance Final Report. In the statement, the Minister of Education committed Australian universities to two measures relating to transparency. University governing bodies will be required to publish:

- outcomes of meetings and decisions taken
- consultancy spending, its purpose, value and justification.⁴⁸

Additionally, TEQSA is currently considering how it will implement ECUG Principles into its *Threshold Standards*, as noted in the introduction. Standards around transparency will feature, given Principle 4 is 'Transparency: Purpose, strategy and performance are clear and openly communicated'.⁴⁹ The Committee acknowledges the Commonwealth's mandated actions, and TEQSA's upcoming reforms, and makes its recommendations with these in mind.

Universities' actions to strengthen transparency

Universities spoke on transparency in the public hearings and in their submissions, and it was widely acknowledged as a critical principle for universities to embody. Some universities have recently taken or committed to actions to improve transparency, which they discussed. These include:

- La Trobe University is allowing staff and student representatives of Council to attend in-camera sessions, publishing a communiqué after each Council meeting, and providing information around Council members attendance at Council meetings in its annual report.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ The Honorary Jason Clare MP, *Improving the governance of our universities*, media release, 18 October 2025.

⁴⁹ Melinda Cilento, Sharan Burrow, Bruce Cowley, *Final Report and Principles / Expert Council on University Governance*, Canberra, August 2025, p. 47.

⁵⁰ Professor Theo Farrell, Vice-Chancellor, La Trobe University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21; La Trobe University, *Submission 108*, received 5 March 2026, p. 3.

- Victoria University is considering publishing Council minutes, publicly disclosing conflicts of interest for Council members, and improving public reporting on the composition of Council.⁵¹
- Monash University is providing more detailed commentary on the outcomes of Council meetings.⁵²
- The University of Melbourne is providing more detailed accounts in its Council news summary and disclosing the number of and attendance at Council meetings in its annual report.⁵³
- Swinburne University of Technology is reviewing opportunities to enhance clarity and accessibility of Council communications.⁵⁴
- As discussed in Chapter 2, all universities except for RMIT University and Victoria University have published their Council skills matrices.

The Committee commends these actions to improve transparency, and many touch upon recommendations the Committee is making in response to what the Committee heard from staff and organisations. However, the Committee believes more should be done to achieve consistency across universities.

Staff and organisations' opinion on strengthening transparency

Suggestions from staff on how best to increase transparency were primarily centred on the university increasing communication to staff, and publishing information for staff to access. That information related to:

1. Council appointments
2. Council deliberations and decision-making.

Council appointments

Several staff members and organisations emphasised the need to increase transparency in appointments, for both Government-appointed members and Council-appointed members. Recommendations from staff and organisations centre around clarifying the process for how appointments to Council were made:

- 'Improve appointment transparency ... : publish criteria and processes for council appointments'.⁵⁵
- 'Transparency requires clarity of process as well as communication ... [for] Council appointment processes'.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Victoria University, *Submission 68*, received 27 February 2026, p. 6.

⁵² Monash University, *Submission 107*, received 3 March 2026, p. 4.

⁵³ Dr Nancy Huggett, University Secretary, The University of Melbourne, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 29; The University of Melbourne, *Submission 62*, received 27 February 2026, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Swinburne University, *Submission 84*, received 1 March 2026, p. 6.

⁵⁵ Dr Benjamin Gussen, *Submission 26, Attachment B*, received 18 February 2026, p. 1.

⁵⁶ Australian Academic Alliance Against Antisemitism, *Submission 94*, received 1 March 2026, p. 4.

- ‘Require universities to publish Council appointment processes in full, including the skills matrix, selection criteria, panel composition, conflict management arrangements, and how staff, student and community representation is considered in appointment decisions’.⁵⁷
- ‘Transparent criteria for appointment[s] that include understanding of academic labour conditions’.⁵⁸

The Committee understands the perception of lack of transparency regarding how Council members are appointed, whether by the Government or by the Council themselves. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is not enough information available regarding how Council members are selected. The lack of understanding by staff members of the Council appointment process breeds mistrust, and therefore the Committee reiterates the need for a more open process where staff can understand the process that has been undertaken.

While the Committee cannot make a formal recommendation to university Councils, it encourages all Councils to review the terms of reference and matrices for their nominations to committees (or equivalent), with the aim of improving transparency in their describing the member appointment process.

FINDING 11: Staff members and organisations recommended improving transparency to clarify the process of how Council members are appointed to Council, for both Government-appointed members and Council-appointed members.

Through understanding the process by which Council members are appointed, staff feel they would understand the role the Council members play in contributing to a sound university governance system. A critical part of understanding the value of specific Council members in their Council is knowing what criteria was considered in their hiring—determined through a skills matrix. Several submissions recommended the publishing of skills matrices, which, as stated earlier, many universities have recently implemented.⁵⁹ The Committee made a recommendation regarding skills matrices’ publication to ensure consistency across Victorian universities in Chapter 2.

FINDING 12: Staff and organisations emphasised the importance of understanding the criteria by which Council members are appointed, and the different areas of expertise that universities are looking for in Council members. They recommended that universities publish their skills matrix.

⁵⁷ National Tertiary Education Union Victoria University Branch, *Submission 96*, received 1 March 2026, p. 11.

⁵⁸ Name withheld, *Submission 23*, received 18 February 2026, p. 7.

⁵⁹ National Tertiary Education Union, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, p. 11; National Tertiary Education Union Victoria University Branch, *Submission 96*, received 1 March 2026, p. 11; Name withheld, *Submission 71*, received 28 February 2026, p. 2.

Council deliberations and decision-making

The second grouping of suggestions from staff focused on how Councils should improve mechanisms to provide information about their deliberations, and rationales used in making decisions. To increase transparency in these areas, recommendations included the publishing of Council meeting agendas, the publishing of Council meeting minutes and outcomes, and the publishing of explanations for major decisions.⁶⁰

The Committee fully supports the suggestions to publish the agendas, minutes, and key outcomes of Council, as an action that is simple for universities to implement. Universities already produce these documents, and while certain items may have to be redacted due to commercial reasons, it should not prevent the publication of the documents as a whole. While this action has already been committed to by the Commonwealth government, it is important to warrant a recommendation by this Committee.

As discussed earlier in this Chapter, the Committee also believes that staff are entitled to more information about why universities make the decisions they do—regarding strategic and operational decisions that directly impact staff's jobs. Especially related to decisions such as restructures, whether it is for courses, departments, or university-wide, staff should be given as much information as possible. The Committee registered with concern the impact on mental health and wellbeing that lack of transparency in this area had on staff. The Committee encourages Victorian universities to consider releasing a key summary document for staff within a reasonable timeframe after a large strategic decision, providing considerations for the decision and the expected impacts.

FINDING 13: Staff and organisations overwhelmingly recommended that Councils publish meeting agendas and outcomes, and rationales for major decisions that impact staff and students.

RECOMMENDATION 7: That the Victorian Government require Victorian universities to publish agendas and key outcomes of Council meetings with a communique as soon as is practical. Items that cannot be published due to confidentiality reasons can be redacted.

RECOMMENDATION 8: That the Victorian Government mandate Victorian universities to maintain a publicly disclosed 'public-of-interest' registry for all Council members.

⁶⁰ Name withheld, *Submission 37*, received 23 February 2026, p. 2; National Tertiary Education Union, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, p. 6; Name withheld, *Submission 50*, received 25 February 2026, p. 3; Samuel Eaton, *Submission 1*, received 17 December 2025, p. 12; Dr Benjamin Gussen, *Submission 26, Attachment B*, received 18 February 2026, p. 1; National Tertiary Education Union, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, p. 6; Professor Joo-Cheong Tham, Assistant Secretary Victoria Division, National Tertiary Education Union, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

Regarding wanting to understand decisions made by Council, staff also referred to financial elements in their recommendations. Some recommendations around transparency referred to increasing the information provided around consultancy expenditures (given that Victorian universities already report their consultancy expenditure projects over \$10,000), to demonstrate outcomes achieved.⁶¹

The NTEU's Victoria University Branch also recommended measures to increase financial transparency, so that staff understood the financial situation of the university. They stated 'universities should be required to report more plainly on: recurring operating performance; investment-related gains and losses; and one-off items'.⁶²

The Committee acknowledges that, as is statutorily required, Victoria provides certain information on consultancy expenditure and is more transparent in that regard than other jurisdictions in Australia. However, the lack of reporting on the justification for and the outcomes of consultancy projects leave room for improvement.

FINDING 14: While Victorian universities provide basic information around consultancy expenditure in their annual reports, staff do not feel it is sufficient, notably regarding information around what consultancy projects achieve.

RECOMMENDATION 9: That the Victorian Government amend the enabling Acts for all Victorian universities to require them, in their annual reports, to include additional information regarding consultancy expenditures including the purpose, justification, and where possible, outcomes.

While staff understanding the university's financial standing is important, the Committee notes that Victorian universities are subject to strict financial reporting requirements through the *Financial Management Act 1994*. As such, it would not recommend additional reporting on university finances. The Committee does, however, encourage universities to keep financial literacy and accessibility in mind when communicating about finances.

3.3 Lack of accountability in university Councils

Another key issue the Committee heard about from university staff was the perceived lack of accountability in Victorian university governing bodies.⁶³ The structural nature of accountability is linked to different terms in the submissions: closed governance circuits, accountability loops or gaps, and democratic deficits. The discussions all relate

⁶¹ National Tertiary Education Union, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, p. 6; National Tertiary Education Union Victoria University Branch, *Submission 96*, received 1 March 2026, p. 11; Academics for Public Universities, *Submission 105*, received 4 March 2026, p. 4.

⁶² National Tertiary Education Union Victoria University Branch, *Submission 96*, received 1 March 2026, p. 3.

⁶³ Dr Gregory Harper, *Submission 25*, received 18 February 2026; Professor Rob Watts, *Submission 64*, received 27 February 2026; Professor Stephen Parker and Professor Stephen Bottomley, *Submission 24*, received 18 February 2026; Professor Luke Beck, *Submission 28*, received 20 February 2026; Dr Tim Moore, *Submission 89*, received 1 March 2026.

to the notion of an accountability deficit in Victorian universities, where those who hold power are not elected democratically, and structures to hold them accountable are weak. It was broadly argued in various submissions that university Councils lack bidirectional accountability mechanisms, which allows the Councils to not be accountable to the university community—placing them in an accountability deficit.⁶⁴ It is not an issue specific to any one university, but a structural issue across the system.

The closed governance circuit was described by the Academics for Public Universities (APU) as a system ‘in which power is concentrated within senior executive teams and corporate-aligned governing bodies, marginalising the academic community and weakening public accountability’.⁶⁵ APU stated the authority is concentrated among the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and external appointees, which result in a ‘democratic deficit’ (also known as an accountability deficit), where there is insufficient oversight of the decisions made by Council.⁶⁶

Dr Marija Taflaga, Dr Francis Markham, and Dr Keith Dowding also addressed the broken accountability loop in Australian universities, stating that authority is delegated from the university Council to the Vice-Chancellor, who subsequently direct the executive with impacts on the staff and students. Typically, when authority is delegated, there would be a delegation—accountability loop, where those who are impacted by the delegated decisions have the ability to hold them accountable. However, the authors argue that the accountability pathway from staff back to the Council is weak due to the lack of formal capacity to review or dismiss members of Council, which leaves the loop open.⁶⁷ They concluded that until the loop was repaired, ‘controversies will recur, and the trust in and legitimacy of Victorian universities as self-governing public institutions will continue to deteriorate’.⁶⁸

3.3.1 Accountability mechanisms

Submissions discussed the typical accountability mechanisms (or lack of) and issues associated. Staff emphasised that there were either no mechanisms that existed to hold management to account, or that the current mechanisms were very weak. Professor Stephen Parker and Professor Stephen Bottomley wrote that ‘Management is not held effectively to account. Nor are Council members held to account; it is not even clear to whom they are accountable or what mechanism exists to hold them to account’.⁶⁹ Dr Tim Moore noted that ‘as things stand, no mechanisms exist in the statutes and regulations of universities that require answerability to this group

⁶⁴ Name withheld, *Submission 50*, received 25 February 2026; National Tertiary Education Union, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026; Dr Marija Taflaga, Dr Francis Markham and Dr Keith Dowding, *Submission 86*, received 1 March 2026; Academics for Public Universities, *Submission 105*, received 4 March 2026.

⁶⁵ Academics for Public Universities, *Submission 105*, received 4 March 2026, p. 3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21–22.

⁶⁷ Dr Marija Taflaga, Dr Francis Markham and Dr Keith Dowding, *Submission 86*, received 1 March 2026, p. 4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶⁹ Underlining is the submitter’s emphasis. Professor Stephen Parker and Professor Stephen Bottomley, *Submission 24*, received 18 February 2026, p. 2.

[the university community] in any formal way'.⁷⁰ He concluded that there was 'a governance accountability void, where there is both limited or unclear accounting to entities above (i.e. government), and no formal accounting to those below (i.e. staff, students etc.)'.⁷¹

Similarly, Dr Marija Taflaga, Dr Francis Markham and Dr Keith Dowding wrote 'the pathway through which those who bear the consequences of institutional decisions can constitute, inform and hold to account the governing body is weak',⁷² and Professor Luke Beck stated the mechanisms of accountability of the governing bodies of public universities to the members of public universities are weak or non-existent.⁷³ One example is that Council members can only be removed from Council by Council itself—staff members do not have the ability to propose the removal of a member, restricting accountability.⁷⁴ Victorian university Councils can remove a member 'if it is of the opinion that the member has failed to comply with the responsibilities of a member of the Council', and if two-thirds of the Council agree.⁷⁵ There is no input from university staff.

Another example reflected in submissions was the lack of formal forums for staff to hold leaders to account in a public setting. The Young Workers Centre (YWC), which represents young workers in education, stated there was 'an absence of formal institutional forums that can represent staff ... or allow them to hold leadership accountability'.⁷⁶ One submission stated 'In 20 years of working in the sector I have never seen a university Council member ... address a public forum'.⁷⁷ Dr Moore commented that in the case of poor actions (as will be discussed in Section 3.3.2), 'there was no requirement for the executive to front to some open forum of staff to seek to account for decisions and actions taken'.⁷⁸

Other staff commented on complaint and feedback processes as a key mechanism for holding university governing bodies accountable. However, staff stated these processes are unsafe, and may lead to negative repercussions for those who make a complaint. This discourages complaints from staff and weakens accountability.⁷⁹

Victorian universities have publicly accessible grievance or complaints procedures for staff, for example, Victoria University's *Complaints Procedure (Staff)*, RMIT University's *Staff Complaints Procedure*, La Trobe University's *Workplace Issue Resolution (Staff) Procedure*, and The University of Melbourne's *Appropriate Workplace Behaviour Policy*,

⁷⁰ Dr Tim Moore, *Submission 89*, received 1 March 2026, p. 8.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷² Dr Marija Taflaga, Dr Francis Markham and Dr Keith Dowding, *Submission 86*, received 1 March 2026, p. 1.

⁷³ Professor Luke Beck, *Submission 28*, received 20 February 2026, p. 13.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷⁵ This text occurs in all Victorian university Enabling Acts. For example, *Deakin University Act 2009*, Schedule 1 (3).

⁷⁶ Young Workers Centre, *Submission 66*, received 27 February 2026, p. 2.

⁷⁷ Name withheld, *Submission 45*, received 24 February 2026, p. 2.

⁷⁸ Dr Tim Moore, *Submission 89*, received 1 March 2026, p. 12.

⁷⁹ Samuel Eaton, *Submission 1*, received 17 December 2025; Name withheld, *Submission 12*, received 5 February 2026; Name withheld, *Submission 17*, received 10 February 2026; Name withheld, *Submission 37*, received 23 February 2026.

which has a section about raising a complaint and case management procedure for complaints.⁸⁰ However, the official complaint process does not match staff's experience when they formally escalate a complaint.

The lack of security regarding complaints processes is due to people who handle and facilitate these complaints are also the subject of the complaint. One submitter noted that 'when complaints or governance concerns are raised, processes may be internal, confidential, and ultimately controlled by the same leadership structures under scrutiny. This creates a perception (fair or not) of institutional self-protection'.⁸¹ As the above submitter had noted, this results in a lack of security for the individual bringing forward the complaint, as it is perceived the security of the institution is more important.

Aside from unclear pathways for complaint escalation, the issue of perceived penalties for escalating a complaint was also brought up in submissions, including negative reputational and career consequences for staff who raised the issues.⁸²

Based on all the evidence collected in this Inquiry, the Committee is concerned on the lack of mechanisms to report complaints over governance practices and the repercussions experienced by staff when they tried to make a formal complaint. Universities are encouraged to consider appropriate mechanisms to guarantee a fair process of complaint, especially in relation to governance issues.

FINDING 15: Staff note that accountability mechanisms to hold Council members to account are insufficient. Examples include the inability for staff to remove a Council member, the lack of public forums for Council members to answer questions by staff, and the unclear and insecure complaints processes.

3.3.2 Actions and outcomes

Staff believe that there is not enough accountability among universities. There is concern that where university Councils do not produce good outcomes, there are weak mechanisms and little way for leadership to be held to account. Outcomes for universities refer to staff and student experience, teaching and research quality, universities' reputation in the society.

Accountability for outcomes was often discussed in relation to corporatisation, and the misalignment between Councils acting in a corporate fashion (e.g. making decisions privately), yet being seen as a public good, and in receipt of public funding. Samuel

⁸⁰ Victoria University, *Complaints Procedure (Staff)*, 2025, <<https://policy.vu.edu.au/document/view.php?id=526>> accessed 1 May 2026; RMIT, *Staff Complaints Procedure*, 2026, <<https://policies.rmit.edu.au/document/view.php?id=156>> accessed 1 May 2026; La Trobe University, *Workplace Issue Resolution (Staff) Procedure*, 2026, <<https://policies.latrobe.edu.au/document/view.php?id=51>> accessed 1 May 2026; The University of Melbourne, *Appropriate Workplace Behaviour Policy*, 2026, <<https://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1328>> accessed 1 May 2026.

⁸¹ Name withheld, *Submission 37*, received 23 February 2026, p. 1.

⁸² Name withheld, *Submission 12*, received 5 February 2026, p. 2; Name withheld, *Submission 37*, received 23 February 2026, p. 1.

Eaton remarked on how this ambiguous position results in an accountability gap, where ‘universities may adopt corporate-style confidentiality and high discretion in governance while remaining insulated from the level of democratic scrutiny commonly associated with public administration’.⁸³

It was also noted that in privately held corporations, poor performance could result in executives being removed from their positions—but this rarely occurred in universities. Professor Rob Watts stated:

In a public corporation, the executive is accountable to shareholders and a board of directors. Poor performance is questioned, and senior executives and managers can be removed if the board or shareholders are unhappy with that performance. However, unlike corporate boards, which are answerable to their shareholders, and to some extent, the public as ‘clients’ or ‘consumers’ of their goods and services, the accountability of university governing bodies is effectively restricted to financial issues - if that.⁸⁴

Many stakeholders discussed the lack of accountability through outcomes, noting that university Councils are not clearly held responsible for decisions and that when mistakes occur, no one is held to account.⁸⁵

Submissions also discussed several instances of poor actions occurring with limited accountability. One example is wage underpayment. The NTEU Monash University Branch stated that, despite Monash University being found responsible for wage underpayment and signing an Enforceable Undertaking with the Fair Work Ombudsman, they felt there was little governance accountability. It noted that ‘Victorians might expect that the governing Council and senior executive members of Monash University would take responsibility. This has not happened’.⁸⁶ Numerous Council members from that period remain on Council, including the current Chancellor.⁸⁷

Another instance, discussed in detail in Section 3.2.2, was the closure of the Monash Sustainable Development Institute. While it was described earlier as an example of poor transparency by Monash University, the submission also noted that there were no accountability mechanisms in place to reflect upon the outcomes of the closure. It stated:

No measurement, evaluation or further accountability mechanisms are in place to understand the impact of this change on former MSDI staff, the project work they were undertaking at the time of transition, or the success (or otherwise) of the Change Plan. This means there is no opportunity for staff or leadership to learn from this drastic change to a flagship Institute and transdisciplinary program of work.⁸⁸

⁸³ Samuel Eaton, *Submission 1*, received 17 December 2025, p. 5.

⁸⁴ Professor Rob Watts, *Submission 64*, received 27 February 2026, p. 4.

⁸⁵ Professor John Quiggin, *Submission 6*, received 31 January 2026, p. 7; Professor Stephen Parker and Professor Stephen Bottomley, *Submission 24*, received 18 February 2026, pp. 2–3.

⁸⁶ National Tertiary Education Union Monash University Branch, *Submission 77*, received 1 March 2026, p. 4.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Name withheld, *Submission 61*, received 27 February 2026, p. 5.

Another instance referenced was at Swinburne University of Technology, around the behaviours of the Vice-Chancellor and Chancellor. Dr Tim Moore listed several episodes that reflected poorly on both positions, such as additional payments on top of the official salary, poor communication regarding the underpayment of staff, and allegations around bullying and misuse of role.⁸⁹ Dr Moore noted that these issues only received fulsome attention by the university after pressure had been brought by external agencies, such as the media. It should be noted that the Vice-Chancellor resigned from her job in March 2026, and there is currently an independent investigation into the allegations surrounding the Chancellor.⁹⁰

In the case of public mistakes, staff expressed concern that accountability was focused more on repairing reputations as opposed to the issue itself—which reflects in the aforementioned submission, where it was claimed that the Swinburne University of Technology governance issues were only investigated once reputations were at stake. An academic iterated this in their submission, that consequences for governance failures appear limited or opaque unless matters reach external regulatory or media attention.⁹¹

Another staff member concluded that ‘accountability [had] become reputation management’,⁹² and a final submitter wrote that there was ‘a ‘keeping up appearances’ culture that prioritises maintaining a sheen of respectability over the sometimes messy process of trying to change things for the better’.⁹³ This perception contributes to weakening trust in senior leadership by staff, with the perception that they prioritise the university’s image over the impact to staff.

The Committee acknowledges the importance of establishing mechanisms to evaluate university outcomes and make governing bodies accountable for their performance.

3.3.3 Remuneration of Vice-Chancellors

While staff referenced that mechanisms should be implemented to hold to account all members of university governance bodies, submissions highlighted Vice-Chancellors as a role to focus on that held particular importance for accountability. As discussed in Chapter 2, Vice-Chancellors are arguably the key figure in university governance, as they are the Chief Executive Officers (CEO) of universities.

⁸⁹ Dr Tim Moore, *Submission 89*, received 1 March 2026, pp. 12–15.

⁹⁰ Swinburne Institute of Technology, *Vice-Chancellor to farewell Swinburne after six years of leadership*, media release, 26 March 2026; Sumeyya Ilanbey, ‘Swinburne investigates chancellor over workplace concerns’, *Australian Financial Review*, 21 November 2025, <<https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/swinburne-investigates-chancellor-over-workplace-concerns-20251121-p5nhey>> accessed 1 May 2026.

⁹¹ Name withheld, *Submission 37*, received 23 February 2026, p. 3.

⁹² Name withheld, *Submission 12*, received 5 February 2026, p. 3.

⁹³ Name withheld, *Submission 18*, received 10 February 2026, p. 1.

Concerns around Vice-Chancellors mirrored the broader concerns spoken about in the previous section—that there was little accountability in response to performance. These comments relate to the earlier discussion in Section 2.3 on how universities are becoming increasingly like corporations, but without the top executive—the Vice-Chancellor—being directly responsible to its shareholders, university staff and students. One submitter was clear in their concerns of Vice-Chancellor accountability, as they stated a key issue in governance was the:

poor performance of some vice-chancellors, with no grounds for redress. VCs range from competent and committed to manifestly inadequate. When a VC goes rogue or isn't performing to standard there is very little that anyone can do about it until their term expires. Without naming names, I have seen VCs and other senior executives at universities act in ways that are extremely malicious, wasteful and ill-considered – and nobody is able to stop them.⁹⁴

The lack of accountability is especially concerning considering the remuneration levels of Vice-Chancellors, which have been part of the public discourse surrounding university governance in recent years.⁹⁵ In 2024, the media reported that five of the eight Victorian Vice-Chancellors were paid more than \$1 million annually, and six of the Vice-Chancellors earned more in 2024 than in 2023.⁹⁶ Other articles noted that the high salaries of Vice-Chancellors did not necessarily lead to better outcomes for students, and that their pay was several times more than a university lecturer.⁹⁷ The most recent salary figures for Victorian Vice-Chancellors are as follows:

⁹⁴ Name withheld, *Submission 45*, received 24 February 2026, p. 3.

⁹⁵ Caitlin Cassidy, 'Majority of university chiefs in Victoria earn over \$1m despite budget woes', *The Guardian*, 2 May 2024, <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2024/may/02/majority-of-top-university-bosses-in-victoria-earning-in-excess-of-1m-as-federal-government-vows-pay-crackdown>> accessed 8 May 2026; Jack Thrower, 'The high pay for Vice-Chancellors does not deliver better outcomes for students', *The Australia Institute*, 30 January 2025, <<https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/the-high-pay-for-vice-chancellors-does-not-deliver-better-outcomes-for-students>> accessed 8 May 2026; Jack Thrower, 'Uni Vice-Chancellors keep getting richer while those who teach and research are left behind', *The Australia Institute*, 4 February 2025, <<https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/uni-vice-chancellors-keep-getting-richer-while-those-who-teach-and-research-are-left-behind>> accessed 8 May 2026; Caitlin Cassidy, 'Five vice-chancellors in Victoria paid more than \$1m in 2024, prompting claims of largesse', *The Guardian*, 14 May 2025, <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/may/13/five-vice-chancellors-in-victoria-paid-more-than-1m-in-2024-prompting-claims-of-largesse>> accessed 8 May 2026; Julie Hare, 'Vice chancellors awarded six-figure pay rises despite salary pressure', *Financial Review*, 30 May 2025, <<https://www.afr.com/policy/health-and-education/vice-chancellors-awarded-six-figure-pay-rises-despite-salary-pressure-20250530-p5m3mb>> accessed 8 May 2026.

⁹⁶ Caitlin Cassidy, 'Five vice-chancellors in Victoria paid more than \$1m in 2024, prompting claims of largesse', *The Guardian*, 14 May 2025, <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/may/13/five-vice-chancellors-in-victoria-paid-more-than-1m-in-2024-prompting-claims-of-largesse>> accessed 8 May 2026.

⁹⁷ Jack Thrower, 'The high pay for Vice-Chancellors does not deliver better outcomes for students', *The Australia Institute*, 30 January 2025, <<https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/the-high-pay-for-vice-chancellors-does-not-deliver-better-outcomes-for-students>> accessed 8 May 2026; Jack Thrower, 'Uni Vice-Chancellors keep getting richer while those who teach and research are left behind', *The Australia Institute*, 4 February 2025, <<https://australiainstitute.org.au/post/uni-vice-chancellors-keep-getting-richer-while-those-who-teach-and-research-are-left-behind>> accessed 8 May 2026.

Table 3.2 Salaries of Victorian Vice-Chancellors in 2024 and 2025

University	2024 salary	2025 salary
Deakin University	\$1.1 million	\$1.1 million
Federation University	\$919,000	\$919,000
La Trobe University	\$869,000 ^a	\$999,000
Monash University	\$1.1 million	\$1.2 million
RMIT University	\$1 million	\$1.2 million
Swinburne University of Technology	\$1.2 million	\$1.2 million
The University of Melbourne	\$1.6 million	\$929,000 ^b
Victoria University	\$859,000	\$859,000

Notes: the annual reports of universities do not always specify the Vice-Chancellor’s salary as the Vice-Chancellor’s. Rather, they state the salary bands of ‘Key management personnel’, and the Vice-Chancellor is the individual in the highest salary band.

Where salaries were listed in a range, the highest value in has been recorded in the table.

a. This salary was for a part-year period from 1 February 2024 to 31 December 2024.

b. This salary was for a part-year period from 10 February until 26 December 2025.

Source: Deakin University, *Annual Report 2024*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 145; Deakin University, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 149; Federation University, *Annual Report 2024*, Mt Helen, 2025, p. 98; Federation University, *Annual Report 2025*, Mt Helen, 2026, p. 110; La Trobe University, *2024 Annual Report*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 110; La Trobe University, *2025 Annual Report*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 114; Monash University, *Annual Report 2024*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 158; Monash University, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 176; RMIT, *2024 Annual Report*, Melbourne, 2025, p. F-61; RMIT, *2025 Annual Report*, Melbourne, 2026, p. F-61; Swinburne University of Technology, *2024 Annual Report*, Melbourne, 2025, p. SFR:123; Swinburne University of Technology, *2025 Annual Report*, Melbourne, 2026, p. SFR:135; The University of Melbourne, *Annual Report 2024*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 132; The University of Melbourne, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 116; Victoria University, *2024 Annual Report*, Melbourne, 2025, p. 139; Victoria University, *2025 Annual Report*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 137.

Submissions from staff commented on the high remuneration levels of Vice-Chancellors, concluding broadly it is excessive.⁹⁸ While the salary is evidently an issue, their remuneration not being an obvious reflection of performance contributes to the lack of perceived accountability of Vice-Chancellors: put simply by one academic, ‘remuneration is not benchmarked to their performance’.⁹⁹ Other submissions remarked on the misalignment between the salaries of Vice-Chancellors and outcomes.¹⁰⁰

A paper from The Australia Institute concluded that there is no obvious correlation between Vice-Chancellor remuneration and student satisfaction, or global rankings.¹⁰¹ It is difficult to understand how Vice-Chancellors’ remuneration is calculated, and explanations are not readily accessible. The University Chancellor Council’s *Code of Executive Remuneration Principles and Practice for Australian Public Universities*, which is voluntary but considered best practice, encourages remuneration to ‘be tied to transparent, pre-agreed, measurable outcomes aligned to institutional strategy’,

98 Name withheld, *Submission 15*, received 9 February 2026, p. 2; Associate Professor William Partlett, *Submission 46*, received 24 February 2026, p. 2.

99 Professor Rob Watts, *Submission 64*, received 27 February 2026, p. 4.

100 Professor Ian Wanless, *Submission 72*, received 28 February 2026, p. 2; Dr Tim Moore, *Submission 89*, received 1 March 2026, p. 13; Associate Professor William Partlett, *Submission 46*, received 24 February 2026, p. 2.

101 Jack Thrower, ‘Overpaid and unaccountable: reining in Vice-Chancellor pay’, *The Australia Institute*, Canberra, March 2025, p. 1.

and that ‘where performance-based remuneration is offered, incentive components should be subject to claw back provision in the event of misconduct, material underperformance, or misreporting’.¹⁰²

FINDING 16: Staff are concerned over the Council’s lack of accountability in response to poor actions of the university, such as wage underpayment or an investigation of leadership. The lack of perceived ownership of outcomes is compounded when considering the high remuneration levels of Vice-Chancellors.

3

3.3.4 Strengthening accountability in university governance

Similarly to transparency, submissions and evidence provided during the hearings stated accountability is needed to be strengthened.¹⁰³ While the Committee will make recommendations to address these concerns, it should be noted that there are other mechanisms that have been introduced through Commonwealth bodies to achieve this goal.

Commonwealth overlap

As stated earlier, in October 2025, the Commonwealth released a statement in response to the Expert Council on University Governance Final Report. The Minister of Education committed to several measures relating to accountability. These included:

- The Australian Government, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Remuneration Tribunal, states and territories, and stakeholders including the Universities Chancellors Council, will establish a remuneration framework for Vice-Chancellor remuneration.
- University governing bodies will be required to publish their annual remuneration reports in line with requirements for public companies.¹⁰⁴

Like transparency, accountability will feature in TEQSA’s reforms of the *Thresholds Standards*. The ECUG Principle 1 is ‘Accountability: Governance structures and accountabilities are well-defined, effective and transparent’.¹⁰⁵ The Committee acknowledges the Commonwealth’s mandated actions, notably regarding a remuneration framework, and TEQSA’s upcoming reforms, and makes its recommendations with these in consideration.

¹⁰² University Chancellors Council, *Code of Executive Remuneration Principles and Practice for Australian Public Universities*, April 2025, Melbourne, p. 1.

¹⁰³ Name withheld, *Submission 9*, received 4 February 2026, p. 4; Name withheld, *Submission 18*, received 10 February 2026, p. 2; Dr Gregory Harper, *Submission 25*, received 18 February 2026, p. 2; Name withheld, *Submission 54*, received 26 February 2026, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ The Hon Jason Clare MP, *Improving the governance of our universities*, media release, 18 October 2025, <<https://ministers.education.gov.au/clare/improving-governance-our-universities>> accessed 11 June 2026.

¹⁰⁵ Melinda Cilento, Sharan Burrow, Bruce Cowley, *Final Report and Principles | Expert Council on University Governance*, Canberra, August 2025, p. 41.

Universities' actions to strengthen accountability

Through their submissions and testimony at the hearings, universities spoke of accountability, all noting its importance. They noted several actions where they were demonstrating or improving their accountability with regards to staff concerns, namely around providing increased information to staff.

For instance, The University of Melbourne noted they held 'regular Town Hall forums where the Vice-Chancellor and members of the executive team meet staff, discuss specific issues and projects, and answer staff questions and concerns'.¹⁰⁶ They also explicitly supported the recommendation for Vice-Chancellor remuneration benchmarking.¹⁰⁷

Another example is Victoria University's submission which stated 'additional engagement occurs through ... regular staff town halls and forums'.¹⁰⁸ It also noted that 'Council will receive a quarterly Strategic Scorecard report and is considering options for regular public reporting on performance', increasing visibility on performance¹⁰⁹

La Trobe University also noted that the Vice-Chancellor also holds yearly in-person town halls with each of the 10 schools and other divisions in the University, and their three-times-yearly webinars where staff can ask questions of the Vice-Chancellor.¹¹⁰ It also stated it had 'developed formal documentation that guides the process for appointing the Vice-Chancellor which addresses remuneration, approval and ongoing monitoring of performance process'.¹¹¹

Despite some measures to improve, universities were resistant to establishing new accountability mechanisms to strengthen accountability, especially within Victorian legislation as discussed in Chapter 2, claiming that there are existing reforms implemented within TEQSA's regulatory frameworks and there is no need to repeat the same processes through different avenues.¹¹²

During the hearings, Monash University spoke of two existing mechanisms that they believed could be better used to encourage accountability: meetings between the Vice-Chancellors and the Minister, and the tabling of universities' annual reports to Parliament.¹¹³ The Vice-Chancellor recommended the inclusion of a standing item in the Minister—Vice-Chancellor meetings around governance issues, and more fulsome

¹⁰⁶ The University of Melbourne, *Submission 62*, received 27 February, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ Victoria University, *Submission 68*, received 27 February 2026, p. 8.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹¹⁰ Professor Theo Farrell, Vice-Chancellor and President, La Trobe University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24.

¹¹¹ La Trobe University, *Submission 108*, received 5 March 2026, pp. 3, 5.

¹¹² Deakin University, *Submission 4*, received 19 January 2026, p. 3; Glyn Davis, Interim Vice-Chancellor, The University of Melbourne, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 34.

¹¹³ Professor Sharon Pickering, Vice-Chancellor and President, Monash University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 54–55.

discussion after annual reports are tabled to Parliament, to encourage dialogue and thus accountability.¹¹⁴

The Committee appreciates the comments made by Monash University regarding dialogue between the Government and universities after the tabling of the annual reports, as an accountability mechanism. The Committee agrees that there could be stronger relations between the two entities and recommends that after the tabling of the annual reports, the Minister meet with each individual Vice-Chancellor to discuss the university's performance and governance.

FINDING 17: Several Victorian universities discussed how they are strengthening accountability, referencing town hall forums and other ways they are increasing communication to staff.

FINDING 18: Universities are reluctant to establish new accountability mechanisms and instead recommended that existing levers be used to strengthen accountability. These include: TEQSA regulatory frameworks, meetings between the Vice-Chancellors and Minister for Skills and TAFE, and dialogue with Parliament around the tabling of the universities' annual reports.

RECOMMENDATION 10: That the Victorian Government establish more formal arrangements between Government ministers and universities as an accountability mechanism.

Staff and organisations' opinion on strengthening accountability

Staff and organisations discussed ways in which accountability mechanisms could be strengthened, including around the remuneration of the Vice-Chancellor. Accountability mechanisms to staff, as discussed earlier, are varied. Staff and organisations made suggestion in three main areas:

- increasing reporting of performance
- establishing opportunities to provide feedback to Council members
- giving staff the ability to impact Council membership.

The Committee agrees that accountability in university governance needs to be strengthened, as a key focus of this Inquiry. There were many suggestions made by individuals, organisations and universities as to how to do this, which will be detailed, but the Committee notes pre-emptively that some are out of the scope of the Inquiry, or cross into areas of federal jurisdiction. The Committee is also mindful on not

¹¹⁴ Professor Sharon Pickering, Vice-Chancellor and President, Monash University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 54–55.

wanting to impose additional burdens on universities, as it recognises they are already regulated in numerous ways.

Increasing reporting

While many of the recommendations relating to increased reporting also support greater transparency, enhanced reporting serves a broader purpose. By publicly reporting against key governance and performance measures, universities strengthen their accountability to staff, students, government and the wider community. It also reinforces a culture of accountability across the institution, recognising that expectations for transparency and performance should apply not only to staff, but also to university leadership and governing bodies.

As the NTEU's Monash University Branch noted the following:

Monash University staff face onerous performance metrics. Staff members who are considered by University managers to not be performing, can and are disciplined and in some cases terminated for their underperformance ... No such accountability measures appear to apply to the members of the University's governing Council.¹¹⁵

As noted earlier, outcomes in the context of universities (in relation to staff experience) are broad, and could include a variety of metrics. Staff and organisations suggested increased reporting in university annual reports on various elements, including:

- wage violations¹¹⁶
- research output¹¹⁷
- administrative loads on teaching/research staff
- workload sustainability¹¹⁸
- process turnaround times (procurement, contracts, hiring, ethics, grant support)¹¹⁹
- complaint volumes, average resolution timeframes, proportion internally resolved versus externally escalated¹²⁰
- indigenous activities and engagements¹²¹
- performance of the university and Vice-Chancellor, in terms of transparency and accountability.¹²²

¹¹⁵ National Tertiary Education Union Monash University Branch, *Submission 77*, received 1 March 2026, pp. 4–5.

¹¹⁶ Name withheld, *Submission 71*, received 28 February 2026, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ Professor Matt Pinnuck, *Submission 5*, received 26 January 2026, pp. 6–8.

¹¹⁸ Name withheld, *Submission 23*, received 18 February 2026, p. 6.

¹¹⁹ Professor Akram Hourani, *Submission 31*, received 23 February 2026, p. 2.

¹²⁰ Australian Academic Alliance Against Antisemitism, *Submission 94*, received 1 March 2026, p. 4.

¹²¹ Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, *Submission 99*, received 2 March 2026, p. 12.

¹²² Professor Joo-Cheong Tham, Assistant Secretary Victoria Division, National Tertiary Education Union, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 6.

Reporting requirements of universities are strict, as they are required to report on their operational and financial activities as a public entity as per the *Financial Management Act 1994*. While increased reporting on the elements suggested would improve accountability, the Committee does not feel it is appropriate to be legislated, given the existing requirements on universities. However, it encourages universities to examine whether it is able to report on the elements suggested and consider doing so where possible.

Staff and organisations also recommended more independent, external reporting of university performance.¹²³ Associate Professor Shumi Akhtar wrote:

We must mandate independent external oversight mechanisms to ensure fairness in the composition, process, and decision-making of university governance. Only through rigorous, external auditing can we restore a meritocratic framework that reflects the true diversity and intellectual caliber of the academy.¹²⁴

TEQSA undertakes reviews of university providers every seven years when they require a renewal of their accreditation, including a review of its governance systems. The reviews are not available for the public to access. Councils are also externally reviewed for its performance regularly, but similarly these reports are not publicly available. The reviews of Council are also conducted with differing frequency depending on the university—for example, The University of Melbourne commissions external Council reviews every seven years, while Victoria University commissions it every three years.¹²⁵ The Expert Council on University Governance Final Report recommended that Councils have an external review of their performance at least every three years.¹²⁶ This review is triggered independently by universities and not by an independent body.

FINDING 19: To strengthen accountability mechanisms, staff and organisations suggest increased reporting on a variety of metrics, including wage violations, complaint volumes and resolution timeframes, and Indigenous activities.

FINDING 20: To strengthen accountability mechanisms, staff and organisations recommend more external reporting of university governance performance and effectiveness.

Providing feedback to Council members

The second grouping of suggestions highlights the importance of establishing opportunities to provide feedback to Council members. This mechanism would increase

¹²³ Academics for Public Universities, *Submission 105*, received 4 March 2026, pp. 4, 23.

¹²⁴ Associate Professor Shumi Akhtar, *Submission 102*, received 3 March 2026, p. 4.

¹²⁵ The University of Melbourne, *Submission 62*, received 27 February 2026, p. 7; Victoria University, *Governing Body Report of Outcomes*, 24 March 2026, p. 3.

¹²⁶ Melinda Cilento, Sharan Burrow, Bruce Cowley, *Final Report and Principles / Expert Council on University Governance*, Canberra, August 2025, p. 44.

accountability as it would hold leadership accountable to staff. Dr Tim Moore wrote that greater accountability would ultimately be achieved ‘through a new leader’s answerability to their constituents, including how well they follow through on the proposed vision’.¹²⁷ He suggested the university community should have ‘a permanent watching brief on the operations of governance in the university, including the performance of its leaders’.¹²⁸

Public town halls were identified as option to provide feedback to Councils. Professor Luke Beck recommended Victorian legislation be amended to provide ‘members of the organisation have the ability to ask questions about or make comments on the management of the organisation and ask questions of the organisation’s auditor in a public forum’.¹²⁹ Likewise, the Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC) recommended that legislation be amended ‘to require senior leaders to conduct periodic decision-making assemblies where major decisions are openly explained and rationalised to the university community’.¹³⁰

Through opportunities such as regular public forums, staff can raise feedback about issues that concern them, to individuals who would have the power to impact. However, for a forum to be genuinely constructive, it would require Council support with its members engaging in the process.

The Committee encourages Victorian university Councils to establish regular, public forums between senior leadership on Council and staff members, to explain operational decisions and provide the opportunity to hear feedback. Public forums with open dialogue would help rebuild trust between staff and Council.

Complaint processes also provide a way for staff to give feedback, but staff and organisations noted that these processes require greater clarity and improvement. One submitter recommended ‘clarifying and publicly documenting escalation pathways for governance concerns’, and ‘strengthening whistleblower protections and ensuring demonstrable safeguards against retaliation’.¹³¹ While this issue was raised to the Committee in other submissions, staff and organisations did not suggest tangible ways to strengthen complaints processes. However, the repeated emphasis speaks to the lack of secure processes and mechanism for staff to provide feedback to Council.

During the hearings, the NTEU also affirmed that ‘there needs to be a very clear and robust process where audit and risk concerns by staff and staff representatives can be enabled to allow the kinds of concerns on the ground to actually reach where they need to reach’.¹³²

¹²⁷ Dr Tim Moore, *Submission 89*, received 1 March 2026, p. 19.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Professor Luke Beck, *Submission 28*, received 20 February 2026, p. 4.

¹³⁰ Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 67*, received 27 February 2026, p. 6.

¹³¹ Name withheld, *Submission 37*, received 23 February 2026, p. 2.

¹³² Professor Joo-Cheong Tham, Assistant Secretary Victoria Division, National Tertiary Education Union, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8–9.

The Committee encourages universities to examine their complaints processes, and to register the concerns from staff regarding their feeling insecure in logging complaints about governance. It advises universities to, where possible, improve complaints processes so that staff understand them clearly, and feel supported when bringing forward a complaint.

FINDING 21: Staff recommend strengthening opportunities to provide feedback to Council members, such as establishing regular public forums and clarifying feedback processes.

FINDING 22: Staff do not believe that complaint processes at universities are transparent, robust or secure, and expressed not feeling safe and supported throughout the process.

RECOMMENDATION 11: That the Victorian Government conduct a review into universities' complaint processes for staff to better understand the process, its independence and efficiency, and develop clear mechanisms for escalation and accountability.

Impacting Council membership

The final group of suggestions focuses on giving staff a say in Council membership. Staff believe they should be able to elect or remove Council members, which would improve accountability by giving staff more influence over Council. APU explained that electing university leadership 'enhances legitimacy ... [and] embed[s] accountability in those who teach, research, study, and sustain the institution'.¹³³

Several submissions recommended the democratic election of the Council, and particularly the Vice-Chancellor, by staff (and students). Some examples include:

- amending the legislation so that most of the university Council/governing body officials are appointed via a democratic election of the student-staff community¹³⁴
- replacing the Council's appointments of the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor with community elections, with the Vice-Chancellor being elected through a weighted process that gave 60–70% weight to academic staff¹³⁵
- introducing weighted community election of Vice-Chancellors with fixed terms and transparent programs¹³⁶
- allowing for the key officer in Victorian universities, the Vice-Chancellor, to be appointed by democratic election via a vote from within the university community.¹³⁷

¹³³ Academics for Public Universities, *Submission 105*, received 4 March 2026, p. 87.

¹³⁴ Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 67*, received 27 February 2026, p. 7.

¹³⁵ Public Universities Australia, *Submission 87*, received 1 March 2026, p. 4.

¹³⁶ Academics for Public Universities, *Submission 105*, received 4 March 2026, p. 14.

¹³⁷ Dr Tim Moore, *Submission 89*, received 1 March 2026, p. 1.

Democratic election of Vice-Chancellors (and other senior university leadership) occurred internationally. APU listed several countries where it was the norm to elect some senior leadership, including Germany, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Belgium, and some universities in Latin America and the United States.¹³⁸

Submissions also recommended for staff to have the ability to remove members of Council, although the logistics of this were not discussed.¹³⁹ Some provided recommendations for Victorian legislation amendments, that:

- the members of the organisation have the power to remove any individual member of the organisation's governing body;
- the members of the organisation have the power to spill the entire governing body of the organisation.¹⁴⁰

The Committee also heard suggestions that accountability would be strengthened by introducing caps on Vice-Chancellor remuneration and strengthening the link between remuneration and performance, including through clearer performance benchmarks.¹⁴¹

The Committee notes the recommendations to explore the democratic election of Council members, notably of the Vice-Chancellor, and to place remuneration caps on Vice-Chancellors. The Committee regards the international case studies of democratically elected Vice-Chancellors with interest. However, it does not feel the timeline and scope of this Inquiry allow for the analysis required to make such a recommendation. It encourages universities to consider how Councils appoint Vice-Chancellors, and how the appointment process encourages accountability.

As noted in the previous section, the Commonwealth Government, alongside the Victorian Government and the University Chancellors Council, is developing a framework for Vice-Chancellor remuneration. Given the work is underway, the Committee considers it inappropriate to make a recommendation at this stage. The Committee will continue to monitor the development of the framework.

The Committee acknowledges the importance of remuneration being responsible and ethical, and that to strengthen accountability and build trust with staff, it should be linked to performance benchmarks and assessments should be available to the public. While the Commonwealth has committed universities to publishing annual remuneration reports in line with requirements for public companies, this is an action that the Committee believes is necessary to include in legislation. As such, it recommends amending the enabling Acts of universities to include the publishing of annual remuneration reports as part of the responsibilities of the Council.

¹³⁸ Academics for Public Universities, *Submission 105*, received 4 March 2026, p. 88.

¹³⁹ Dr Tim Moore, *Submission 89*, received 1 March 2026, p. 19; Academics for Public Universities, *Submission 105*, received 4 March 2026, p. 66.

¹⁴⁰ Professor Luke Beck, *Submission 28*, received 20 February 2026, p. 3.

¹⁴¹ Name withheld, *Submission 40*, received 24 February 2026, p. 2; Dr Peter Drummond, *Submission 56*, received 26 February 2026, p. 2; Public Universities Australia, *Submission 87*, received 1 March 2026, pp. 2–3; Victorian Trades Hall Council, *Submission 67*, received 27 February 2026, p. 7; Academics for Public Universities, *Submission 105*, received 4 March 2026, p. 4; National Tertiary Education Union, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, p. 14.

There is a clear perception among staff that universities are not held accountable for their performance or actions, and that there are not sufficient mechanisms to allow this to happen. The Committee heard the frustration of staff in their inability to safely voice concerns over lack of information or the outcomes of decisions, and their dissatisfaction in being subject to performance metrics and standards that do not seem to be applied to their most senior leaders.

FINDING 23: Some staff and organisations recommend that, to strengthen accountability, senior leadership (notably Vice-Chancellors) be democratically elected by the university community, and remuneration caps and benchmarks be established.

RECOMMENDATION 12: That the Victorian Government amend the enabling Acts of all Victorian universities to add the publication of annual remuneration report for Council members, with performance benchmarks, under the responsibilities of the Council.

3.4 Staff representation on university Councils

The final key issue in relation to concerns from staff, is their lack of representation on university Councils. As stated by Young Workers Centre (YWC), there is ‘a lack of staff ... voice in key decision-making institutions’.¹⁴² As per state legislation, Victorian universities are required to have at least one staff member elected on the university Council, for a term of up to three years. The NTEU’s submission mapped the number of elected staff on Councils across Australia, and while all Victorian universities had a single staff member, every other university in Australia had two or three. Furthermore, having only one staff representative in Victorian university Councils is a decrease from the number of historic number of staff representatives: in the past, Victorian universities were required to have at least three or four representatives, and even up to seven.¹⁴³ During the hearings, the NTEU explained that this decrease over the past decades was due to a ‘shift in culture of the universities’, where there was ‘primacy given to the views of management to the neglect of differing views’, i.e. staff members.¹⁴⁴

During the hearings, the Committee asked whether there was evidence that demonstrated increased student and staff representation resulted in better governance. The NTEU responded that there was ‘ample evidence that marginalisation of a staff and student voice tends towards bad governance’.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, the VTHC noted that when there was higher staff representation in the early 2000s, governance

¹⁴² Young Workers Centre, *Submission 66*, received 27 February 2026, p. 2.

¹⁴³ National Tertiary Education Union, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, pp. 38–41.

¹⁴⁴ Professor Joo-Cheong Tham, Assistant Secretary Victoria Division, National Tertiary Education Union, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

issues that exist now—‘systematic wage theft, the destruction of entire disciplines and widespread casual work’—did not exist as such.¹⁴⁶

A single representative on Council means there is limited involvement in the decision-making process at the highest level, and as a result, limited influence on the decisions made. La Trobe University Branch of the NTEU stated the low number of staff representatives—one—inherently limited their ability to advocate for staff. The result was that ‘decisions with profound implications for staff working conditions ... are routinely made without meaningful input from those most directly affected’.¹⁴⁷

Another point made was that staff representatives are restricted in what they can share with other staff, regarding the Council. As such, while the single staff representative has limited involvement and influence on Council due to numbers, the rest of the staff also has limited involvement due to the minimal information conveyed.¹⁴⁸ The lack of alternative mechanisms for staff to provide feedback to Council, compounding this issue, were discussed in Section 3.3.1.

A singular staff member on Council is unable to represent the differing staff experiences, and risks poor treatment while on Councils, each of which will be subsequently discussed. While staff commented in their submissions that more representatives were needed on Council, the experience of staff members on Council was only relayed through the Branches of the NTEU, and as such, the Committee relies on those submissions more heavily in this section.

3.4.1 Variety of staff experiences

As mentioned at the beginning of this Chapter, there are different cohorts of staff at universities. These cohorts include professional, academics with ongoing roles, academics with fixed-term or casual roles, staff with disability, staff who are Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD), and Indigenous staff.

The Monash University Branch of the NTEU stated a single staff representative was ‘simply not enough to provide adequate voice for the two most important stakeholder groups of our university’ (they included students in that statement).¹⁴⁹ Staff have different priorities and different needs, depending on their positions. The concerns of a long-established, ongoing academic are different from a newer academic on a casual contract, or of a professional staff member in an administrative role. Similarly, a neurodivergent staff member may have different needs in their workplace than a staff member who is part of a CALD community or identifies as Indigenous. While every single staff cohort will never be able to be personally represented, a single staff member on Council makes it near impossible to attempt.

¹⁴⁶ Oscar Kaspi-Crutchett, Senior Research Organiser, Victorian Trades Hall Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁷ National Tertiary Education Union La Trobe University Branch, *Submission 81*, received 1 March 2026, p.1.

¹⁴⁸ National Tertiary Education Union Monash University Branch, *Submission 77*, received 1 March 2026, p. 6.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

Indigenous staff

As of May 2026, there are no elected staff members who identify as Indigenous on Victorian university Councils. Swinburne University of Technology's Branch of the NTEU reflected on their lack of identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff representatives, and stated that given Swinburne University of Technology's public commitment to reconciliation, it felt the university should explain the choice not to include these staff perspectives in Council.¹⁵⁰ All Victorian universities have a reference to Indigenous inclusion in their strategic documents (whether it is a First Nations Action Plan, a Reconciliation Action Plan, or reconciliation listed as a strategic commitment or driver), so the lack of staff inclusion on Council is a notable gap.

Indigenous representation on Council is crucial. During the hearings, the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. stated the importance of 'hearing the voice of the mob at the highest level' and ensuring that Indigenous communities are represented.¹⁵¹ Lisa Briggs, CEO of Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, also emphasised there needs to be an Indigenous representative on Council, 'to make sure it [governance systems] is in system and in sync ... you need to make sure that all the policies, procedures and governance align'.¹⁵² While these organisations did not discuss Indigenous representation on Council in relation to elected staff members, their points stand in relation to staff members.

Outside of Council, all Victorian universities have a formal body providing advice to senior management on Indigenous issues. However, it is not clear whether these forums include elected Indigenous staff members, or how the members are chosen writ-large.¹⁵³ The level of influence that these bodies have is also unclear, given that they are advisory bodies—they would not replace having a representative on Council. In its submission, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo noted that 'Aboriginal governance guidance consistently highlights that advisory arrangements do not constitute shared decision-making. There must be a clear pathway for advice to influence outcomes'¹⁵⁴—implying that the current level of influence that these bodies have on decision-making is weak. This reiterates the need for representation on Council as opposed to in advisory bodies. During the hearings, the CEO of Ngaweeyan Maar-oo stated this point again, that 'representation is really important. It is not just representation in consultation at the middle level. It has to be in the governance and the leadership'.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ National Tertiary Education Union Swinburne University Branch, *Submission 79*, received 1 March 2026, pp. 6–7.

¹⁵¹ Professor Mark Rose, Vice-President, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc., public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 36.

¹⁵² Lisa Briggs, Chief Executive Officer, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 34.

¹⁵³ National Tertiary Education Union, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, pp. 45–47.

¹⁵⁴ Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 111*, received 10 March 2026, p. 12.

¹⁵⁵ Lisa Briggs, Chief Executive Officer, Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

Multicultural staff

With only one elected staff representative on Council, the opportunity for multicultural staff to be represented through an elected staff position is reduced. While the topic of multicultural staff members on Council was not raised in the submissions received for this Inquiry, some submissions touched on racism experienced by staff, and how they believed it had impacted their career trajectories in their universities.¹⁵⁶ George Lekakis, who spoke to the Committee about multicultural representation on Councils, affirmed that hiring processes can be impacted by the applicant's ethnicity, racial or religious background but, based on his personal opinion, it was not an overwhelming issue at universities.¹⁵⁷

George Lekakis spoke of current multicultural representation on Councils, and concluded that it was 'clearly an omission'.¹⁵⁸ He emphasised that while individuals who are on Council, either appointed or elected, are all highly qualified people, there are other equally qualified people who have multicultural backgrounds and thus possess 'insightfulness that they would bring to the board tables when they have to deal with complex multicultural issues as they emerge within the campus and the society more broadly'.¹⁵⁹

While multicultural representation in university Councils is difficult to address given the election process for staff representatives in Councils, it should be guaranteed through the appointment processes of Council members. This was already discussed in Chapter 2.

3.4.2 Treatment on Council

Single representatives on Council have experienced poor treatment while on Councils, limiting their involvement in the decision-making process. This was touched upon in various submissions, with the NTEU describing the low staff representation as the 'marginalisation of staff ... voice in Victorian universities', and explained that due to this marginalisation, there was an 'acute risk of a power imbalance between senior management and staff ... members, with these members being side-lined and ignored'.¹⁶⁰ Deakin University Branch of the NTEU wrote that 'the staff ... representatives on Council often report feeling superfluous and unheard'.¹⁶¹

The NTEU wrote of staff representatives being excluded from certain discussions in Council. They noted that 'elected staff representatives at several Victorian university councils constantly battling exclusion from council proceedings, based on an alleged

¹⁵⁶ Name withheld, *Submission 41*, received 24 February 2026; Name withheld, *Submission 55*, received 26 February 2026.

¹⁵⁷ George Lekakis AO, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ National Tertiary Education Union, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, pp. 22, 36.

¹⁶¹ National Tertiary Education Union Deakin University Branch, *Submission 59*, received 27 February 2026, p. 3.

conflict of interest by virtue of being staff representatives'.¹⁶² Monash University Branch of the NTEU affirmed this, writing that staff representatives 'are regularly asked to excuse themselves from deliberations on the grounds of conflict of interest'.¹⁶³ Swinburne University of Technology Branch of the NTEU also stated, that 'staff ... representatives are frequently excluded from Swinburne University of Technology Council processes when matters of remuneration for senior executives, or other matters considered "commercial in confidence" are discussed'.¹⁶⁴

There were also reports of staff representatives being harassed when raising instances of staff mistreatment on Council at Federation University and Swinburne University of Technology.¹⁶⁵ A result of staff mistreatment on Council, beyond the impact on the staff member themselves, is reluctance by other staff to undertake the roll of staff representative on Council. Swinburne University of Technology Branch of the NTEU noted that two staff representatives on the Council between 2020 and 2025 were made redundant during their tenure, impacting 'a significant chilling of staff willingness to participate in university governance, including among members who have directly expressed to us their reluctance to put themselves forward'.¹⁶⁶

Submissions made claims of staff representatives not receiving appropriate workload relief. The NTEU noted that 'solitary membership poses the risk of excessive workloads for staff ... limiting their effective participation in the governing body and its committees'.¹⁶⁷ Dr Adam Lucas of APU also spoke of workload, and the need for a recognition of the additional work for elected staff members.¹⁶⁸ With only one staff member being charged with representing staff interests, on top of their regular workload, without sufficient support they are highly likely to be unable to contribute properly.

FINDING 24: A single-elected staff member cannot represent the varying staff cohorts in Council, is at higher risk of mistreatment, and often does not receive appropriate workload relief. These conditions make it more difficult when there is a sole staff member to participate and influence Council decisions.

3.4.3 Strengthening representation in university governance

Despite the number of evidence collected from staff arguing in favour of strengthening representation of staff in university Council, the Committee found that universities had mixed in their responses on how (or whether) to increase staff representation on Council. Once again key stakeholders and universities disagree on the changes needed

¹⁶² National Tertiary Education Union, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, p. 22.

¹⁶³ National Tertiary Education Union Monash University Branch, *Submission 77*, received 1 March 2026, p. 6.

¹⁶⁴ National Tertiary Education Union Swinburne University Branch, *Submission 79*, received 1 March 2026, p. 7.

¹⁶⁵ Dr Tim Moore, *Submission 89*, received 1 March 2026, pp. 4–5.

¹⁶⁶ National Tertiary Education Union Swinburne University Branch, *Submission 79*, received 1 March 2026, p. 6.

¹⁶⁷ National Tertiary Education Union, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, p. 36.

¹⁶⁸ Dr Adam Lucas, Founding Member, Academics for Public Universities, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 28–29.

to strength governance and representation in Council. The sections below describe the two different approaches and the recommendation of the Committee on how to strengthen staff representation.

Universities' actions to strengthen representation

While all universities stated it is important to have representation of staff in governance, they countered that there already are other avenues outside of Council to involve staff such as the Academic Board, committees, other representative bodies, official consultation forums, etc.

As of early June 2026, La Trobe University and Deakin University had increased their number of elected staff representatives to two. In the hearings, La Trobe stated 'from the next meeting of council, which will be in June [2026], 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'.¹⁶⁹ Similarly in a correspondence to the Chair of this Committee on 1 June 2026, Deakin University advised that its Council had unanimously approved increasing its elected staff members to two: one academic staff and one professional staff.¹⁷⁰ The Committee commends the decisions by these two universities.

Federation University stated in its submission that it had 'strengthened staff representation on Council', although it is not clear how that has been achieved as no further details were provided, and they still have a sole elected staff representative. During the hearings, RMIT University stated additional elected staff members on Council was 'under consideration',¹⁷¹ and Swinburne University of Technology said that 'we are very enthusiastically looking at how it is that we would expand the council to enable more representation from staff and students'.¹⁷²

Universities raised concerns about increasing the number of staff representatives. Monash University was outspoken in its view that increasing elected members on the Council did not improve governance. It stated in its submission that 'it is evident that there is no correlation between the number of elected members and better governance. Nor do higher numbers of elected members ensure a diversity of perspectives'.¹⁷³ Monash University recommended against legislative changes to amend the composition of Council.¹⁷⁴

One concern regarded the size of Councils. Victoria University stated it had not increased staff representation on Council—but 'it is not because we are averse

¹⁶⁹ Professor Theo Farrell, Vice-Chancellor and President, La Trobe University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20.

¹⁷⁰ Deakin University, *Supplementary Submission 4a*, received 1 June 2026, p. 1.

¹⁷¹ Professor Alec Cameron, Vice-Chancellor and President, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

¹⁷² Professor Simon Ridings, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer, Swinburne University of Technology, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2025, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 46.

¹⁷³ Monash University, *Submission 107*, received 3 March 2026, p. 3.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

to things; it is just that there is a debate about governance and the ideal sizes of council'.¹⁷⁵ Deakin University noted that with regards to the ECUG Final Report, 'there are some where there are almost internally conflicting messages around size versus representation in terms of an effective governing body'.¹⁷⁶ The University of Melbourne noted that it was 'confront[ing] the traditional question of what is the right scale and what is the right size [of a Council], for which there are no right answers',¹⁷⁷ and its submission recommended that any changes to the numbers of elected members of Council 'minimise the total size of Council where possible'.¹⁷⁸ Monash University wrote in its submission that '[t]he size of many governing bodies, as dictated by legislation, has been identified as a challenge to best practice'.¹⁷⁹

Some universities noted that strengthening representation was not just about having the numbers but ensuring that elected staff members feel confident and comfortable to participate fully. One of Federation University's key observations in its submission was to 'strengthen practical support and protocols for elected ... staff Council members', as they recognised that 'staff representatives may experience tensions between governance obligations and their employment relationship'.¹⁸⁰ Swinburne University of Technology also wrote in its submission that it 'considers effectiveness of voice to be as important as formal numerical representation and will assess structural, reporting and engagement mechanisms accordingly'.¹⁸¹ Monash University said similarly, that diversity of voices 'is not just the numbers; it is the culture, it is the level of inclusion, it is the quality of that engagement'¹⁸² from elected members.

FINDING 25: As of June 2026, La Trobe University and Deakin University have committed to increasing the number of staff-elected representatives on Council to two. Other Victorian universities are considering an increase, but listed concerns such as the lack of guarantee in diverse perspectives, and Council size.

Staff and organisations' opinion on strengthening representation

Evidence heard by the Committee from staff and organisations were unanimous in how to elevate staff voice at the highest governance level: increase the number of elected staff members on Councils.¹⁸³ The NTEU submission, which was supported

¹⁷⁵ Professor Adam Shoemaker, Vice-Chancellor and President, Victoria University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 59.

¹⁷⁶ Professor Iain Martin, Vice-Chancellor and President, Deakin University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 8.

¹⁷⁷ Professor Glyn Davis, Interim Vice-Chancellor, The University of Melbourne, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 28.

¹⁷⁸ The University of Melbourne, *Submission 62*, received 27 February 2026, p. 3.

¹⁷⁹ Monash University, *Submission 107*, received 3 March 2026, p. 2.

¹⁸⁰ Federation University, *Submission 57*, received 27 February 2026, pp. 5–6, 9.

¹⁸¹ Swinburne University of Technology, *Submission 84*, received 1 March 2026, p. 4.

¹⁸² Professor Sharon Pickering, Vice-Chancellor and President, Monash University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

¹⁸³ Associate Professor William Partlett, *Submission 46*, received 24 February 2026, p. 3; Name withheld, *Submission 71*, received 28 February 2026, p. 2; Dr James Walker, *Submission 19*, received 13 February 2026, p. 3; Name withheld, *Submission 23*, received 18 February 2026, p. 7.

by 21 organisations (including many who provided separate submissions),¹⁸⁴ recommended this increase. It stated:

Victorian legislation should be amended to increase the minimum number of elected staff members on university governing bodies to three, constituting no less than 20% of total membership.

The Chair of the academic governing body may count towards this minimum membership, provided:

- Principle 3 (Independence) has been implemented and assured; and
- Effective mechanisms exist for the input of professional staff.¹⁸⁵

FINDING 26: Staff and organisations recommend increasing the number of elected staff representatives on Council. While an additional elected staff member on Council would not address every aspect of representation raised by staff and organisations, it would encourage diversity of perspectives.

Strengthening representation through legislative changes

Based on all the evidence collected during this Inquiry, the Committee believes that there should be an increase in the number of staff on Victorian university Councils. However, in line with a recommendation it will make in Chapter 4, it supports raising the minimum number of elected staff members from one to three in the Victorian legislation, with the caveat that one of the three elected staff members can include the Chair of the Academic Board. Additional staff representation would bring Victoria into alignment with staff numbers on university Councils in other Australian states and would return them closer to historic levels of staff representation on Councils in Victoria.

An additional staff member on Council would address the concerns raised in this section around ensuring a variety of staff experiences on Council, as it would allow for more staff cohorts to be represented—reflecting the second principle of the ECUG.¹⁸⁶ Both La Trobe University and Deakin University have allocated their second staff member seat to professional staff, to ensure both academic and professional staff are

¹⁸⁴ The organisations that supported the NTEU's *Joint Reform Proposal* were: the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations, National Union of Students, Australian Democracy Network, Australian Education Union, Deakin University Student Association, Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic), Human Rights Law Centre, Human Rights Law Centre, Islamic Council of Victoria, La Trobe Student Union, Liberty Victoria, Monash Student Association, National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Postgraduate Association, RMIT University Student Union, Swinburne Student Association, Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, The University of Melbourne Graduate Student Association, The University of Melbourne Student Union, Victoria Trades Hall Council, Victoria University Postgraduate Association, and Young Workers Centre.

¹⁸⁵ National Tertiary Education Union, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, p. 35.

¹⁸⁶ Melinda Cilento, Sharan Burrow, Bruce Cowley, *Final Report and Principles / Expert Council on University Governance*, Canberra, August 2025, pp. 43–45.

represented on Council.¹⁸⁷ The Committee commends this decision, and while it will not mandate a similar allocation for other universities, it encourages them to consider this allocation.

As already mentioned, the Committee acknowledges the difficulties in ensuring diversity in representation for staff-elected members. Diversity includes, for example, the voice of multicultural staff, Indigenous staff, or staff with disability. Another aspect to consider in the tertiary education context is the location of campuses. While the metropolitan and regional representation of staff members on Council was not heavily discussed in submissions or the public hearings, the Committee notes the importance of staff representation as it relates to location. It understands that staff in regional campuses have different realities than staff in metropolitan campuses.

The Committee believes Councils offer limited opportunities for staff diversity representation due to the structure of the governing body, and the low number of staff-elected representatives. Additionally, only staff members have control over who is elected as their representatives on Council, limiting the influence the university or the Government can enact on who is chosen as a representative. While the Committee does not believe that diversity should be legislated or that there should be demographic quotas for elected members of Councils, it hopes that staff consider diversity in demographics when electing their peers for Council.

While increasing the number of staff representatives is crucial, the NTEU advised Councils should also ‘provide resourcing, training, workload relief, and protections against adverse action’ for elected staff members, and the Committee agrees.¹⁸⁸ Having additional staff representatives would reduce the burden on any one individual and help distribute workload. Even though additional staff representation would not remove the possibility of poor treatment on Council, there is strength in numbers, and it would be more difficult to bully or intimidate multiple individuals. With additional staff representation, representatives would hopefully feel more comfortable in speaking out.

The Committee emphasises that elected staff members would need to receive adequate training, workload relief, and resources to feel equipped and confident in contributing fulsomely to Council discussions. While providing training and resources are implementable objectives, ensuring that staff members feel confident is a result of culture, and the Committee encourages all Victorian universities to seriously examine the cultures in their governance bodies.

The Committee acknowledges that not all issues raised by stakeholders during this Inquiry can be addressed by an additional staff member on Council. Being excluded from discussions due to perceived conflicts of interest, or confidential topics, can occur whether there is one or multiple staff representatives. However, having elected staff members from different areas of the university and representing different cohorts would allow staff to have stronger voice in Councils.

¹⁸⁷ Professor Theo Farrell, Vice-Chancellor and President, La Trobe University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 20; Deakin University, *Supplementary Submission 4a*, received 1 June 2026, p. 1.

¹⁸⁸ National Tertiary Education Union, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, p. 6.

The Committee believes legislative changes to increase the number of staff in Council are crucial to guarantee a stronger involvement of staff in the decision-making process and, most importantly, to ensure consistency on Councils' composition among the eight public universities.

RECOMMENDATION 13: That the Victorian Government amend the enabling Acts of all Victorian universities to require all Victorian university Councils to have a minimum of three elected staff members (this can include Chair of the Academic Board) on Council.

3.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Committee heard from staff and professional organisations regarding their experiences of poor transparency, accountability, and representation on their university Councils. Staff's concerns centred around lack of information provided for major strategic and operational decisions impacting their employment, a lack of understanding of the Council appointment processes, weak mechanisms for them to hold Council accountable in the case of adverse actions or outcomes, and the risks of low influence and poor treatment on Council due to low numbers of staff-elected representatives.

The Committee appreciates that the Commonwealth is currently considering how best to implement the ECUG Principles, many of which will address these issues. To ensure consistency across Victorian universities, the Committee has made recommendations to enhance transparency, accountability, and the staff voice on Council, namely through legislative changes.

Chapter 4

Concerns and impacts of university governance on students

This Chapter will discuss the concerns and impacts of the current university governance system on university students. As with staff, the main issues cited by students echo the commentary throughout the Expert Council on University Governance report, as well as the Final Report from the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee's Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers.¹ There are no major departures from said commentary with regards to the Victorian landscape.

In this Inquiry, the Committee received submissions mainly from student organisations, including the University of Melbourne Student Union, and Graduate Association, the Monash Graduate Association, La Trobe Student Union, and the Swinburne Student Association. The National Union of Students (NUS) and the Council of Australian Graduate Associations (CAPA) were key signatories to the National Tertiary Education Union's (NTEU) Joint Reform Proposal, but provided additional commentary through individual submissions beyond the Proposal. The evidence received from a student perspective was small in comparison to a staff perspective. However, the Committee notes that many of concerns and impacts of students were similar to staff. For this reason, this Chapter will refer to recommendations made in Chapter 3.

In line with the Terms of reference and the topics discussed in the submissions received, this Chapter will cover the following concerns and related impacts: transparency, accountability, and representation in Council. As with Chapter 3, within each topic, this Chapter will analyse and discuss the critiques moved by students, followed by their suggestions on how to address their concerns.

4.1 Profile of students at universities

The number of students at Victorian universities are reported in their annual reports. While the formatting differs, Victorian universities also report on varying cohorts, such as undergraduate, postgraduate, domestic, and international. For 2025, Victorian universities had the following 2025 numbers:

¹ Melinda Cilento, Sharan Burrow, Bruce Cowley, *Final Report and Principles / Expert Council on University Governance*, Canberra, August 2025; Parliament of Australia, Education and Employment Legislation Committee, *Quality of governance at Australian higher education providers: final report*, Canberra, December 2025.

Table 4.1 Victorian university student numbers for 2025, enrolments

Higher education students	Undergraduate ^a	Postgraduate ^b	Domestic	International (in Victoria)	Notes ^c
Deakin University					
61,704	39,766	18,954	44,881	16,862	
Federation University					
13,199	9,844	3,014	9,145	4,054	Dual-sector institution VET students: 7,393
La Trobe University					
39,648	29,311	10,310	29,837	9,811	Rural/ remote students: 7,360 Indigenous: 381
Monash University					
91,850	Not available (2024 data available)	Not available (2024 data available)	Not available (2024 data available)	Not available (2024 data available)	
RMIT University					
81,883	57,609	19,150	Not available	Not available	Dual-sector institution VET students: 19,122
Swinburne University of Technology					
43,906	25,843	4,178	18,112	7,420	Dual-sector institution VET students: 25,303
University of Melbourne					
76,504	38,564	37,940	41,312	35,192	
Victoria University					
39,571	25,856	11,089	19,377	9,190	Dual-sector institution VET students: 13,805

Notes: Student numbers only include those in higher education. For dual-sector institutions, the number of students enrolled in Vocational and Education Training (VET) programs are listed separately under the Notes column.

Where statistics are solely listed by 'student load (EFTSL)', the Committee has calculated enrolments for those categories by calculating the percentage of the student load, and mirroring to total student population.

- 'Undergraduate' includes an Associate degree, Bachelor degree, and Undergraduate certificate.
- 'Postgraduate' includes a Graduate diploma or certificate, Masters Degree by coursework, Masters degree by research, and Research degree.
- 'Notes' includes any distinct cohorts included in university statistics, where relevant to the Inquiry.

Source: Deakin University, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 17; Federation University Australia, *Annual Report 2025*, Mt Helen, 2026, p. 55; La Trobe University, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 42; Monash University, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 25; RMIT University, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 38; Swinburne University, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. AR: 53; University of Melbourne, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 30; University of Melbourne, *2025 Annual Report*, 2026, <<https://about.unimelb.edu.au/strategy/annual-reports/2025-annual-report>> accessed 25 May 2026; Victoria University, *Annual Report 2025*, Melbourne, 2026, p. 25.

The breakdown of student cohorts mostly depends on the type of degrees they are undertaking at university (undergraduate or postgraduate), whether they are domestic or international students, and the campus where they study (metropolitan or regional). There are also cohorts of students with special needs that might require special considerations during their education journey, mature students, and multicultural and Indigenous students. Several of these cohorts of students are discussed in the submissions received by the Committee. Similarly to staff, students expressed concerns about the lack of transparency and accountability of governing bodies, providing their different perspectives and experiences.

4.2 Lack of transparency in university Councils

The Committee heard from student associations who were concerned with transparency in Victorian university governing bodies. The University of Melbourne Student Union stated that Council's lack of transparency 'undermines universities' legitimacy as public institutions and erodes the trust of students'.² Students cited lack of transparency occurring in varying ways. Similarly to staff, students' concerns were primarily about the lack of transparency in Councils' decision-making processes. Students also believe there is insufficient rationale provided by the Council in explaining decisions after they were made.

4.2.1 Decision-making processes

Most submissions by students referenced secrecy in Council and the lack of understanding of how decisions were made. This was by the far the largest issue raised by students, who evidently feel isolated from the process of decision-making despite being the groups who experience the biggest impact (together with staff).

The La Trobe Student Union stated that 'governance culture at La Trobe reflects ... restricted transparency in Council deliberations', further elaborating that 'Council deliberations are not reported in detailed or accessible form to students'.³ The same issue of transparency in decision-making processes is shared by the University of Melbourne Student Union: 'the absence of clear information about Council decision-making ... obscures how universities balance financial, educational and social objectives'.⁴

During the public hearing, Felix Hughes, president of the National Union of Students stated that 'agendas are not shared with us. Minutes are not shared with us ... we [the union, and students more broadly] have no idea how decisions are made in the university council sometimes'.⁵ Similar concerns about the availability of council minutes and financial reports were raised by CAPA.⁶

² The University of Melbourne Student Union, *Submission 69*, received 27 February 2026, p. 7.

³ La Trobe University Student Union, *Submission 85*, received 1 March 2026, pp. 2, 4.

⁴ University of Melbourne Student Union, *Submission 69*, received 27 February 2026, p. 8.

⁵ Felix Hughes, President, National Union of Students, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 57.

⁶ Council of Australian Postgraduate Association, *Submission 106*, received 5 March 2026, p. 23.

The lack of explanation provided to students about decisions that would directly impact them, was described as offensive. Students provided examples to the Committee namely about changes to studies or to student services. The La Trobe Student Union wrote that there was ‘no systematic publication of decision rationales affecting student services or academic policy’.⁷ The submission emphasised that transparency should include explanations of decisions that impacts teaching, research priorities, staffing, and student services, and that ‘without transparency, educational and research decisions cannot be meaningfully scrutinised by the university community’.⁸

Amy Roseman, a student at RMIT University, wrote that ‘key governance decisions that directly affect educational quality and affordability often occur without visible consultation or clear explanation’, and she referenced decisions such as course restructures and discontinuations, reductions to staff, or campus facility closures. She also stated that students typically learn of these decisions after they have been made, which weakens trust.⁹ Roseman noted that it was not clear if and how student consultation processes shaped decisions at Council, writing that ‘when RMIT publishes an Annual Report and governance documents, there is no consistent public reporting on how student feedback informed strategic decisions’, and that consultation is often perceived as advisory. Contributing to a lack of transparency, this ‘diminishes trust and undermines inclusivity’.¹⁰

During public hearings, the NUS President spoke of an example where Monash University cancelled tutorials in the Faculty of Law. Despite students being ‘extraordinarily concerned’, NUS stated that no rationale was published ‘that we have understood’.¹¹ While this is an example of the issues of transparency, it should be noted that the Vice-Chancellor of Monash University addressed this issue in their public hearing. They stated that Monash University was ‘able to support students and colleagues coming together to resolve that issue. I [the Vice-Chancellor] think it has been solved to everyone’s satisfaction’.¹² The statement provided by the Monash University Vice-Chancellor does not align with the evidence provided by NUS. The Committee finds this misalignment concerning showing how the existing tension between governing bodies and the student cohort.

FINDING 27: Students cite a lack of transparency in decision-making processes on Council, and in Council’s explanation of major decisions to students. The result of current transparency levels has led to an erosion of trust by students in the university.

⁷ La Trobe University Student Union, *Submission 85*, received 1 March 2026, p. 4.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Amy Roseman, *Submission 88*, received 1 March 2026, p. 3.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

¹¹ Felix Hughes, President, National Union of Students, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 53.

¹² Professor Sharon Pickering, Vice-Chancellor and President, Monash University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 49.

4.2.2 Strengthening transparency in university governance

Universities have stated various actions they are taking to strengthen transparency, which was discussed in Section 3.2.3, and is equally applicable to students.

As with staff, students were unanimous in the need to strengthen transparency. All the student organisations that provided submissions included recommendations to increase transparency around Council decision-making, regarding both the process itself and the reasoning behind major decisions. In their submission, the University of Melbourne Graduate Association recommended the following:

ensuring transparency in how and why decisions have been made, including how student and staff voice was involved, considered and integrated' and that 'decision-making, including through co-design and consultation processes should always be followed by 'closing the loop', including information on how and why certain decisions were made.¹³

The publication of relevant material to inform students about decisions made at Council level also were a priority for students. The La Trobe Student Union recommended legislation require 'timely publication of Council agendas and outcome summaries; contextual explanations for major strategic decisions affecting education and research'.¹⁴

The Swinburne Student Association recommended universities 'provide clear information about what was approved or changed, the reason for the change, the expected impact on students and the broader community, how impacts will be monitored and reviewed', suggesting that universities could publish a short, accessible summary when major decisions occurred with the above information.¹⁵

Simplification of the language and accessible material for all students represents an important aspect to consider enhancing transparency. The University of Melbourne Student Union recommended to 'require councils to publish accessible summaries of decisions on defined "material matters" ... includ[ing] decisions related to: major policy changes affecting student or staff ... and significant organisational restructures or cost-cutting measures'¹⁶. CAPA also recommended that all 'non-industry and commercial items' discussed at Council meetings should be made available to students.¹⁷

NUS did not have a standalone recommendation about transparency, however as stated earlier was a key signatory for the Joint Reform Proposal by the NTEU. As such, they endorsed all the recommendations made in that proposal, including to 'publish agendas and outcomes of meetings; [and to] provide context to the outcomes published when they concern material matters affecting the university community'.¹⁸

¹³ The University of Melbourne Graduate Student Association, *Submission 63*, received 27 February 2026, p. 4.

¹⁴ La Trobe University Student Union, *Submission 85*, received 1 March 2026, p. 6.

¹⁵ Swinburne Student Association, *Submission 44*, received 24 February 2026, p. 5.

¹⁶ The University of Melbourne Student Union, *Submission 69*, received 27 February 2026, p. 14.

¹⁷ Council of Australian Postgraduate Association, *Submission 106*, received 5 March 2026, p. 24.

¹⁸ National Union of Students, *Submission 101*, received 2 March 2026, p. 13.

The Committee notes these recommendations from student associations and believes that universities need to publicly provide more information about key outcomes and decisions made from Councils. It is integral for students to trust their university's decision-making processes and the outcome of these processes. Without information, it is understandable that trust diminishes.

In the previous chapter, in Section 3.2.3, the Committee noted universities' actions on strengthening transparency, and that many of them have already taken steps to improve their communications regarding Council deliberations and decisions. Recommendation 7 in Chapter 3 addresses the issues raised by students, which recommended publishing Council agendas, outcomes, and a communique.

FINDING 28: Student organisations unanimously recommend that Victorian universities strengthen transparency through publishing Council agendas and outcomes of meetings, including the rationale used to reach major decisions that impact students.

4.3 Lack of accountability in university Councils

Similarly to transparency, the Committee heard substantial concerns about accountability in university Councils. Students and student associations concerns could be categorised into two primary areas:

1. insufficient reporting, and lack of clear reporting lines
2. weak complaints processes.

These two topics are discussed in the following sections to identify the areas of improvement on accountability towards students.

4.3.1 Insufficient reporting

Students and student associations discussed universities' reporting on outcomes, and their perceived lack of clear reporting lines. They felt, broadly speaking, reporting was not sufficiently clear to ensure accountability for outcomes. Students also believe it is not easy to understand who was responsible for what, also weakening accountability. Without clear reporting, students indicated they did not believe governing bodies were being sufficiently held responsible.

Similarly to staff concerns about outcomes, the Committee notes that outcomes are not referring to rankings, in this context. Moreso, outcomes refer to student experience, opportunities, teaching and research quality—issues that impact students on the ground.

The University of Melbourne Student Union wrote about accountability and outcomes in its submission, stating that it believed:

University councils are not consistently accountable for strategy, performance and outcomes on matters affecting students. While university councils are responsible for institutional strategy and risk, they do not reliably oversee or publicly report on outcomes that affect students and the communities in which they operate.¹⁹

They elaborated on this point, adding that ‘High-level summaries do not generally explain ... how performance against student-centred outcomes (e.g. complaints, appeals, equity outcomes, mental health impacts) are tracked and addressed over time’.²⁰ They concluded the university has not provided student-centred accountability due to a lack of visibility.²¹

CAPA also discussed insufficient reporting as an accountability failure, noting its members were concerned by the lack of financial reporting about universities. As discussed earlier, while Victorian universities do have strict financial reporting requirements that are included in their annual reports, much of the detail is high-level and thus not accessible to staff and students. CAPA emphasised this, stating that ‘universities ... have complex financial structures, which can make understanding the financial position difficult based on the annual report’.²²

Amy Roseman’s submission discussed how she believed RMIT University was not being accountable for outcomes impacting disability students. She stated that ‘reporting on disability outcomes is not publicly audited against rigorous benchmarks at governance level’, and that public reporting did not consistently include ‘how outcomes for students with disability compare with equity commitments’.²³ The limited information provided by the Council results in an accountability deficit, where actions impacting students with disability are not able to be judged by the primary stakeholders—the students.

Aside from insufficient reporting on outcomes, student associations wrote that reporting lines were not always clear, and it was uncertain who was responsible for what. The University of Melbourne Graduate Association noted this, stating:

Some elected representatives have noted significant issues in identifying who is ultimately responsible for a change and/or capable of making that change. When raising an issue, they may be sent through a confusing web of people and departments who all determine that they do not have the power to address the issue. Alternatively, others may simply not follow up or reply to emails.²⁴

¹⁹ The University of Melbourne Student Union, *Submission 69*, received 27 February 2026, p. 6.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations, *Submission 106*, received 5 March 2026, p. 23.

²³ Amy Roseman, *Submission 88*, received 1 March 2026, p. 4.

²⁴ The University of Melbourne Graduate Student Association, *Submission 63*, received 27 February 2026, p. 12.

When this occurs, it creates confusion and additional bureaucracy, which discourages both accountability and involvement in decision-making processes.²⁵ Swinburne Student Association noted that accountability was strengthened when governing bodies ‘clearly assign responsibility for major matters’,²⁶ implying that this was not entirely the case currently.

FINDING 29: Students and student associations are concerned that universities do not sufficiently publicly report on outcomes that impact students. Students also state that reporting lines are not always clear resulting in weak accountability of governing bodies.

4.3.2 Complaints processes

Students and student associations also discussed complaints processes at universities. While staff members raised concerns about the lack of clarity around complaint processes, students criticised them to be too internal and bureaucratic. Both groups, however, noted concern over reprisal from making a complaint.

The University of Melbourne Student Union described the inadequacy of the student appeals process. They noted outcomes were taking six to twelve months, which are longer than the timelines stated in policy, and in some cases, mean that a successful resolution for the student is not possible. They stated the process was incredibly burdensome for the student, and that, although appeals processes were under the purview of the Academic Board, the issues with student appeal reflected a Council oversight failure.²⁷ Overall, there was a lack of trust in the University’s complaint system, which was cited as a common theme from students.²⁸

CAPA stated similarly, that the complaints processes can be very burdensome on the student, to the point of discouraging making a complaint. During the public hearing, Jesse Gardner-Russell, the President of CAPA stated:

one of the issues with making complaints is the length and the bureaucratic nature of these complaints can take a long time. Particularly if you are a student with a lot on your plate, let us say you are working a job and studying is your five-to-nine, not your nine-to-five, then going through months and months of a complaint system is probably going to be something that turns someone off making a complaint.²⁹

Amy Roseman discussed complaints processes for disability-related complaints, and how complaints about disability adjustments ‘are often handled within the same institutional hierarchy responsible for implementing those adjustments’.³⁰ This creates

²⁵ The University of Melbourne Graduate Student Association, *Submission 63*, received 27 February 2026, p. 12.

²⁶ Swinburne Student Association, *Submission 44*, received 24 February 2026, p. 3.

²⁷ The University of Melbourne Student Union, *Submission 69*, received 27 February 2026, p. 9.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁹ Jesse Gardner-Russell, President, Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

³⁰ Amy Roseman, *Submission 88*, received 1 March 2026, p. 11.

a concern of bias in complaints handling and contributes to the lack of trust that students experience with their university governing bodies.

During the hearings, the Committee also heard of potential negative repercussions for raising complaints. The President of CAPA stated that when he raises concerns about the university, he is concerned as to whether it will impact his career options as an academic. He stated it was a risk, but ‘that normalising students speaking up alongside academics is a better solution in the long term than potentially continuing this current culture’.³¹ The NUS President affirmed the sentiment that students feel they cannot raise certain issues due to feeling they will be targeted. He stated ‘students are regularly penalised for raising things with the university. Universities will lock students out of discussions when they hear feedback from students that is not what they want to hear’.³²

FINDING 30: Complaints processes at universities can be lengthy, bureaucratic, centralised, and result in fear of reprisal against students. For these reasons, complaints processes are not always trusted and contribute to a perceived lack of accountability in governing bodies.

4.3.3 Strengthening accountability in university governance

Considering all the concerns and issues raised by key stakeholders, this section looks at suggestions made by students and student associations on how accountability of Councils could be strengthened. This section includes the perspective of universities and students’ suggestions.

Universities’ opinion on strengthening accountability

As stated in Chapter 3, universities spoke of accountability through their submissions and public hearings. However, discussions were generally not in relation to accountability to students, but rather accountability to staff or the community at large. Universities did not directly address most of the concerns described in this section.

The exception was complaints processes for students, which the Committee asked several universities about during the hearings. La Trobe University confirmed the following:

[the university has] various processes that provide ... 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.³³

³¹ Jesse Gardner-Russell, President, Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

³² Felix Hughes, President, National Union of Students, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 57.

³³ Professor Theo Farrell, Vice-Chancellor, La Trobe University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 24.

Swinburne University of Technology explained that it had just reformed its complaints processes and later provided some information to the Committee about its external complaints process, which responds to the public and students—it is ‘a detailed complaints management framework. Swinburne has a dedicated team to triage complaints, reviews, appeals and misconduct’.³⁴

Victoria University stated it had a centralised student complaints office, which triages and examines complaints, conducts data collection, engages with the National Student Ombudsman, and reports complaints issues regularly to the executives.³⁵

While universities explained their complaints processes, and public complaints processes documents can generally be found on university websites, the primary concerns of students—the bureaucratic and lengthy nature of complaints and the fear of negative repercussions—were not sufficiently addressed.

The Committee also notes Federation University’s discussion on accountability and outcomes in its submission. One of its key points the university highlighted was that, in a regional context, accountability to students was also accountability to the community, and was more direct and impactful than in a metropolitan context because of the more tangible impacts the university can have in smaller communities.³⁶ For this reason, Federation University recommended outcomes for students and the community should be included in as one of the factor to measure governance, noting that structural compliance does not tell the whole picture. It argued the most importance outcomes (and thus metrics for success) were: ‘student access and success, staff and student wellbeing, graduate outcomes, community benefit and contribution to regional workforce needs’.³⁷

The Committee agrees that these outcomes are a good indication as to whether a governance system is working and encourages universities to report on non-financial outcomes.

Students’ opinion on strengthening accountability

Students provided similar recommendations as staff on how to strengthen accountability. Their recommendations responded to their two main concerns of insufficient reporting, and complaints processes.

The University of Melbourne Student Union recommended that Councils should be required ‘to formally define, oversee and publicly report on non-financial performance outcomes’, which included:

- student complaints and appeals timeliness and outcomes
- student safety and wellbeing indicators

³⁴ Swinburne University of Technology, response to questions on notice, received 29 February 2026, p. 2.

³⁵ Professor Adam Shoemaker, Vice-Chancellor and President, Victoria University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p.57.

³⁶ Federation University, *Submission 57*, received 27 February 2026, pp. 4–5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

- access to fair academic review and appeal processes
- the impacts of workforce precarity on educational quality.³⁸

Similarly, La Trobe University Student Union noted performance reporting did not consistently include structured student input and recommended ‘annual public reporting on student engagement metrics’.³⁹ With this reporting, students would be able to more accurately judge whether their input is considered in university decisions. Finally, on the financial side, CAPA recommended that Councils provide quarterly financial reports, to provide students a better understanding the financial standing of the universities.⁴⁰ The Committee supports increased reporting in general and encourages universities to consider whether they can include any of these outcomes in their annual reports.

The University of Melbourne Graduate Association recommended that to strengthen accountability, ‘clear reporting lines, action items arising from meetings, and expectations of committee members’ must be prioritised.⁴¹ With a clear understanding of who is responsible for what, holding Council to account would be easier.

FINDING 31: To strengthen accountability, students and student associations recommend additional performance metrics in annual reports, and clearer reporting lines in terms of Council responsibility.

Regarding complaints processes, stakeholders provided two notable recommendations:

- The University of Melbourne Student Union suggested to ‘establish protected escalation pathways enabling staff, students and their representatives to raise systematic concerns directly with university councils, independent to management’.⁴²
- Amy Roseman recommended ‘independent review pathways external to faculty hierarchy’.⁴³

Both recommendations support enabling students to raise complaints being addressed independently and with confidence. The Committee supports this outcome and encourages universities to review their complaints processes to ensure their efficiency, independence, and safety for students. The Committee was concerned when hearing of perceived repercussions for students raising complaints and believes it is crucial for accountability for students to be able to have complaints addressed in a timely, safe manner with no fear of reprisal.

³⁸ The University of Melbourne Student Union, *Submission 69*, received 27 February 2026, p. 13.

³⁹ La Trobe University Student Union, *Submission 85*, received 1 March 2026, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations, *Submission 106*, received 5 March 2026, p. 24.

⁴¹ The University of Melbourne Graduate Student Association, *Submission 63*, received 27 February 2026, p. 13.

⁴² The University of Melbourne Student Union, *Submission 69*, received 27 February 2026, p. 15.

⁴³ Amy Roseman, *Submission 88*, received 1 March 2026, p. 11.

FINDING 32: Students and student associations recommend strengthening complaints processes for students and ensuring their independence so that students are protected.

RECOMMENDATION 14: That the Victorian Government conduct a review into universities' complaints processes for students to understand the process, its independence and efficiency, and develop clear mechanisms for escalation and accountability.

4.4 Student representation on university Councils

By far, the issue raised most often and with the most intensity by students and student organisations was student representation on university Councils. The Committee notes that there are other forms of engagement mechanisms with students—the Academic Board, student forums, surveys, etc. However, due to the scope of the Inquiry, this section will solely focus on representation on Council. As previously mentioned in this report, Victorian universities are required by legislation to have at least one elected student representative on the Council, for a term of a maximum of two years (although universities can impose their smaller term limits through regulations, if desired).

Until recently, all universities only had one representative, resulting in Victorian universities having the lowest proportion of elected students on Council as compared to other Australian jurisdictions.⁴⁴ However, in December 2025 The University of Melbourne approved an additional elected student representative, a graduate student, on Council.⁴⁵ La Trobe University and Deakin University have also recently decided to add an additional elected student representative on Council, meaning each university will have one undergraduate student representative and one graduate student representative.⁴⁶ The Committee commends these recent decisions by the three universities.

In discussing the lack of student representation on Councils, students and student associations brought up two main concerns:

- that a single student could not accurately represent the perspectives of varying cohorts of students.
- that students were treated poorly on Council.

⁴⁴ National Tertiary Education Union, Victorian Branch, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, p. 38.

⁴⁵ The University of Melbourne, *Submission 62*, received 27 February 2026, p. 4.

⁴⁶ La Trobe University, *Submission 108*, received 5 March 2026, p. 3; Claire Higgins, Chancellor, Deakin University, *Submission 4a*, received 1 June 2026, p. 1.

4.4.1 Variety of student experiences

As mentioned in the introduction to this Chapter, there are several cohorts of students. The most referenced cohorts include undergraduate, graduate, international, regional, students with disability, multicultural, and Indigenous students. Students may belong to a single or several cohorts simultaneously. These different cohorts come with different past experiences and can face different realities in university. CAPA stated during their public hearing that depending on the cohort you belong to, 'you have a completely different relationship with the university and different pressures that are on you'.⁴⁷

While it is important to note that students on Council are not there to represent the interests of the cohorts they belong—e.g. an undergraduate student on Council is not solely advocating in the interests of undergraduates—they are there to provide a student perspective in the interests of the university. However, an undergraduate student, by nature, can only provide a perspective of an undergraduate. For this reason, there are limitations in having a single student representative on Councils.

The assumption that more student representation encourages a diversity of perspectives was rejected by Monash University, whose submission stated that 'it is evident that there is no correlation between the number of elected members and better governance. Nor do higher numbers of elected members ensure a diversity of perspectives'.⁴⁸ Monash University's statement was subsequently countered during the Committee's public hearings, with the President of the National Union of Students—also a student at Monash University—stating that it 'is just blatantly incorrect ... having multiple students on that board and that council will increase the number of students being represented'.⁴⁹ CAPA supports the same view:

it has been shown that increased participation of internal university stakeholders in governing committees improves research and financial performance, supporting the argument that participation of different stakeholders in strategic decision-making provides critical expert knowledge.⁵⁰

The Committee believes that more student representatives will naturally lead to an increased diversity in perspectives, due to the likelihood of students occupying different cohorts, and thus able to speak from the perspective of those multiple cohorts.

⁴⁷ Jesse Gardner-Russell, President, Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ Monash University, *Submission 107*, received 3 March 2026, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Felix Hughes, President, National Union of Students, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 57.

⁵⁰ Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations, *Submission 106*, p. 17.

Students and student associations spoke to the limitation of having a single student perspective, as it relates to diversity of views and experiences. During the hearings, several stakeholders stated very similar points. According to NUS:

you cannot expect one student to represent 60,000 students. There are so many different groups. There are domestic students, international students, undergrad, postgrad, regional. You cannot expect one student to do that work.⁵¹

CAPA also believes it is unreasonable to expect from one student to advocate for an entire student population:

It is unfair, actually, to expect an undergraduate student to be able to understand and be an expert on the issues faced by someone that is 10 years older than them, works a full-time job, has kids, has a mortgage and has a completely different interaction with university. Similarly, it is unfair to expect someone who is 20 and an undergraduate student to understand the issues faced by a postgraduate research student and the issues facing the research sector and understand how that all interplays in the university space.⁵²

The Monash Graduate Association (MGA) emphasised the different priorities of graduate students, and even within the graduate student cohort, between coursework and research students. It noted that graduate students as a whole cohort are older than undergraduates, and likely to be navigating different responsibilities than undergraduate students, such as housing costs, supporting a family, or working.⁵³ While undergraduate governance concerns focus around course offerings, teaching quality, and campus amenities, graduate coursework and research students have different governance concerns (and even to each other): coursework students are concerned with employment relevance, value for money, and administrative flexibility, while research students are more concerned with issues such as stipends, academic freedom, and research funding allocation.⁵⁴ The MGA argued that graduate research students are more akin to casual academic staff in terms of governance priorities. With such differing priorities, their perspectives are rarely accurately represented on Victorian university Councils, who typically have a single undergraduate as the elected student.

Yilin Liang, a graduate student at the University of Melbourne, wrote about how international students are underrepresented in governing bodies, and notably in Council. The primary message in her submission was that international students 'are central to institutional sustainability yet often peripheral to governance conversations that affect their lived realities'.⁵⁵ International students are often considered through governance frameworks in terms of finances and enrolment numbers, rather than through their outcomes and experiences. Other structured ways of engaging with

⁵¹ Felix Hughes, President, National Union of Students, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 57.

⁵² Jesse Gardner-Russell, President, Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

⁵³ Monash Graduate Association, *Submission 60*, received 27 February 2026, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Yilin Liang, *Submission 70*, received 27 February 2026, p. 1.

students do not necessarily result in meaningful participation for international students, due to cultural or linguistic barriers.⁵⁶ As such, their perspectives are not typically included in decision-making at governance levels. This point was reiterated by the Victorian Trades Hall Council in its public hearing, who stated that ‘we need to have dedicated structures within structures to make sure that international students get representation, because their needs are unique’.⁵⁷

Amy Roseman also wrote about the limited student voice at RMIT University, noting there was one student representative for over 94,000 students.⁵⁸ Particularly, she emphasised the lack of students with disability in the university Council. Her submission noted the lack of requirement for representation of students with disability on Council, and the result being that ‘accessibility is treated as an operational matter rather than a strategic governance priority’.⁵⁹ Students who have disabilities do not have a ‘direct structural voice in institutional discussions’, which Roseman argued was a clear governance gap.⁶⁰

FINDING 33: One single student representative on Council cannot provide diversity of perspectives because one student is unable to represent the perspectives of the varying cohorts, and the experiences of all students at the university.

Indigenous students

Several witnesses and submissions shared the experience of Indigenous students and the work that has been undertaken by First Nations organisations. The Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) noted, in its submission, that Koorie students face additional barriers in universities, in part due to their being ‘among the most dispersed communities in Australia’.⁶¹

A key initiative for improving Indigenous students’ experiences in Victorian universities is the Toorong Marnong Higher Education Accord, initially signed in 2008 and re-signed in 2016. It is a partnership between the VAEAI and the Victorian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, intended to improve higher education retention rates and outcomes for Indigenous students.⁶² The priorities of the Accord currently include the development of a student tracking tool, and a Toorong Marnong website that enables Koorie students to search for courses and receive further information from Victorian universities and TAFEs.⁶³

⁵⁶ Yilin Liang, *Submission 70*, received 27 February 2026, pp. 3–4.

⁵⁷ Danae Bosler, Assistant Secretary, Victorian Trades Hall Council, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 16–17.

⁵⁸ Amy Roseman, *Submission 88*, received 1 March 2026, p. 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, *Submission 99*, received 2 March 2026, p. 9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Ngaweeyan Maar-oo emphasised in its submission that outcomes for Indigenous students should be considered a core governance responsibility, and noted several Closing the Gap targets (such as Target 6: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70 per cent) that could be supported by universities.⁶⁴ Both Ngaweeyan Maar-oo and VAEAI recommended that performance reporting around Indigenous outcomes and activities for students should be undertaken by universities, given their status as public institutions.⁶⁵

FINDING 34: Indigenous students face additional barriers in universities. The Toorong Marnong Higher Education Accord is a partnership between Victorian universities and Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated and aims to improve higher education retention rates and outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION 15: That the Victorian Government work with Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated and universities to include Indigenous activities, engagement, and other supports being offered for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their annual reports.

4.4.2 Treatment of students on Council

Aside from the limited diversity that one student brings, students and student organisations discussed their concerns about the experience of the single student on Council, and their potential for being ignored, mistreated or overworked. It was argued that poor treatment on Council acts as a barrier for their proper inclusion in decision-making.

The NTEU spoke to this point. They stated that solitary membership raises ‘the acute risk of a power imbalance between senior management and ... student members, with these members being side-lined and ignored’.⁶⁶ They concluded that ‘a critical mass of ... student members is necessary for their effective participation’.⁶⁷ NUS reiterated this point, in its additional commentary beyond the Joint Reform Proposal. It stated that the single elected student member is ‘grossly outnumbered and easily side-lined from key decision-making processes’.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 111*, received 10 March 2026, pp. 5, 9.

⁶⁵ Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, *Submission 99*, received 2 March 2026, p. 12; Ngaweeyan Maar-oo, *Submission 111*, received 10 March 2026, pp. 9–10.

⁶⁶ National Tertiary Education Union, Victorian Branch, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, p. 36.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ National Union of Students, *Submission 101*, received 2 March 2026, p. 18.

Dr Tim Moore also spoke of exclusion in his submission, stating that there was ‘a clear intolerance for open discussion, alternative opinions etc., evidenced in cases of gross mistreatment of ... student representatives on councils’.⁶⁹ This exclusion speaks to the perception of the value of the student voice by Council. During the hearings, the Young Workers Centre referenced this, stating:

I think for young workers, we are told over and over and over again that our voice is worth less, that our efforts are worth less, we deserve to be paid less, we have to slog it out to have any type of validation or a living wage, and this is just how it is. I think that lacking representation of a student voice reinforces that notion of ‘why should we listen to young people?’⁷⁰

If students are sidelined from discussions, there is a risk of major decisions being made without student perspectives. It is important for student representatives to have the confidence to speak up in Council. The President of CAPA argued that the ‘current governance is ‘a model of ‘consent by silence’ ... silence from the committee is taken as consent for what the university is planning on doing’.⁷¹ This description was affirmed by other organisations’ testimony during the hearings.⁷² If the student representative is silent, it is potentially taken as approval.

Beyond being excluded or sidelined from discussions, some discussed overt mistreatment on Council. The NUS President named several actions experienced by student representatives that demonstrated disrespect, and which he stated as designed to intimidate:

- students being given a lower chair in Council meetings than other members
- students not being given glass of water in Council meetings, when other members are
- students attending a graduation ceremony as a university Council member, but informed they cannot attend the official welcoming ceremony with other members.⁷³

Finally, being overworked was also cited as a concern for student representatives. The NTEU noted that ‘solitary membership poses the risk of excessive workloads for ... student members, of understanding and responding to the views of ... student bodies, thus limiting their effective participation in the governing body’.⁷⁴ NUS also stated that having only a single student representative ‘places an unreasonable burden on those individuals, requiring them represent the breadth and diversity of views within their constituencies without the support of peers performing the same role’.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Dr Tim Moore, *Submission 89*, received 1 May 2026, p. 18.

⁷⁰ Yolanda Robson, Director, Young Workers Centre, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 11.

⁷¹ Jesse Gardner-Russell, President, Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 19–20.

⁷² Peter Tregear, Founding Member, Academics for Public Universities, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 25.

⁷³ Felix Hughes, President, National Union of Students, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 54.

⁷⁴ National Tertiary Education Union, Victorian Branch, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, p. 36.

⁷⁵ National Union of Students, *Submission 101*, received 2 March 2026, p. 18.

These experiences combined can result in students being nervous to speak up, and when they are the sole representative, you are experiencing them alone. This was summarised well by the NUS President, who stated:

one of the worst parts there is where you have one representative who is going into that room, versus 10 or 15 other people who can be quite intimidating, to speak up. So one of the proposals is to have multiple student representatives, so you are going into that room with an ally, so you are going into that room with someone that can second your motions, you are going into that room with actual support from your peers, because otherwise every time you raise a question you have 10 people go, 'Oh, that's not actually a real issue'.⁷⁶

FINDING 35: Students and student organisations are concerned about the elected student's experience on Council, as there have been claims of student representatives being ignored, mistreated or overworked.

Some universities also acknowledged that student representatives face barriers that hinder their full participation on Council. Federation University discussed the realities for student representatives in its submission. It explained:

Elected student ... Council members carry the same legal duties as appointed members, but operate under different conditions and often without the governance background and professional supports available to government of Council appointed directors. Student representatives typically serve short terms and may have limited time to build institutional knowledge ... These challenges are often more visible in smaller institutions and can act as a deterrent to participation, particularly for students with caring responsibilities or part-time study loads.⁷⁷

Federation University also reflected that its demographics made student participation in Council harder, as most of its students were mature age, female, and had jobs or caring responsibilities on top of their studies. The Vice-Chancellor explained these factors meant that it was 'hard to get them involved in the way that you would naturally do if you were in a city and they were coming straight from school and were more or less full time at the uni'.⁷⁸ The Committee commends the frankness of Federation University in acknowledging the barriers that student representatives face.

La Trobe University also reflected on the difficulties that a single student representative could face, noting 'if you were a single student on council and you do not have a peer with you, then it might feel quite isolating'.⁷⁹ He stated that the current student representative 'makes frequent contributions to discussion, so I am not sensing that

⁷⁶ Felix Hughes, President, National Union of Students, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 54–55.

⁷⁷ Federation University, *Submission 57*, received 27 February 2026, p. 9.

⁷⁸ Professor Duncan Bentley, Vice-Chancellor and President, Federation University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

⁷⁹ Professor Theo Farrell, Vice-Chancellor and President, La Trobe University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

that person feels inhibited in any way whatsoever'. However, if any evidence arose that current or past student representatives on Council did not feel supported—he 'would very much welcome that insight'.⁸⁰

Other universities have different interpretation on the issues of student representation in Council. Deakin University's Vice-Chancellor stated that the university had 'worked really hard to make sure that our students and staff members are full members of council. They are never excluded'.⁸¹ When asked directly by the Committee about claims that student representatives on Council do not feel heard and are not comfortable to speak up, the Vice-Chancellor responded by stating that 'I do not know where that came from, but that has not been my experience in seven years as a chancellor ... There has not been a concern in my time on council around that'.⁸²

The Committee is concerned about the different perspectives universities have on the issues student representative may experience in Councils despite the amount of evidence provided on this topic and the request for changes.

4.4.3 Strengthening representation in university Councils

Both universities and students provided commentary on how best to strengthen representation in Councils, and how to elevate the student voice at the highest governance level. Students and student organisations were broadly in agreement on the required actions to strengthen representation, but universities had more varied views.

Universities' actions to strengthen representation

Universities spoke at length about student representation on Council during the hearings and through their submissions. While some universities have added representatives already, others stated they were open to the idea, and others were less committal. Many emphasised that beyond having students simply on Council, they needed to ensure that students were full members of Council and were comfortable to participate.

As they did with regards to staff, universities emphasised the ways of student engagement beyond Council, such as through the Academic Board or student forums. The Committee agrees that students should be engaged by universities in varying ways, beyond Council—but having other engagement mechanisms does not discount the need for representation on Council, and due to the scope of the Inquiry, the Committee is not able to sufficiently comment on student engagement outside of Council.

⁸⁰ Professor Theo Farrell, Vice-Chancellor and President, La Trobe University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 21.

⁸¹ Professor Iain Martin, Vice-Chancellor, Deakin University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 9.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 11–12.

Additional student representatives

As stated earlier, as of June 2026 only the University of Melbourne, La Trobe University and Deakin University have approved an additional elected student representative on Council, to have one undergraduate and one graduate student each. During public hearings, the Committee asked universities about their view on student representation, and whether they would be open to increasing the number of students on Council.

Monash University was reluctant to acknowledge the need for additional student representatives and expressed that additional students would not guarantee an increase in diversity of perspective. As discussed in Chapter 3 Monash University has the same view with regards to increasing staff representatives on Council. Its Vice-Chancellor stated the following:

there is no question that the student and staff voice is important, and it is important at a range of levels and in a range of ways ... [but] how do you actually make sure that you get a diversity of voices in all the places that they are needed while balancing all of the other needs of a governing body as well? I think what underpins that is, of course, recognising that it is not just the numbers; it is the culture, it is the level of inclusion, it is the quality of that engagement.⁸³

As said in Chapter 3, the Committee agrees that diversity on Council depends on more than numbers, including culture, inclusion and quality of engagement. However, increasing the number of student representatives remains a key part of achieving that diversity.

Victoria University did not reject the idea of additional student representatives but was non-committal in its response to the Committee. As noted in Chapter 3, the University stated they had not addressed the issue ‘not because we are averse to things [i.e. to increasing the number of student representatives]; it is just that there is a debate about governance and the ideal sizes of council’.⁸⁴

RMIT University, Swinburne University of Technology, and Federation University were receptive to the idea of an additional student representative. RMIT University stated that it was ‘certainly open to the idea’, and noted that an additional student representative would likely be a student from vocational education, as a dual-sector institution.⁸⁵ Swinburne University of Technology stated that it was ‘enthusiastically looking at how it is that we would expand the council to enable more representation from staff and students’, but did not provide more detail than that.⁸⁶

⁸³ Professor Sharon Pickering, Vice-Chancellor and President, Monash University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, pp. 48–49.

⁸⁴ Professor Adam Shoemaker, Vice-Chancellor and President, Victoria University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 59.

⁸⁵ Professor Alec Cameron, Vice-Chancellor and President, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

⁸⁶ Professor Simon Ridings, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer, Swinburne University of Technology, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 46.

While being open to the idea of increasing student representation, Federation University explicitly left the decision to the state Government. Professor Duncan Bently, the Vice-Chancellor, expressed that student representation:

is a matter for the Victorian government. We were essentially established by the Victorian government. Half of our council are appointed by the government either through Governor in Council or the minister, which is fantastic, because then the government makes sure that there is really good representation, and we try with the other appointees to build that up. If the government and this inquiry think that more student representation is a good thing, we will work with that.⁸⁷

The Committee appreciates Federation University's stance and commends those who expressed their openness to increasing student representatives on Council. However, while some universities stated their openness to the idea, as discussed in Section 2.2, all universities rejected the need for legislative amendments to require universities to increase their elected student representation on Council. Universities told the Committee that the current legislation allowed them to increase the number of student representatives, if desired.⁸⁸ The Committee was concerned that, while universities could increase student representation without legislative requirement, none had done so prior to the Inquiry's establishment.

Student participation on Council

The Committee also discussed how to address possible barriers that student representatives faced on Council. Generally, universities believed the issue was best addressed through providing training for students, to allow them to contribute meaningfully.

Swinburne University of Technology spoke to its mechanisms in place on Council to ensure fair treatment and full participation of student representatives. Professor Simon Ridings, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer emphasised that:

as much as we are keen to see the conversation progress about what the numerical representation [of students on Council] is, we have also been very deliberate in making sure that the experience for them is appropriate and that their voices are actually meaningful and heard.⁸⁹

The Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor later elaborated that Swinburne University of Technology was:

very proactive in actually providing bespoke training for them [student representatives] when they do join the council, including even simple things like just making sure that they are introduced to all other council members so that they actually do have the

⁸⁷ Professor Duncan Bently, Vice-Chancellor and President, Federation University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 16.

⁸⁸ Letter from all Victorian universities' Vice-Chancellors, *Submission 114*, received 22 May 2026.

⁸⁹ Professor Simon Ridings, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer, Swinburne University of Technology, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 42.

relationships being built as well so that they are not just there as the representative. Like I said, they are there deliberately as a full member and we make sure that there is actually a process to help them be that and experience that.⁹⁰

Federation University also discussed the necessity of supporting elected student representatives on Council in its submission. One of its key observations was the need to 'strengthen practical support and protocols for elected student ... Council members'.⁹¹ In its submission, Federation University elaborated on this observation, stating:

Governance settings should support elected members through consistent induction and development, access to independent advice, and clear protocols for managing inherent tensions, including conflicts of interest. Consideration should also be given to whether participation mechanisms can be designed so student representatives can contribute meaningfully and accountably without being exposed to unreasonable liability or risk compared to trained and experienced directors. Without careful design, governance requirements can produce a perverse outcome where only a narrow subset of students feel able to participate.⁹²

La Trobe University also discussed how to strengthen representation through enabling students on Council. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, Professor Sue Bennett, emphasised the importance of students being fully equipped to participate in Council discussions:

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.⁹³

Finally, RMIT University's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Alec Cameron, discussed a convention at RMIT University where the president of the student union typically becomes the student representative on Council. He explained this convention resulted in the student representative being able to fully participate, as they had experience in a leadership role and were informed of the issues at RMIT University. The Vice-Chancellor stated that RMIT University has been able to guarantee an inclusive environment for all members in Council, including students:

the combination of an informed, articulate student and our chancellor Peggy O'Neal, who I would describe as very inclusive in terms of managing a committee meeting and making sure all voices are heard, [it] means that we hear those voices directly.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Professor Simon Ridings, Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer, Swinburne University of Technology, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 46.

⁹¹ Federation University, *Submission 57*, received 27 February 2026, p. 9.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Professor Sue Bennett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, La Trobe University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 27.

⁹⁴ Professor Alec Cameron, Vice-Chancellor, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 39.

Professor Cameron reiterated the student's inclusion when the Committee commented positively on this convention and its stated outcomes—'once again, our council does not discriminate between internal members and external members. All members are at all meetings'.⁹⁵

FINDING 36: Universities are open to increasing the number of student representatives on Council. However, they emphasise the need to ensure that students are enabled to participate fully, including through inductions and providing opportunities to build relationships with Council members.

The Committee agrees that ensuring students have the training and confidence to fully participate in Council discussions is essential to strengthening student voice at the highest governance levels. It encourages all Victorian universities to review their induction processes for students, and to examine the inclusion culture as it relates to students on Council.

Students' opinion on strengthening representation

Students and student organisations have the same recommendation on how to strengthen student representation on Council: to mandate additional student representatives. Every student association that provided submissions to this Inquiry, except for the Monash Graduate Association, signed onto the NTEU's Joint Reform Proposal, and endorsed their recommendation to increase the minimum number of elected student representatives to two.⁹⁶ However, there were slight nuances from varying groups which will be discussed below.

Aside from repeating the recommendation of the Joint Reform Proposal, NUS also recommended that student union presidents (or their nominee) be appointed as ex-officio members of Council.⁹⁷ La Trobe University Student Union also recommended the President of the La Trobe Student Union be one of the student representatives on Council. This would bring the total number of elected student representatives to three.⁹⁸

Numerous associations commented on the distinct nature of graduate students and made the recommendation to have a mandated seat on Council be for an elected graduate student. The University of Melbourne Graduate Student Association recommended precisely that: 'the two student positions on university councils should include one graduate student and one undergraduate student representative, considering the significant difference in university experiences'.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Professor Alec Cameron, Vice-Chancellor, RMIT University, public hearing, Melbourne, 15 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 40.

⁹⁶ National Tertiary Education Union, Victorian Branch, *Submission 52*, received 26 February 2026, pp. iv–v, 9.

⁹⁷ National Union of Students, *Submission 101*, received 2 March 2026, p. 18.

⁹⁸ La Trobe University Student Union, *Submission 85*, received 1 March 2026, p. 5.

⁹⁹ The University of Melbourne Graduate Student Association, *Submission 63*, received 27 February 2026, p. 3.

CAPA recommended the Government to amend the legislation to mandate three elected students: one undergraduate, one postgraduate by coursework, and one higher degree by research.¹⁰⁰ During the hearings, the President of CAPA emphasised the different priorities that undergraduate and graduate students have, which is why it was '100 per cent vital that there needs to be that delineation of the mode of study as the criteria for additional representatives'.¹⁰¹

The Monash Graduate Association made the same recommendation: to 'guarantee three student university council positions, with two reserved for each graduate student cohort'.¹⁰² It emphasised the distinctions between the cohorts of graduate coursework students and graduate research students, and stated that 'both deserve dedicated representation at university decision-making levels'.¹⁰³ The Committee agrees that there are significant distinctions in priorities between undergraduate and graduate students, and for that reason recommends there be at least one undergraduate and one graduate student on a university Council. The Committee also appreciates the differences in graduate coursework and research students but will not make a recommendation to that effect at this time.

Amy Roseman, who discussed the representation of students with disability in governance, recommended to 'mandate enhanced student representation',¹⁰⁴ which would encourage perspectives around accessibility to be better represented. She also recommended that there be 'guaranteed disability representation on Council'.¹⁰⁵ It is uncertain whether the latter recommendation refers to students or staff. The Committee agrees that disability perspectives are important and encourages university students to consider disability representation in electing its peers to Council.

Yilin Liang, who discussed the representation of international students in governance, recommended to 'encourage the inclusion of expertise in transnational student experience within governance structures ... [as] incorporating expertise related to international student transition, participation, and engagement would assist councils in interpreting student outcomes beyond standard performance metrics'.¹⁰⁶ Like above, the Committee agrees that international students play an important role in Victorian universities, and bring unique perspectives. The Committee encourages university students to consider international student representation in electing its peers to Council.

¹⁰⁰ Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations, *Submission 106*, received 5 March 2026, p. 20.

¹⁰¹ Jesse Gardner-Russell, President, Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations, public hearing, Melbourne, 14 May 2026, *Transcript of evidence*, p. 22.

¹⁰² Monash Graduate Association, *Submission 60*, received 27 February 2026, p. 7.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Amy Roseman, *Submission 88*, received 1 March 2026, p. 5.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p. 11.

¹⁰⁶ Yilin Liang, *Submission 70*, received 27 February 2026, p. 5.

While students did not discuss regional representation, the Committee notes that alongside inclusion considerations for students with disability, international students, etc., the perspectives of regional students should be encouraged to be represented in university Councils that have significant regional presences. The needs and priorities of students on regional campuses differ than those on a metropolitan campus, and they are an important perspective to consider. Aligned with statements regarding staff diversity in Chapter 3, the Committee encourages university students to consider regional student representation in electing its peers to Council.

FINDING 37: Students and student organisations unanimously recommend increasing the number of elected student representatives. Some included specificities, such as two graduate students (one coursework and one research), or student union presidents.

The evidence collected by the Committee through this Inquiry clearly indicate the need for changes to facilitate stronger participation of students within university Council and better engagement of all the different cohort of students within governing bodies. The Committee is convinced that increasing the number of representatives in Council will guarantee a more adequate representation of students, a stronger students' voices within governing bodies and more diversity of representatives.

Furthermore, the Committee supports the idea that increasing the number of students within Councils will guarantee better transparency and accountability of universities. A larger representation of students will allow students to raise concerns with governing bodies, advocate for issues affecting different cohorts, understand decision-making processes, and inform the entire student population on how these decisions are made, the rationale used, and the impact these decisions will have.

The Committee believes legislative changes are needed to guarantee consistent student representation amongst the eight public universities and that different cohort are represented within university governing bodies.

RECOMMENDATION 16: That the Victorian Government amend the enabling Acts of all Victorian universities to require all university Councils to have a minimum of two elected student members across various qualification levels on Council.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Committee heard from students and other organisations regarding their experiences of poor transparency, accountability, and representation on their university Councils. Students' concerns centred around a lack of understanding of the Council appointment processes, the bureaucratic nature of complaints processes, and the underrepresentation of students in Council.

The Committee appreciates that the Commonwealth is currently considering how best to implement the ECUG Principles, many of which will address these issues. To ensure consistency across Victorian universities, the Committee has made several recommendations to enhance transparency, accountability, and the staff voice on Council, namely through legislative changes.

RECOMMENDATION 17: That the Victorian Government conduct a review, after three years, into the impacts and effectiveness of the legislative changes to the enabling Victorian Acts of all universities, made as a result of this report.

**Adopted by the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament of Victoria, East Melbourne
2 July 2026**

Appendix A

About the Inquiry

A.1 Submissions

Submission number	Individual or organisation	Date received
1	Samuel Eaton	17 December 2025
2	Paul Murray	19 December 2025
3	Associate Professor John Kenny	14 January 2026
4	Deakin University	19 January 2026
5	Professor Matt Pinnuck	26 January 2026
6	Professor John Quiggin	31 January 2026
7	Dr Tony Chalkley	4 February 2026
8	Confidential	4 February 2026
9	Name withheld	4 February 2026
10	Name withheld	4 February 2026
11	Liam Wood-Baker	5 February 2026
12	Name withheld	5 February 2026
13	Dr Neelofar Rehman	5 February 2026
14	Name withheld	5 February 2026
15	Name withheld	9 February 2026
16	Name withheld	9 February 2026
17	Name withheld	10 February 2026
18	Name withheld	10 February 2026
19	Dr James Walker	13 February 2026
20	Dr Allan Patience	17 February 2026
21	Steve Else	17 February 2026
22	Name withheld	18 February 2026
23	Name withheld	18 February 2026
24	Professor Stephen Parker and Professor Stephen Bottomley	18 February 2026
25	Gregory Harper	18 February 2026
26	Benjamin Gussen	18 February 2026
26A	Supplementary submission	18 February 2026
26B	Supplementary submission	18 February 2026
26C	Supplementary submission	18 February 2026

Submission number	Individual or organisation	Date received
27	Fiona Kelly	19 February 2026
28	Professor Luke Beck	20 February 2026
29	Diana Booth	23 February 2026
30	Name withheld	23 February 2026
31	Akram Hourani	23 February 2026
32	Name withheld	23 February 2026
33	Associate Professor Mark Gregory	23 February 2026
34	Roslin Botlero	23 February 2026
35	Name withheld	23 February 2026
36	Alain Grossbard OAM JP	23 February 2026
37	Name withheld	23 February 2026
38	Name withheld	23 February 2026
39	Name withheld	23 February 2026
40	Name withheld	24 February 2026
41	Name withheld	24 February 2026
42	Yuan Yuan Chuy	24 February 2026
43	Name withheld	24 February 2026
44	Swinburne Student Association	24 February 2026
45	Name withheld	24 February 2026
46	Associate Professor William Partlett	24 February 2026
47	Name withheld	24 February 2026
48	Dr Mark Humphries	25 February 2026
49	RMIT University	25 February 2026
50	Name withheld	25 February 2026
51	Name withheld	26 February 2026
52	National Tertiary Education Union	26 February 2026
53	Name withheld	26 February 2026
54	Name withheld	26 February 2026
55	Name withheld	26 February 2026
56	Dr Peter Drummon	26 February 2026
57	Federation University	27 February 2026
58	Joint professors of Melbourne University	27 February 2026
59	Deakin University National Tertiary Education Union Branch Committee	27 February 2026
60	Monash Graduate Association	27 February 2026
60A	Supplementary submission	27 February 2026
60B	Supplementary submission	27 February 2026

Submission number	Individual or organisation	Date received
61	Name withheld	27 February 2026
62	The University of Melbourne	27 February 2026
63	The University of Melbourne Graduate Student Association	27 February 2026
64	Professor Rob Watts	27 February 2026
65	Kirsty Waring	27 February 2026
66	Young Workers Centre	27 February 2026
67	Victorian Trades Hall Council	27 February 2026
68	Victoria University	27 February 2026
68A	Victoria University	15 May 2026
69	The University of Melbourne Student Union	27 February 2026
70	Yilin Liang	27 February 2026
71	Name withheld	28 February 2026
72	Professor Ian Wanless	28 February 2026
73	Name withheld	28 February 2026
74	Name withheld	28 February 2026
75	Dr Lucinda Aberdeen	28 February 2026
75A	Supplementary submission	28 February 2026
75B	Supplementary submission	28 February 2026
76	Name withheld	28 February 2026
77	National Tertiary Education Union Monash University Branch	1 March 2026
78	Honorary Professor Margaret Malloch	1 March 2026
79	National Tertiary Education Union Swinburne University of Technology Branch	1 March 2026
80	Professor Greg Bamber, Associate Professor Brian Cooper and Dr Sean O'Brady	1 March 2026
80A	Supplementary submission	1 March 2026
81	National Tertiary Education Union La Trobe University Branch	1 March 2026
82	Professor Kim Dovey	1 March 2026
83	National Tertiary Education Union Federation University Branch	1 March 2026
84	Swinburne University of Technology	1 March 2026
84A	Supplementary submission	5 May 2026
85	La Trobe University Student Union	1 March 2026
86	Dr Marija Taflaga, Dr Francis Markham and Distinguished Professor Keith Dowding	1 March 2026
87	Public Universities Australia	1 March 2026
88	Amy Roseman	1 March 2026
89	Dr Tim Moore	1 March 2026

Submission number	Individual or organisation	Date received
90	Confidential	1 March 2026
91	Stop Woodside Monash	1 March 2026
92	Name withheld	1 March 2026
93	Professor Patrick Keyzer	1 March 2026
94	Australian Academic Alliance Against Antisemitism	1 March 2026
95	Name withheld	1 March 2026
96	National Tertiary Education Union Victoria University Branch	1 March 2026
97	Name withheld	1 March 2026
98	Name withheld	2 March 2026
99	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated	2 March 2026
101	National Union of Students	2 March 2026
102	Associate Professor Shumi Akhtar	3 March 2026
103	Anna Helme	4 March 2026
104	Universities Australia	4 March 2026
105	Academics for Public Universities	4 March 2026
105A	Supplementary submission	9 April 2026
105B	Supplementary submission	27 May 2026
106	Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations	5 March 2026
107	Monash University	3 March 2026
108	La Trobe University	5 March 2026
109	Victorian Government	2 March 2026
110	Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation Victoria	3 March 2026
111	Ngaweeyan Maar-oo	10 March 2026
112	Australian Higher Education Industrial Association	11 March 2026
113	Confidential	9 May 2026
114	Letter from all Victorian universities' Vice-Chancellors	22 May 2026

A.2 Public hearings

Thursday 14 May 2026

Melbourne

Name	Title	Organisation
Sarah Roberts	Division Secretary Victoria	National Tertiary Education Union
Professor Joo-Cheong Tham	Assistant Secretary Victoria (Academic Staff)	National Tertiary Education Union
Danae Bosler	Assistant Secretary	Victorian Trades Hall Council
Oscar Kaspi-Crutchett	Senior Research Organiser	Victorian Trades Hall Council
Yolanda Robson	Director	Young Workers Centre
Jesse Gardner-Russell	President	Council of Australian Postgraduate Association
Dr Adam Lucas	Founding Member	Academics for Public Universities
Professor Justin O'Connor	Founding Member	Academics for Public Universities
Professor Peter Tregear	Founding Member	Academics for Public Universities
Professor Mark Rose	Vice-President	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
Uncle Lionel Bamblett	General Manager	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
Lisa Briggs	Chief Executive Officer	Ngaweeyan Maar-oo
Fina Weight	Senior Policy Officer	Ngaweeyan Maar-oo
Dr Lucinda Aberdeen	Adjunct Senior Research Fellow	La Trobe University
Dr Janet Congues	Adjunct Research Fellow Sociology	La Trobe University
George Lekakis AO	–	–
Felix Hughes	President	National Union of Students

Friday 15 May 2026

Melbourne

Name	Title	Organisation
Lill Healy	Deputy Secretary Skills and TAFE	Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
Joanna Adam	Manager, Higher Education Policy and School Pathways	Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions
Professor Iain Martin	Vice-Chancellor	Deakin University
Professor Duncan Bentley	Vice-Chancellor and President	Federation University
Professor Theo Farrell	Vice-Chancellor and President	La Trobe University
Professor Sue Bennett	Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic	La Trobe University

Name	Title	Organisation
Associate Professor Melanie Bish	Pro Vice-Chancellor Regional	La Trobe University
Professor Glyn Davis	Interim Vice-Chancellor	The University of Melbourne
Dr Nancy Huggett	University Secretary	The University of Melbourne
Professor Alec Cameron	Vice-Chancellor and President	RMIT University
Professor Sherman Young	Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President	RMIT University
Professor Simon Ridings	Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Chief Academic Officer	Swinburne University of Technology
Professor Sharon Pickering	Vice-Chancellor and President	Monash University
Professor Sarah McDonald	Deputy Vice-Chancellor Student Experience and Senior Vice-President	Monash University
Professor Adam Shoemaker	Vice-Chancellor and President	Victoria University
Sofia Moisidis	Director, Governance and Secretariat	Victoria University

A.3 Closed hearing

Friday 5 June 2026

Melbourne

Name	Title	Organisation
Professor John Pollaers OAM	Convenor	University Chancellors Council

Appendix B

Letter from Vice-Chancellors

B



Professor Theo Farrell FACSS, FRSN
Vice-Chancellor and President

22 May 2026

Mrs Alison Marchant MP
Chair, Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Via email: alison.marchant@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Mrs Marchant,

We write as the Vice-Chancellors of Victoria's universities in response to the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's ongoing Inquiry into enhancing Victorian university governance.

Thank you for the opportunity for the majority of us to appear before the Committee and to highlight how we continuously seek to strengthen our governance processes for the benefit of the students we teach, the staff we employ, the partners we engage with, and the communities we serve across Victoria. Universities are central to Victoria's economic performance, skills pipeline, and research capability.

As outlined in our submissions, Victoria's universities fully support the Final Report of the Expert Council on University Governance (ECUG) and its Principles. We expect that the Principles will be written into Commonwealth regulation through the Higher Education Threshold Standards, and that universities will be required to report annually on compliance with the Principles on an 'if not, why not' basis to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). We would welcome a recommendation from the Committee that Victorian universities fully adopt the ECUG Principles.

We acknowledge the Committee's interest in ensuring that the voices of students and staff, in all their diversity, are well understood and considered within universities' governance structures including their Governing Bodies. We note that the current legislative settings already provide us with the flexibility to increase the number of elected staff and student members within our respective University Councils. In fact, some of us have already increased the number of elected student and staff members while others are in the process of doing so. In line with ECUG's endorsement of a 'principles-based approach to enable continuous improvement in the governance of public universities', we do not consider that amendments to Victorian legislation are required to fulfill this purpose.

We look forward to the Committee's recommendations to achieve our shared goal of strengthening Victorian university governance.

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Yours sincerely,

Professor Theo Farrell, Vice-Chancellor and President, La Trobe University and Chair of the Victorian Vice-Chancellors' Committee

Professor Zlatko Skrbis, Vice-Chancellor and President, Australian Catholic University

Professor Iain Martin, Vice-Chancellor and President, Deakin University

Professor Duncan Bentley, Vice-Chancellor and President, Federation University

Professor Sharon Pickering, Vice-Chancellor and President, Monash University

Professor Alec Cameron, Vice-Chancellor and President, RMIT University

Professor Pascale Quester, Vice-Chancellor and President, Swinburne University

Professor James McLaren, Vice-Chancellor, University of Divinity

Professor Glyn Davis, Interim Vice-Chancellor, University of Melbourne

Professor Adam Shoemaker, Vice-Chancellor and President, Victoria University

Cc

The Hon. Colin Brooks MP, Minister for Skills and TAFE

The Hon. Ben Carroll MP, Deputy Premier of Victoria and Minister for Education

Ms Kim O'Keeffe MP, Deputy Chair, Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee

