University Council Minutes

University Council met in the Council Room, Admin Building, Sandy Bay Campus and by Zoom on Friday 28 February 2025 from 9.30am.

Members: The Chancellor (Ms Alison Watkins AM) as Chair, Vice-Chancellor (Professor Rufus Black), Associate Professor Aidan Davison, Professor Emeritus Peter Dawkins, Mr Garreth Dent, Ms Karina Groenewoud, Mr James Groom, Ms Sarah-Jayne Hall, Professor Kristyn Harman, Ms Tara Howell, Ms Alicia Leis, Dr Tania Price, and Ms Sheree Vertigan AM.

In attendance: Mr Craig Barling (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Student Services and Operations), Professor Natalie Brown (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic - Interim) Professor Anthony Koutoulis (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research) and Ms Kate Huntington (Executive Director, Strategic Communications) attended for all items other than members only.

Ms Sally Paynter attended as University Secretary.

By invitation: Ms Emma Bates (Financial Controller)
Ms Jane Beaumont (Executive General Manager UPPL)
Professor Luke Bereznicki (Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education)
Mr Leigh Burrill (Senior Lead - Financial Reporting)
Professor Nicholas Farrelly (Pro Vice-Chancellor, Campus Life – Southern Tasmania)
Mr Ben Rose (Chief Financial Officer)
Ms Ingrid Summers (Director Workplace Relations)
Mr Rob Wilson (Executive Director Recruitment)
Ms Susannah Windsor (General Counsel / Executive Director Legal and Risk)

Apologies: None

1 MEMBERS ONLY

1.1 * Members Only

The Chancellor opened the meeting by welcoming Academic Staff member, Associate Professor Aidan Davison and student member Garreth Dent to their first meeting of Council. Members discussed the papers listed for consideration on the meeting agenda and noted that few had specific recommendations and that it was not clear for each paper exactly what the purpose was and why management was seeking input from University Council.

The Vice-Chancellor joined the meeting at 9.42am

The Council discussed the six priority areas for 2025 listed in the University Executive Report with members seeking to understand the objectives for each priority area and to better understand the Tasmanian Transitions and their impacts. In discussion it was agreed that the value of focusing on the six priority areas was to test and challenge why these have been identified as priorities and what success would look like in terms of meeting the objectives for each area. It was agreed that the strategic priority areas would be incorporated into the University Council Annual Work Plan so that each one would be a focus for strategic discussion at future meetings.

Members also agreed to include focused sessions on academic mission in future meetings and sought advice from the Chair, Academic Senate around what specific areas could be explored with suggestions including student attainment and retention. Members discussed the Chancellor and Deputy Chancellors' participation in a governance session as part of the University Strategic Forum (USF) in February, in particular the positive response from the staff attending the session and the importance of University Council's visibility and engagement with staff in an open forum such as USF. In considering a plan for future stakeholder events and activities, the suggestion of University Council hosting a provocation with staff, students and experts for the June meeting was discussed, with possible themes suggested including Generative AI, with the Chair, Academic Senate and the Interim Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic asked to participate in planning for the session.

***Action**: University Secretary to ensure that the Provocation stakeholder activity be added to the Council Workplan for June and ensure that both the Chair, Academic Senate and the Interim Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic are included in planning the session.*

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-1.1
University Council **noted** the University Council Annual Planner

1.2 * Items to be starred / Motions on Unstarred Items
The motions relating to the remaining unstarred items were passed in a block:
- Item 1.1 University Council Workplan for 2025
- Item 7.5 UTAS Holdings Pty Ltd Minutes
- Item 7.6 Utas Properties Pty Ltd (UPPL) Minutes

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-1.2
University Council **adopted** the recommendations and reports presented as unstarred items without discussion.

Craig Barling, Professor Natalie Brown, Kate Huntington and Anthony Koutoulis joined the meeting at 9.51am

2. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

2.1 * Introductory Items

Declarations of interest
Associate Professor Aidan Davison noted possible conflicts with Agenda Item 5.3 (Update on Academic Systems Project) and Item 5.4 (Staff Agreement) due to being a member of the University's Academic Workload Consultative Committee as the NTEU representative.

Members requested that any amendments made to the Register of Interest between meetings of University Council be clearly marked and visible for the reference of Council members.

Action: *University Secretary to ensure that any changes made to the Register of Interest for University Council members are clearly marked and that amendments are visible for members' reference.*

Minutes
Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-2.1(1)
University Council **confirmed** the minutes of the meetings held on 6 December 2024 and via circular on 24 January 2025 and 5 February 2025 as true and accurate records.

Actions
University Council noted the status of all action items.

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-2.1(2)
University Council **received** the report showing progress on all outstanding items from previous Council meetings.

3. 2024 ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Ben Rose, Emma Bates, Leigh Burrill and Susannah Windsor joined the meeting 10.10am

3.1 * 2024 Financial Result
University Council discussed the 2024 Financial Result noting that despite the challenges faced in 2024, the University would be reporting a Cash Operating Result (EBITDA) that is materially on budget and whilst international revenue was below budget, this had been successfully mitigated through higher domestic enrolments and cost savings implemented in response to the projected revenue shortfall.

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-3.1
University Council noted the 2024 Financial Result.

3.2 * 2024 Annual Financial Statements
The Chair, Audit and Risk Committee advised Council that the 2024 Annual Financial Statements had been considered and endorsed by the Audit and Risk Committee at its meeting on 24 February 2025 with key issues flagged with management including the franking credit refund, still pending from the 2021 sale of shares in IDP Education, provisioning for Project Aurora, contingent liabilities relating to Project Aurora, and

the contractual obligations under the State Government funding deed for the Northern Transformation Project.

Management provided an additional overview of the financial statements for Council, confirming that the University Representation Letter and Management Certificates had been prepared indicating that the 2024 Annual Financial Statements were complete, accurate and compliant.

University Council acknowledged the work of the Chief Financial Officer and his team including Associate Director, Financial Controller and Research Support (Emma Bates) and Senior Lead, Financial Reporting (Leigh Burrill) and thanked them for their efforts in preparing the annual statements.

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-3.2
University council **approved** the 2024 Annual Financial Statements for the University and its consolidated entities and **recommended** that the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor sign the Financial Statements on behalf of the University.

Ben Rose, Emma Bates, Leigh Burrill and Susannah Windsor left the meeting at 10.32am

4. CURRENT OPERATING POSITION

4.1 * Vice-Chancellor's Update
The Vice-Chancellor shared an update on the challenges facing the sector including how prepared universities are to adapting their operating models in a low growth environment, student safety on campus, antisemitism and executive remuneration.

University Council discussed the six priority areas for 2025 identified through the University Executive Report and whether there were any additional priorities to be added to the list and how they could be assured of the progress against those strategic priorities not included on the list. The Vice-Chancellor advised that the Strategic Key Performance Indicator Report to Council would make visible progress against all strategic initiatives, with members testing whether there was a seventh area to be included on the list that specifically referenced the challenges of ensuring financial sustainability in a changing funding landscape. Members also considered the correlation between student experience and retention and the financial impacts, noting that a priority for the Academic Division was on segmenting current student data to identify patters for why students were not completing their studies, aided by a more sophisticated use of data to identify students at greater risk of not completing and to deploy appropriate interventions and programs to support them.

Following discussion regarding the efforts to date in building capability in the workforce, members supported the suggestion that for priority area 3, the word '*Lay*' be replaced with the word 'St*rengthen*' "*the foundations for the culture and capability needed for the new era*."

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-4.1
University Council **noted** the update from the Vice-Chancellor.

4.2 * University Executive Report
University Council considered its first University Executive Report that covered strategic and emerging issues, structured around six strategic priorities identified for 2025 (as discussed under items 1.1 and 4.1). Members noted that the first monthly Operating Performance Report would be circulated to University Council in March 2025, and the comprehensive review of performance against Strategic KPIs would be considered later in the year.

During discussion of the Report the following was highlighted:

- Domestic student applications for core offerings were up by 5 per cent from 2024 including interstate and Tasmanian enrolments with a growing interest in new campuses in Burnie, with enrolments up 20 per cent and Launceston, up 8 per cent year-to-date. University College and online enrolments had increased overall with management advising that retention of these cohorts was being managed closely and additional support for these students deployed as required.
- International student numbers were down from 2024 levels however positive progress had been made in attracting better quality applications, increasing conversion outcomes with improved agent management and conversion rates which had shown a positive trend in 2025. There was a notable increase, 40 per cent in 2025 compared with 20 per cent in 2024, in the number of students moving from

accepting offers to enrolling. Members noted the improvement was due to targeting genuine students and utilising enhanced support services, to attract and convert quality student applications.

- Whilst international student enrolments had dropped from India and Bangladesh, there had been increases in the number of students from China and Hong Kong and the University cap was unlikely to be fully utilised.
- Members discussed the evolving policy environment and the likely impact of the upcoming federal election with management emphasising the importance of retention of international and domestic students.

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-4.2
University Council **received and noted** the University Executive Report for February 2025.

5. STRATEGIC FOCUS – ORGANISATIONSL PRIORITIES

Professor Luke Bereznicki and Rob Wilson joined the meeting at 11.27am

5.1 * Academic Unit Empowered Model – WORKING DISCUSSION

A working discussion of University Council was held to consider the revised timeline to support the transition from one-size-fits-all College structures, to a new right-sized University model that empowered academic units. Discussion centred on the realigned timeframes for the three streams of change in the Colleges of Sciences and Engineering, College of Health and Medicine and the Academic Division which would now be launched from 5 March 2025. Members also considered the finalised Institutional Organisational Model that reflected the scale and proximity of where leadership is most valued, with discussion focusing on the adaptability of the model and whether it could respond to future changes and the importance of ensuring that the nomenclature was appropriate and would be understood in any future state.

5.2 * Review of Academic Delegations and Ordinance

University Council noted that following the changes emerging to the University's academic structures and the commitment through the Refreshed Strategic Plan to reduce hierarchy and bureaucracy and organise around the idea of subsidiarity, the *Academic Delegations Ordinance (the Ordinance)* required review. Members considered the proposed principles upon which the review of the Ordinance and supporting schedule would be based, noting that that the overall aim of the review was to ensure that the Ordinance is simplified, that the delegations appropriately consider regulatory and legislative requirements, that it aligns with the recently revised General Delegations, and that unnecessary additional levels of approvals are removed. Management advised that the revised *Academic Delegations Ordinance* would be brought to the May 2025 meeting of University Council for consideration and approval.

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-5.2
University Council **approved** the principles set out, which will be used for the finalisation of a new academic delegation's framework.

5.3 * Update on Academic Systems Project – WORKING DISCUSSION

University Council held a working discussion on the Academic Systems Project and the ongoing work to ensure that by 2026 the University's curriculum offering delivered sustainable staff workloads, viable economics for the University, and an excellent and distinctive student experience across the regions. Members discussed the three work streams of the project, to define the system, develop the structure and deliver and activate the new system, with the objective of finalising the project over the next six months. University Council discussed the impact of the new system and were provided with a demonstration of tools developed to support its implementation including the new Workload Modelling tool.

Professor Luke Bereznicki and Rob Wilson left the meeting at 12.45pm
Ingrid Summers joined the meeting at 1.13pm

5.4 * Staff Agreement

Management provided an update on the planning and preparation being undertaken to finalise the bargaining strategy for Council consideration, with formal enterprise bargaining negotiations to commence with the unions in the latter half of 2025. Areas of focus for inclusion in the bargaining strategy were discussed along with the potential impacts of the upcoming federal election and the organisational restructure which was continuing into the first quarter of 2025.

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-5.4
University Council **noted** the update related to planning and preparation for enterprise bargaining negotiations.

Ingrid Summers left the meeting at 1.37pm

Jane Beaumont and Professor Nicholas Farrelly joined the meeting at 1.38pm

5.5 * Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Business Case and Engagement Strategy – WORKING DISCUSSION

A working discussion was held on the finalisation of the STEM Business Case and engagement strategy, with members noting that Management had been working with the Department of State Growth, particularly Infrastructure Tasmania, to seek State Government endorsement of the business case. Members also noted the outcome of an independent review of the business case found that it had a 'high confidence' rating and that it met State and Federal Government objectives and the integrity of the business case modelling.

Management confirmed that once finalised, the 2025 STEM Business Case for Infrastructure Australia would be circulated to University Council for comments and further feedback, prior to it being approved by Management and submitted to Infrastructure Tasmania. Members noted that the Final Business Case would be published on the University' website.

Action: *Management to circulate the finalised 2025 STEM Business Case for Infrastructure Australia to University Council for comment and feedback.*

Jane Beaumont and Professor Nicholas Farrelly left the meeting at 1.58pm

6. GOVERNANCE

6.1 * Workplace Gender Equity Agency (WGEA) Reporting

University Council considered the WGEA Executive Summary and Industry Benchmark Report, noting the reduction in the Gender Pay gap from 6.9 per cent in 2022-23 to 6.2 per cent in 2023-24 and that the University continued to be a sector leader at 6.2 per cent versus the sector average of 8.3 per cent. Members considered what it would require from the institution to eliminate a gender pay gap completely and whether achieving this target would result in a more diverse and fairer workforce. University Council discussed the ways in which this could be achieved including increasing the number of men in lower quartile professional positions that had traditionally been held by women, noting that by making them more attractive to men it would likely reveal instances of inherent gender bias and barriers for women that exist in the system.

Members agreed that positively valuing academic and professional staff, and their contributions at all levels whilst continuing to tackle embedded issues of gender bias, would contribute to a fairer more diverse workforce. The creation of the Workload Modelling Tool would support this approach by providing an accessible and transparent evidence base to encourage more effective workforce planning.

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-6.1

University Council **noted** the WGEA Executive Summary and Industry Benchmarking Reports.

6.2 * Inquiries into University Governance

University Council received an update on the delivery of the Legislative Council Select Committee's final report on the *Inquiry into the Provisions of the University of Tasmania Act 1992* and the Senate Inquiry into the quality of governance at Australian Higher education providers. Members discussed the Tertiary Education Legislation Amendment (There For Education, Not Profit) Bill 2025, which had been referred to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee, noting Universities Australia would be making a submission to the Inquiry and Council considered how the University might respond to areas of focus for the Inquiry including student engagement in governance, academic staff workload and executive salaries. Members agreed that greater emphasis on engagement with student voices at all levels of governance was important and that remaining connected with the work of the Tasmania University Student Association was a key factor in successfully achieving this.

Management advised that University Council would continue to be updated on the progress of the federal inquiries.

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-6.2

University Council **noted** the update on the delivery of the Legislative Council Select Committee's final report on the *Inquiry into the Provisions of the University of Tasmania Act 1992* and the Senate Inquiry into the quality of governance at Australian Higher education providers.

6.3 * Council Review Update

University Council considered the progress of implementation of the approved Council Review recommendations and associated actions and had no further feedback.

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-6.3
University Council **noted** the update and progress on the actions in response to the 2024 Independent Review of University Council

7. STANDING REPORTS TO COUNCIL

7.1 * Chair Academic Senate Report

The Chair of Academic Senate advised that Academic Senate had begun to consider its future structure at the December 2024 Planning Day in response to multiple external and internal reviews conducted during 2024. Following extensive feedback, a more comprehensive model had been developed which aimed to address several recommendations from these reviews including creating greater opportunities for the full body of Academic Senate to engage more comprehensively with major new academic initiatives, eliminating unnecessary duplication amongst committees of Senate and to review the membership of Senate and consider reducing its overall size, lowering the ratio of ex-officio members and encouraging more diversity.

Members noted that consultation sessions had been held throughout February with various cohorts of Academic Senate members to receive feedback on the proposed new model. Initial responses from the cohort groups had been positive, with aspects identified for further development around membership of Academic Senate and the new committees, further detail around the types of matters and report to be considered by Senate and its committees and a commitment to ensuring that student wellbeing matters, research and research training continued to be critical aspects of Academic Senate's work. Academic Senate would be considering the new model at its March and May meetings with the aim of bringing the final endorsed model and amended *Academic Senate Ordinance* for University Council to consider at its meeting in June 2025.

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-7.1
University Council **received and noted** the verbal report from the Chair Academic Senate.

7.2 * 2024 Academic Senate Report

The 2024 Annual Report was taken as read with the Chair Academic Senate providing key highlights including the importance of ongoing strategic discussions at Senate, working with students as partners, leading curriculum design in a generative AI world and considering the importance of continuing professional development for academic staff. Members were reminded of the importance of collaboration through Academic Senate, for students and elected members to connect and share their insights.

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-7.2
University Council **received and noted** the 2024 Academic Senate Annual Report.

Susannah Windsor joined the meeting at 2.32pm

7.3 * Audit and Risk Committee Report

The Chair, Audit and Risk Committee provided a verbal update to University Council on the meeting held on 24 February 2025, highlighting key areas of focus for the Committee including progress on work to identify and rectify the historical underpayments of staff and the current risk approach towards any newly identified historical underpayments and what assurances were required to avoid future payment issues. It was noted that phase two of the project was nearing completion. The Chair also advised that the Committee had received a presentation on the relocation of the University's research data centre and had been advised on the mitigants in place to ensure that the location selected remained secure and that the risk of damage from future weather events was low.

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-7.3
University Council **received and noted** the verbal update from the Chair Audit and Risk Committee on the recently held meeting on 24 February 2025.

7.4 * Compliance Report

University Council considered the detailed Due Diligence and Compliance Report noting the current and emerging compliance risks and developments since the last Report provided in December 2024.

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-7.4
University Council **received and noted** the Compliance Report.

Susannah Windsor left the meeting at 2.43pm

7.5 * UTAS Holdings Pty Ltd Minutes
This item was unstarred and therefore not discussed.

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-7.5
University Council **noted** the minutes of the UTAS Holdings Pty Ltd meetings held on 14 October 2024 and 9 December 2024

7.6 * University Properties Pty Ltd (UPPL Board) Minutes
This item was unstarred and therefore not discussed.

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-7.6
University Council **noted** the minutes of the University Properties Pty Ltd (UPPL) meeting held on 3 December 2024.

8. GRADUATIONS

8.1 * Graduations to be presented for Conferral of Awards
University Council conferred awards to the students listed in the agenda.

Resolution 28-2-2025-UC-8.1
University Council **reissued, revoked and conferred** the awards as listed before them.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

9.1 Other Business
Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Guidance Notes
The Vice-Chancellor updated University Council on discussions held at the Universities Australia Conference around the growing incidents of antisemitism, islamophobia and racism across the Country and the work ongoing to ensure that university policies and responses were in place to ensure the safety of staff and students on campus. It was note that TEQSA was developing guidance notes in response to these issues and that they were consulting with the sector on two new pieces of guidance, due to be in place by April 2025.

Fundraising
Members agreed with the suggestion that a discussion item on the University's long-term strategic approach to philanthropic funding and fundraising more generally across the sector be added to the Council workplan for 2025.

***Action**: University Secretary to ensure that the University's long-term strategic approach to philanthropic funding and fundraising more generally across the sector be added to the Council workplan for 2025.*

February Council Meeting Summary
Professor Dawkins provided a summary of the meeting, including what had been achieved and identified for further improvement and noted the following:

- The Annual Financial Statements 2024 had been approved, and University Council had endorsed the six strategic priority areas for focus in 2025, with members agreeing to use these priorities to guide strategic focus throughout the year.
- Shorter papers and agenda length overall was welcomed, and there was an appropriate focus on strategy, however the business of the meeting had mostly focused on reports for noting only.
- Members agreed that more clarity and specificity was needed with the agenda papers to ensure University Council was aware of what was being asked of them including if feedback was being sought.
- The accompanying PowerPoint presentations shared at the meeting provided important complimentary information that in some instances assisted University Council to understand the content of the pre-read reports. It was agreed that management should ensure that where appropriate, these presentations accompany the pre-read with the meeting agenda.

***Action**: University Secretary to amend the University Council Briefing Note Template to include the reason or purpose of University Council receiving the paper.*

The meeting concluded at 3.05pm