

Discussion Paper: An ANU Model for Higher Education Governance Reform

Executive Summary

The Challenge

Australian higher education faces significant governance challenges threatening institutional effectiveness and public confidence. Current corporate governance models at universities, including ANU, have produced perverse outcomes: excessive executive remuneration, administrative expansion, consultant dependency, wage compliance failures, and inadequate transparency. ANU's governance structures, regulated by the ANU Act 1991, concentrate power in a 15-member Council where academics hold only minority representation, while the Academic Board lacks formal oversight of change management and other processes affecting the university's national mission.

The Opportunity

As Australia's only federally-regulated university, ANU is uniquely positioned to lead sector-wide governance reform. Drawing on successful collegial governance models from institutions like Cambridge, Oxford, and Harvard, we can develop evidence-based reforms that balance academic expertise with corporate requirements, protecting our national mission while enhancing institutional effectiveness.

Our Collaborative Process

This staff-driven process aims to produce a comprehensive, credible governance reform proposal that could reshape internal governance and inform amendments to the ANU Act 1991. This discussion paper is intended as a provocative and informative *start* to a community discussion.

PHASE 1: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

- **Public Survey:** An open survey for ANU staff, students, alumni, and stakeholders to gather views on governance reform principles and proposals
- **Kitchen Table Conversations (KTCs):** Informal discussions across all Colleges under Chatham House rules, capturing diverse perspectives from the ANU community.
- **Governance Workshop:** Representatives from all Colleges provide feedback on community-generated principles and proposals, ensuring diversity from across ANU.

PHASE 2: PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

- **Finalised Reform Proposal:** The Governance Working Group collates feedback into comprehensive recommendations
- **Endorsement:** ANU open letter supporting the recommended governance reforms. Signatories become public once 100+ signatures achieved
- **Policy Engagement:** Presentation to policymakers, including Education Minister Jason Clare, requesting collaborative implementation

How to Participate

- [Complete and share the public survey](#)
- Volunteer to facilitate or participate in Kitchen Table Conversations
- Provide direct feedback to ANUGovernance@gmail.com
- Nominate representatives for the Governance Workshop
- Endorse the finalised proposal and open letter as a public signatory

This initiative represents an investment in institutional sustainability. Strong governance is essential for the provision of high quality teaching, excellent research and public good to the Australian community.

Introduction

The Australian higher education system faces governance challenges that threaten institutional effectiveness and public confidence; international rankings are falling, funding is constrained, and reputational harm is significant. The role of universities in fostering national intellectual growth, leading scientific and evidence-based public education, and underpinning Australia's sovereign capacity for research and innovation must be urgently safeguarded, especially as our societies become increasingly disrupted by global and algorithmic technologies (Alnemr 2025) and at a time when other advanced economies are rapidly escalating investments in research and development to avoid being outcompeted (Australian Government 2024). Yet higher education governance continues to incentivise perverse outcomes, such as cost-cutting over fulfillment of our national mission, or reliance on external consultant advice advocating a one-size fits all approach that overlooks the value of having diversified tertiary education opportunities.

The Australian National University (ANU) has *an opportunity to lead the sector* as a model of stakeholder-led, collectively-designed governance reform commensurate with our mission to deliver public and social good for Australia in a responsible and efficient manner. We are uniquely well-positioned for such a task: we have a proud history of and deep expertise in contributing to cutting-edge, evidence-based Australian public policy, and we are the only federally-regulated university at a time when the Federal Government has clearly signalled its intent to reform the higher education sector.

As a group of staff passionate about the future of our university, we are holding a stakeholder workshop and collaborative process to develop a comprehensive, credible governance reform proposal for the ANU - and we invite you to participate. This initiative is:

- **ANU-led:** Designed and delivered by ANU staff
- **Evidence-based:** Grounded in comparative analysis of successful governance models and informed by experts on governance, higher education, and policy design
- **Consultative:** Incorporating diverse perspectives from the university stakeholder community
- **Pragmatic:** Focused on implementable solutions that enhance institutional capacity
- **Impactful:** Inviting active participation and collaboration from policymakers

We aim to produce out of this workshop a comprehensive, credible reform proposal that could reshape internal governance and inform amendments to the *Australian National University Act 1991* and related external legislation. This proposal will be presented to ANU staff for their endorsement and to the university executive and key stakeholders including Minister for Education the Hon Jason Clare MP for their consideration.

This work requires expertise from across the ANU community, and from across disciplines and schools. We seek participation from those who recognise that effective governance is essential infrastructure for academic excellence and institutional sustainability.

This discussion paper is intended to offer a rationale for governance reforms at the ANU, stimulate discussion and debate about what reforms could be and outline the process we intend to follow in order to produce a reform proposal. Specifically, we outline:

1. Key governance challenges for the higher education sector in Australia relevant to ANU (pg 5)
 2. Existing governance processes at the ANU (pg 8)
 3. Proposed solutions recommended by higher education governance experts, including alternative governance models that could be emulated at the ANU (pg 13)
 4. How an inclusive, representative process including a workshop to develop solutions could be pursued at the ANU (pg 18); and
 5. A set of example proposals for ANU governance reform for workshop discussion (pg 20).
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1. Key Governance Challenges for Higher Education

Funding constraints following implementation of the Dawkins Reforms and a shift to a neoliberal framework for higher education governance in the late 1980-early 1990s expanded access to higher education, but has been consistently connected to problematic governance outcomes (Horne 2020; Turner 2025). Reduced public funding per student has pushed universities towards corporate operating models that prioritise revenue generation over their academic mission and, in recent years, led to an overreliance on fees from international students.

The ANU is unusual in its mandate to maintain distinctive concentrations of excellence in research and education in areas of national importance to Australia. However, *there is no effective oversight mechanism, internally, or externally, holding the ANU accountable for maintaining these concentrations relevant to Australia's national interests.*

Instead, these systemic pressures and associated corporatisation have resulted in growing criticism:

- **Rapid growth in executive remuneration:** Vice-Chancellor salaries at Go8 universities reached nearly \$1.3 million in 2023 and are the highest in the world. In recent years, high remuneration has attracted growing public criticism at a time when student debts are rising rapidly and student satisfaction is often disconnected from key performance indicators and pay determination processes (Thrower 2025).

- **Administrative expansion:** Proliferation of non-academic management roles whilst core teaching and research academic positions remain precarious. While increased government regulation has required universities to undertake additional tasks than in previous decades, there are growing calls for a re-examination of the balance between the resource allocation between front-line services and back-office operations. The rapid growth in senior executive positions is also a growing source of criticism at a time when universities are increasingly drawing on the paid services of consultants.
- **Consultant dependency:** Australian Universities spent over \$734 million on external consultants in 2023, often without transparent procurement processes and overlooking the world-class expertise of their own staff (NTEU 2024). There is growing evidence that higher education consultancy firms have made a business out of offering one-size-fits-all advice for university restructuring contrary to the importance of maintaining a diverse higher education system. *The ANU has sustained significant reputational damage in 2025 due to allegations it misled the Senate about the value of consultant contracts* (Pocock 2025).
- **Systematic employment practice failures** have undermined institutional capacity:
 - **Wage compliance failures:** Confirmed underpayments exceed \$265 million across the sector (NTEU 2024), with the Fair Work Ombudsman identifying “entrenched non-compliance” (Guardian 2023). *In July 2024, the ANU admitted to underpaying over 2,000 staff by approximately \$2 million due to casual timesheet processing errors* (Gore 2024).
 - **Casualisation:** Extensive reliance on insecure employment creates workforce instability and limits academic staff capacity to participate meaningfully in governance.
- Current governance structures **lack adequate transparency and accountability mechanisms:**
 - **Limited voice of education, research and public-good production experts:** There are growing concerns about insufficient representation from academics on key university governing bodies. A further criticism is an increasing over-reliance on external appointees lacking recent higher education expertise. Corporate expertise is not an inherent problem—this experience is valuable for running large organisations—the criticism rests on the appropriate *balance* between corporate principles of profit making and stakeholder ‘management’ and the reality that universities are ‘communities of scholars’ rather than businesses. Universities have different distributed power-models compared to corporates. Universities also have different obligations and responsibilities to students, their academic community and the public, which contributes a large portion of their funding.
 - A lack of appropriate contestability or creative tension between education, research and public-good production experts and corporate management experts can alter decision premises of decision makers. **This asymmetry between senior managers**

and academics can result in organisational and mission-drift, reputational damage and loss of social licence. Recent public discourse of universities suggests that all three are matters of live public debate. Well functioning Councils offer the potential as a powerful corrective, by bringing staff representation to the titular governing and oversight body of the university.

- The prioritisation of corporate over specialist higher education expertise is enshrined in the governance legislation requirements for most higher education institutions across Australia. *This includes the Australian National University Act of 1991, which requires that the ANU Council be comprised of 15 members, of which 2 are the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor; 7 are appointed by a committee appointed and led by the Chancellor, and only 6 may be drawn from current staff or students. There is no requirement that other members have experience in the higher education sector. Effectively, this legislates a minority voice for academic and higher education expertise in university governance.*

These factors lead to specific implications for university governance:

- **Closed decision-making:** University councils are not required to publish detailed meeting minutes and there are insufficient processes for connecting council members with academic and professional staff in transparent forums. Councils are not subject to the same level of scrutiny as listed companies. A potential weakness is that Council's ability to offer robust oversight can be degraded without the regular external accountability mechanism of an annual shareholder meeting. This weakness can translate directly into poor governance outcomes or just as seriously, mission drift. Councils may also lack independent sources of information beyond that provided to them by the Vice-Chancellor and Chancellor, bringing into question their capacity to appropriately and meaningfully undertake their legislated oversight role. In extreme cases, it calls into question the Council's ability to hold executives accountable.
- **Inadequate internal oversight:** Internal accountability mechanisms provide insufficient checks on executive decision-making. In many universities across Australia, Academic Boards or Academic Senates are responsible for oversight of academic programs and degree conferrals: but they are not included in change management, budget strategies, or other transformational processes where the ability of the university to deliver its national mission may be impacted. Nor do they, or the broader academic community, approve the appointment of university executives (as is the case in leading collegial university governance models overseas). As a result, *there is no internal oversight of the ability of the university to continue to meet its national mission.*
- There is also a *lack of constructive contestability.*

- This issue can arise when academic decision making is not subject to sufficient internal transparency, critique and accountability. Here, the most obvious example that comes to mind are practices of empire building or resource allocation during a ‘spoils system.’
- Likewise, managerial leadership can also fall victim to similar problems. Managerial leadership needs to have enough autonomy to manage the operations of the university in a sustainable manner, the absence of clear processes to enshrine a degree of appropriate contestability can create vulnerabilities. Specifically, if either Senior management groups and/ or Councils become disconnected from the core business of teaching, research and public goods generation.
- **In the case of ANU, a lack of contestability may translate into downstream transparency and accountability problems.** In extreme cases the ability of the University to remain focused on protecting core national priorities can be impressive. Inadequate internal oversight risks myopic decisions to cut these areas despite their crucial importance to Australian society.
- **Inadequate external oversight:** As mentioned above, *Unlike corporations in other sectors that are beholden to shareholders, universities face no such scrutiny.* TEQSA’s powers are limited, as the volume of critical submissions to the recent Senate Inquiry into Quality of Governance in Higher Education Providers attests. Even Jason Clare’s Expert Council on University Governance - established to address the “inadequate” state of higher education governance and because there are “far too many examples of universities underpaying staff and failing their responsibilities as employers” (Ministers’ Media Centre 2025) - only has the power to *advise* university councils on how transparency might be improved, including on issues such as remuneration of senior university executives (Hare 2024).

2. ANU Governance Structures

Current ANU Governance structures reflect many of the issues noted in the previous section. Governance reform at the ANU is likely to require changes both to internal processes, but also external changes to the federal legislation and regulations that currently limit the scope and nature of internal governance changes.

ANU governance is regulated by:

The ANU Act of 1991.

This Act defines ANU as a body corporate (but with special provision for academic independence compared to other government corporations), outlines the purpose of the university, and specifies the composition and powers of ANU Council as ANU's primary governing entity. Some relevant elements of the Act include:

- “The functions of the University include the following: ...encouraging, and providing facilities for, research and postgraduate study, both generally and in relation to *subjects of national importance to Australia*”
- “In the performance of its functions, *the University must pay attention to its national and international roles and to the needs of the Australian Capital Territory and the surrounding regions.*”
- “*Nothing in this Act prevents the Council from establishing, within the University, for academic or administrative purposes, an organisational structure that: (a) includes bodies, or members of staff, from the Institute and The Faculties; or (b) in any other way draws its resources from the Institute and The Faculties.*”
- The Act legislates **that ANU Council “has the entire control and management of the University”** and requires that the ANU Council be comprised of 15 members, of which 2 are the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, 7 are appointed by a nominations committee appointed and led by the Chancellor, and only 6 may be drawn from current staff or students. There is no requirement that other members have experience in the higher education sector.

The Public Governance, Performance, and Accountability (PGPA) Act of 2013.

The PGPA Act outlines the framework for governance, performance, and accountability of Commonwealth corporations such as the ANU, as well as the use and management of public resources. For example, *ANU officials are subject to general duties like duty of care and diligence, duty to act honestly and for a proper purpose, duty in relation to use of position, duty in relation to use of information, and duty to disclose material interests that relate to the affairs of the entity.*

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act of 2011, and a handful of other acts.

As an Australian University, *ANU must meet the Threshold Standards for higher education accreditation and comply with TEQSA investigatory and enforcement directives. This includes any current investigation underway following Education Minister Jason Clare's referring concerns about ANU governance and financial management to TEQSA in June 2025.*

ANU is also regulated by a handful of other Acts, including the Public Interest Disclosure Act of 2013, the Freedom of Information Act 1982, the Archives Act 1983, Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000, etc.

ANU Statutes, passed under the auspices of the ANU Act.

This includes, for example, the Australian National University (Governance) Statute 2024, which *requires that a vote of no-confidence to remove the Vice-Chancellor must be supported by two-thirds, not simply a majority, of Council members.*

ANU Council

As noted above, **under the ANU Act (1991), Council is responsible for the entire control and management of the University.**

- Key Council powers include strategic oversight of the University, including setting the mission, values and strategic direction of the University. The Council is also responsible for ensuring effective overall governance of the university, such as:
 - approval of the annual budget (including any variations)
 - the “Approval of establishments, disestablishments or variations in the academic organisational structure of the University at Level 1 (ie College) and Level 2 (ie Research School), including any variations to naming.” (ANU 2019).
- Council appoints the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Chancellors, and Deputy Vice-Chancellors, and sets the terms and conditions of their appointments. Various ANU Statutes, approved by Council, govern the resignation or removal of these officials.
- In practice, **a rhetorical distinction has been created between ‘governance’ and ‘management’ of the university in a way that undermines the oversight role of Council.** For example the 2019 ANU Governance Handbook explains that the “Council’s role is to govern the organisation rather than manage it, the latter being the responsibility of the Vice-Chancellor, as chief executive officer.” This distinction has been used to relegate Council oversight away from an expansive definition of ‘managerial’ matters - even though Council is still ultimately responsible for overseeing the financial management of the university.
 - This rhetorical distinction has significant implications for the way the ANU community and external stakeholders agree and/or believe the ANU should distribute power and make decisions, **because the ANU Act very clearly states that Council cannot delegate its “reserve powers”, including its power to “review and monitor the management of the University as a whole or the University’s performance as a university”.**
- In order to effectively oversee governance at the university, Council needs to have **(1)** sufficient access to relevant information and **(2)** time to process it. However:

- In practice, Council relies on information provided by the Vice-Chancellor and Chancellor in order to hold the Vice-Chancellor, Chancellor and other university managers accountable. It is not clear how readily additional information or advice can be made available to Council members.
- Information provided to Council is often aggregated and extremely high-level and lacks detail about key processes and prior decisions taken before bringing the material to Council. Council does not have visibility of resource allocation or staffing decisions across Colleges or Portfolios.
- Despite their superficial nature (and thus the importance of paying close attention to not miss small but crucial details), papers provided to Council members typically number in the hundreds of pages. Council members are given only one week to read and prepare.
- Appointed (non-staff or student) Council members rarely attend campus other than for Council meetings and have little interaction with staff and students; how can they understand the ANU if they are so rarely here and not integrated into the work of the university?
- Council Committees where more detailed oversight could occur are dominated by external appointees. For example, *as of July 2025 the powerful Audit, Finance and Risk Committee does not include a single member of ANU's staff or student body.*
- Dominance of Council processes and functions by senior managerial officials has the potential to stifle debate and discussion, especially from staff-elected members.
 - In the latest update to Council's standing orders, Council members are **only allowed to comment once on each issue item**. This calls into grave doubt the ability of the council to act as a meaningful deliberative body and to offer sufficient advice and critique of the executive's plans and proposals.
- Despite the ANU's status as a public institution, the default for Council items has become confidentiality, with rare exceptions. This has been accompanied by public statements from the University that Council members are "**obliged by law to maintain secrecy**" (Evans 2025), and the Council Charter states that members who are alleged to have breached confidentiality may have "action" taken against them under Sections 25-29 of the PGPA Act (ANU 2025). However, these sections of the PGPA Act actually require Council members to act ethically, honestly, in good faith, and not to use their position for personal gain or to cause "detriment" to the ANU. *How it has been determined that Council should act secretly for most of its activities is unclear.*
- Minutes from the Council are rarely shared in a transparent and timely manner, and even when they are, detail is lacking.

Academic Board

Re-established in 2012, Academic Board is composed of key executives, College Deans, 3-4 elected academic staff from each College, 2 elected professional staff, undergraduate, postgraduate, and first nations representatives, and a handful of others. *It is significantly more representative of the diversity of ANU than Council, and its meetings are more transparent in terms of allowing up to 10 observers from the staff and student body to attend (excepting confidential items where observers leave the room).*

- Academic Board is tasked with ensuring the University maintains the highest standards in teaching, scholarship and research.
- The Board has focused on degree accreditation, academic policy recommendations, and safeguarding academic freedom at the university, as well as its role as a forum to facilitate information flow and debate within the University and between the senior executive officers of the University and the wider academic community.

However its powers also include:

- Maintaining an effective overview of the academic activities of the University and advising on them and assisting in their coordination.
- Discussing, developing and approving policy in relation to academic matters.
- Advising on the academic aspects and content of the University's strategic plan.

Currently, Academic Board has little formal role in change management processes or other significant reforms that are likely to impact the nature and extent of ANU's capacity to achieve its national mission and its public educational and research offerings.

Academic Board's existence and powers are approved and alterable by Council.

Convocation

ANU does have a Convocation as established in the ANU Act (1991).

- The Convocation is comprised of all ANU alumni and all current and former members of the Council. ANU is required to keep a roll of all Convocation members.
- The VC can call a Meeting of Convocation, with a quorum of 50 members.
- Historically, Convocation has been called for primarily ceremonial purposes. Currently, Convocation has no formal role in governance or specific powers; Convocation's powers are alterable either via Council-approved Statutes or via reform of the ANU Act.

3. Proposed Solutions: Alternative Governance Models

In this section, we outline several alternative models of governance as a stimulus. We outline what the implications may be for an institution like The ANU. As a community, we may decide that some of the ideas should be adopted or adapted to suit the institutional conditions of the ANU and the Australian Higher Education sector.

The Failure of Corporate Governance

The Australian National University, like most Australian universities, is best typified as following a corporate model of university governance. This model concentrates on the fiscal and managerial responsibility of those governing the university, based on a business-case model and the rationale of corporate efficiency (Trakman 2008).

The ANU is a Commonwealth authority under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability (PGPA) Act 2013* and must meet its external regulatory and statutory obligations; **a continued role for corporate governance at ANU is crucial**. However, as noted in the previous section, *over-reliance* on a corporate governance model produces a perverse fixation on revenue raising and other short-term outcomes, and disincentives maintaining disciplinary diversity, basic research, and quality of education, which underpin the sector's social licence and maintain public support for government funding.

Alternatively, Collegial governance models emphasise the central role of academic staff in university decision-making, aiming to safeguard the academic mission and institutional autonomy. These models offer several frameworks that could inform governance reform at the Australian National University (ANU).

Here are two of the main models of collegial governance and how they work, with implications for ANU:

a) Traditional Faculty Governance (Academic Self-Governance)

This model posits that universities should be primarily governed by their academic staff.

- It often grants expansive governance powers to university senates/academic boards or ensures significant faculty representation on university councils.
- Corporate governance is present, but the underlying rationale is that academic staff are best equipped to understand and achieve the academic goals and aspirations of a university.
- Some versions of this model are associated with “academic democracy,” where senior academic leaders such as Deans are elected from the professorial ranks for set terms to department, faculty, and university-level bodies, with procedures for their removal, reflecting a democratic character and ensuring universities’ institutional autonomy by

preventing non-scholars (like state or corporate organisations) from driving the academic mission.

Examples and Implications for ANU:

Cambridge University is cited as typifying “academic democracy,” where the Regent House, composed of over 7,200 current university staff and college fellows, serves as the primary legislative body and elects the Vice Chancellor. The Senate, comprised of the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, all Regent House members as well as all alumni of the University who have a Cambridge Master's degree, Doctorate degree, or Bachelor of Divinity degree, elects the Chancellor of the University. The University Council is responsible for executive management of the university; it is formed of majority academic staff. The Board of Scrutiny, formed of 8 elected members from Regent House, as well as 2 Proctors and 2 Pro-Proctors, offers an additional accountability measure, scrutinising university accounts and Council annual reports, providing guidance to Regent House.

Oxford University also features a Congregation (over 5,000 members, including academic staff and college heads) responsible for approving statutes, major policies, electing Council members, and approving the Vice-Chancellor's appointment. Since 2006, Oxford's Congregation has used their power to reject an attempt to install corporate governance, to resist a code of discipline that was restrictive of staff and students' right to freedom of speech and expression on issues concerning the university, and to remove a graduate application fee viewed as discriminatory to those from low-income backgrounds.

For ANU, this model suggests a significant expansion in the size and powers of our Academic Board (Senate), with clear majority control by elected academic members, enabling active contribution to strategic goals, critique of executive proposals, and participation in executive appointments and resource allocation. It also implies strengthening the advisory role of the professoriate in maintaining academic standards and examining change proposals, or could reinforce the connection to ANU staff, students, and alumni by offering them a role in university governance. Under this model, ANU Council would be comprised of majority elected staff, student, and/or alumni representatives. Some consideration and accommodation would need to be made for the different funding and regulatory environments that exist in Australia.

Weaknesses and Challenges:

Critics argue that academic staff may lack the necessary governance skill or interest in policy, external stakeholder relations, finances, and complex management systems (although, typically in these models selected staff are trained in such skills) (Trakman 2008). It may disproportionately emphasise the independent academic mission with less focus on improving corporate capabilities for partnerships with government or industry. There's a risk of it becoming an ineffective “talk shop” if representatives prioritise constituent (eg. College level) interests over the university as a

whole (Barnes 2020). Those trained in corporate governance outside the higher education sector may be unfamiliar with the role & importance of academic leadership, and external pressures including from government often push for reforms away from academic-led governance models.

b) Collegiality as Shared Leadership / Balanced Governance

This model acknowledges the vital but different roles of academic and corporate leadership in university governance. The *goal is to rebalance power between these two leadership streams to increase university effectiveness*. It assumes majority academic leadership representation on, or formal oversight of, the Governing Council, backed by a significant increase in the powers of Academic Boards (Senates), to balance executive decision-making power. Academic leaders, even in formal management roles, are expected to retain significant active involvement in teaching and/or research. Their challenge is to balance external demands and university viability without compromising underlying professional values.

This model emphasises academics as partners and leaders, as opposed to employees. It requires academic and corporate leaders to work together, manage inherent tensions, and design governance structures and decision-making processes that resolve issues through discussion and transparent and accountable practices. Here there is a higher component of collegial decision making than found in typical corporate models. The emphasis is on a mutual understanding and acceptance of different but complementary roles.

Examples and Implications for ANU:

- In response to the urgent need to protect academic autonomy as a result of Trump's assault on higher education, **Harvard University** is considering adopting an Academic Senate, as a representative form of governance to facilitate more effective shared deliberations and understanding on strategic, university-wide issues. Their intention is for this body to enhance communication both horizontally - across the faculty of Harvard's graduate and professional schools - and vertically - so that collective faculty views can be shared directly with the governing Harvard Corporation (Shaw 2025). Harvard already follows a Shared Governance Model: their governing bodies comprise Harvard Corporation (exercising fiduciary responsibility), and the Board of Overseers (ensuring that Harvard remains true to its charter as a place of learning and providing strategic counsel), the latter of which is currently comprised of the President, Treasurer, and 31 Harvard alumni elected by Harvard degree holders. Harvard's President is elected following a process that includes active consultation with the broader student, staff, and alumni communities, and the Board of Overseers must consent to the Corporation's choice.

A shared leadership model is **supported by Public Universities Australia and aligns with the Australian Association of University Professors' (AAUP's) Ethical Framework**, which seeks to protect freedom of inquiry and academic autonomy. The AAUP's Framework recommends the

strengthening of academic representation on Council bodies and the empowerment of Academic Boards/Senates so that academic representatives are able to:

- critically examine the potential impacts of government and corporate policy decisions on research and teaching practices within their institutions and make recommendations accordingly to their constituency
- consult with affected members of the university community at department, faculty, institutional and sectoral levels and provide genuine opportunities for university staff including those on casual contracts, to shape proposals to suit their context or offer viable alternatives
- create opportunities for critique and robust discussion of proposals and ensure a strong voice of advocacy for less powerful colleagues and students.
- ensure decisions made consider the potential impacts of any decision on the workloads, health, wellbeing and career opportunities of university staff and do not negatively impact on the ability of the university to achieve its broader social purposes (Kenny et al. 2024). .
- Public Universities Australia has developed a Model Act, which suggests that the Senate (governing body) should have a majority of academic members elected by the university, working alongside appointed members who understand the university's object, values, and functions. This allows the Senate to monitor the Vice-Chancellor, oversee university performance and academic activities, and approve strategic plans and budgets. This model would allow ANU to integrate academic expertise into strategic decision-making beyond purely academic matters, fostering a more collaborative environment for developing university policies and processes.

For ANU, this could entail:

- Drawing on the deep expertise of ANU staff to co-design a new, sector-leading governance model that balances between corporate and academic requirements of governance.
- A shift in the composition of Council to ensure effective academic oversight of the university's strategic mission. This could be done by increasing the number of elected academic positions and/or incorporating all College Deans onto Council.
- The formal empowerment of Academic Board (or formation of a new body to distribute the workload) with oversight and decision-making power over management decisions that might undermine university's academic mission, including the consideration of the university's contribution to Australia's national interest during change management processes. As the Board is more representative of the university and its staff and students than Council and already functions as a forum to facilitate the flow of information between the university community and management, it is well placed to hold the difficult discussions that are crucial to ensuring change management, where necessary, is done in a consultative manner and protects the university's national mission. This could be done via

Council approval and not require formal reform of external legislation (but without reforming the Council itself, these changes could be undone by Council in future).

Weaknesses and Challenges:

One version of this model practiced in Australian universities in the 1960s had an empowered Professorial Board sitting under the VC (in place of the proliferation of Pro-VCs and other executive roles that we have today). This was effective in ensuring that policy flowed bottom-up rather than top-down (Barnes 2020). However, one perverse outcome of this version was to overly empower departmental heads (“god-professors”) and enable dictatorial control over departments (Forsyth 2014). *A straightforward answer to this issue is to ensure that academic leaders (Deans) are elected, not appointed. For example, Deans could be elected from among existing academic staff in each College, and could sit on Council alongside the existing Council members to ensure academic oversight of management decisions.*

Summary of Strengths of Collegial Models (Relevant to ANU Reform):

- **Expertise-driven Decision-making:** Ensures that academic work and mission are guided by scholarly and subject-matter expertise.
- **Protection of Academic Freedom and Autonomy:** Safeguards scholarly inquiry, teaching, and research from undue external (corporate/state) or internal (managerial) interference.
- **Democratic Accountability:** Involves elected academic leaders and processes for their removal, fostering trust and a sense of shared ownership.
- **Focus on Core Mission:** Reorients the university towards its fundamental purpose of knowledge creation, preservation, and dissemination, rather than primarily commercial or short-term objectives.
- **Institutional Memory and Culture:** Leverages the long-serving staff’s understanding of the university’s unique culture and history, promoting stability over “change for change’s sake”.
- **Quality Assurance:** Academics, as experts, are the best guarantors of academic quality and standards.

In essence, the argument for collegial governance reform at ANU stems from the belief that returning meaningful decision-making power to the academic community, fostering a culture of trust and shared responsibility, and explicitly prioritising academic values over corporate metrics will lead to a more effective, accountable, and ethically sound institution that better serves the public good.

4. A Proposal for Collaborative Governance Reform

As a group of staff passionate about the future of our university, we are establishing a collaborative process to develop an evidence-based governance reform proposal for the ANU - and we invite you to participate.

We aim to produce out of this process a collaborative, comprehensive, credible reform proposal that could reshape internal governance and inform amendments to the *Australian National University Act 1991* and related external legislation. This proposal will be presented to the broader ANU community for their endorsement and to the university executive and key external stakeholders including Education Minister Jason Clare for their consideration.

This work requires expertise from across disciplines and schools. We seek colleagues who recognise that effective governance is essential infrastructure for academic excellence and institutional sustainability.

How the process will work (dates tentative):

1. **(July 2025)** The Governance Working Group presents a discussion paper on governance reform for discussion amongst ANU stakeholders (*this paper*).
2. **(July-August 2025)** The ANU community (staff, students, parents, stakeholders) are invited to share their views on the importance of governance reform, key principles, and share reform proposals through an [online public survey](#).
3. **(July-August 2025)** Simultaneously, we hold a series of informal “Kitchen Table Conversations” (KTCs), to support discussion amongst academic and professional staff, students, and other stakeholders on what they see as most needed in terms of governance reform at the ANU, to build endorsements of our process, and to collect views from a diverse array of participants across the university community. We will hold as many of these online or in-person as we can within a three-week period, depending on how many staff are willing and able to host these conversations. The KTCs are held under Chatham House rule.
4. **(August 2025)** Staff host a Governance Workshop, including representatives from all Colleges and aimed at capturing the diversity of ANU’s staff and student community. Workshop participants will be asked for their views on governance reform and to provide feedback on principles and proposals forwarded by the community through the KTCs and the public survey.
5. **(August 2025)** The Governance Working Group collates feedback from the KTCs, the survey, and the Governance Workshop into a finalised reform proposal. We seek to do this as transparently as possible while also being mindful of the importance of acting within our political window to ensure the proposal is impactful.

6. **(August 2025)** We share the finalised proposal with ANU staff for public endorsement (as an open-letter). Signatories to the letter will be made public once we reach 100 or more signatures.
7. **(August 2025)** We present the proposal to policymakers and request their support in collaboratively implementing the reforms (especially external legislative reforms). This may entail additional consultations with and input from the ANU community.

What we need from you, our ANU community:

Complete and share the public survey. Academic and professional staff, students, alumni, university executives, external stakeholders, and other members of the ANU community are welcome to complete our online survey on ANU governance. Identities will remain confidential but moderated (removal of off-topic or profane) feedback will be published on our website for transparency as well as included in the reform proposal through the processes outlined below.

Volunteer to facilitate or notetake at a Kitchen Table Conversation (KTC) (one facilitator and one notetaker per session). We anticipate this would take no longer than 1.5 hours of your time and would ensure the governance reform proposal captures the unique impact on your discipline and work area. Facilitators ensure the conversation is meaningful; notetakers are responsible for ensuring key conclusions from the conversation are shared with the Governance Working Group for inclusion in the reform proposal.

Contact us to participate in a KTC. The ANU is a diverse, highly specialised institution. We want to know how governance reform would impact your work and help to safeguard areas of national importance. We seek input from as many and as diverse an array of staff as possible. Please bring your colleagues. To be clear: professional as well as academic staff are welcome to participate in these conversations. Students are also welcome to attend. KTCs are held under Chatham House rule.

Send feedback on governance directly to us. If you want to share your views directly with us rather than through the survey or a KTC, please email the Governance Working Group at ANUGovernance@gmail.com.

Nominate staff, students, and others to participate in the Workshop. To facilitate effectively, we are limiting participants in the workshop to around 30; but we are aiming to achieve a representative sample of our ANU community, including representatives from all Colleges and Central, academic as well as professional staff, first nations and minority representatives, undergraduate and postgraduate representatives, etc. *If we cannot include you in the workshop we still want to hear from you:* please email us at ANUGovernance@gmail.com.

Endorse this collaborative process and our recommendations for governance. When the finalised proposal is shared, we hope you will publicly endorse it: this would mean your name would be publicly included alongside (we hope) hundreds of other ANU staff. ANU staff are world-class intellectual leaders in our respective areas: we want our reform proposal to have internal legitimacy amongst those who have been most impacted by poor governance outcomes in the past and to be guided by the core mission of academic leadership to position ANU as an innovative, groundbreaking model of higher education governance.

5. Proposed Governance Reforms at ANU - for Discussion

Below are examples of the types of reforms we could pursue at the ANU. We think it is best to start the discussion with something concrete - but this is only the start of the conversation.

Some of the principles we think are central to developing a governance reform proposal at the ANU are:

- **Operational Efficiency and Avoiding Over-regulation:** Reform implementation must ensure enhanced participation does not compromise institutional agility and decision-making capacity. It must also achieve appropriate representation without creating unwieldy governance structures, and maintain access to necessary external expertise whilst prioritising academic governance.
- **Protecting the ANU's National Mission:** Reform should ensure that governing entities have a clear mandate and capacity to protect the ANU's unique national mission. This would also encompass robust protections for academic freedom.
- **Transparency:** As a public institution the ANU should have transparent, accessible governance processes.
- **Accountability and Oversight:** There must be clear and robust processes for oversight and accountability of senior university management.

Examples of Immediate Reforms

Some reforms could be implemented immediately, if Council were amenable. This would be designed to **build a culture of trust** among staff, students, and university stakeholders.

Some examples:

- ANU could publish the revised budget estimates for 2025 so that staff can assess where we are in the current change management process.

- ANU Council could immediately improve transparency by making the process for staff and students to observe Council meetings more accessible, restricting the default designation of agenda items as confidential and the more timely publication of minutes.
- ANU could commit to best practice reporting (public disclosure and public reporting with a brief written summary of use case) of external consultancies.
- Academic Board's role could be altered by Council to provide official guidance to Council on protection of the university's national mission during change management processes.

Examples of Medium or Long term reforms

Some reforms will require changes to the legislation governing the ANU or take some time to implement.

Some examples:

- The ANU Act could be amended to change the way nominations are managed to Council, increasing the role of academics in the process and having a wider selectorate than currently exists (The Chancellor).
- The ANU Act could be reformed to require a two-thirds majority of university-elected staff on ANU Council, while still preserving the requirements for specific expertise outlined by the Act.
- Academic Board's role could be expanded to have formal oversight (not guidance or consultation) over Council on any issues which might impact the university's capacity to fulfill its national mission.

These are some ideas to start the conversation - but we want to hear from YOU, the ANU community.

Conclusion

The governance challenges facing Australian higher education are systemic and require comprehensive reform. The Australian National University has a unique opportunity to lead this transformation, leveraging its federal governance structure and national mission to demonstrate how enhanced academic governance can strengthen institutional effectiveness.

By implementing transparent, accountable, and academically-centred governance practices, ANU can address the sector's credibility challenges whilst positioning itself as a model for sustainable, mission-focused university governance. This approach would not only strengthen ANU's own institutional capacity but contribute to rebuilding public confidence in Australian higher education more broadly.

Proactive governance reform would enhance ANU's reputation by:

- **Demonstrate ANU leadership:** Continue ANU's role in leading transformative higher education reform
- **Strengthen Public Confidence:** Demonstrate commitment to accountability and transparency
- **Improve Staff Satisfaction:** Create more secure and participatory working conditions
- **Enhance Academic Excellence:** Ensure academic priorities drive institutional decision-making
- **Attract Quality Staff:** Position ANU as an employer of choice for academic talent

The proposed reforms represent an investment in institutional sustainability, recognising that strong governance is essential infrastructure for academic excellence and public service. Through careful implementation of these recommendations, ANU can fulfil its potential as Australia's leading public university whilst contributing to the broader renewal of the higher education sector.

If you have feedback you'd like to share directly with us, please email the Governance Working Group at ANUGovernance@gmail.com .

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