

Discussion Paper: Governance Reform at UTS

Executive Summary

The Challenge

Governance refers to the system or framework of structures, rules, laws, functions, processes and functions through which an organisation such as a university is controlled and directed. It provides a framework for Universities and the people that work, study and engage with them to organise themselves to achieve common goals. These goals commonly include: providing higher education through teaching and research, cultivating critical thinking and problem solving, producing high quality graduates for the workforce, advancing knowledge and innovation for public good, promoting academic freedom and a place for reasoned debates, supporting societal progress, and creating social impact and fostering social justice.

Governance sets the boundaries of acceptable conduct and practices of different actors in an organisation and controls their decision making through the creation and enforcement of rules and guidelines. From a normative perspective, good governance features a well organised system that represents stakeholders interests and needs. It should guide the formulation, implementation and evaluation of an organisation and its people's objectives, policies, and programs and ensure smooth operation across various contexts. Core principles of good governance include:

- **Accountability** - relates to the acceptance of responsibility for one's actions, and being answerable to these to relevant stakeholders
- **Transparency** - refers to open and honest communication about decisions and processes and making it clear how decisions are made and why, as well as sharing of information.
- **Rule of law** - requires that organisations and the decision makers within them are subject to and accountable to laws of the land that are applied equally and impartially.
- **Consensus orientation** - frames decisions making so that it represents the broader interests of the community ensuring that governance approaches are inclusive and lead to a collective consensus.
- **Equity and inclusiveness** - ensures that all people in an organising and especially those who may experience vulnerability have the opportunity to participate in decision making.
- **Responsiveness** - means that organisations and their decision makers should react promptly and effectively to the needs and demands of stakeholders.
- **Effectiveness and efficiency** - is focused on optimising the resources of the organisations to achieve sustainable results, ensuring that processes are streamlined and goals are met with minimal waste.
- **Participation** - emphasises the active involvement of people within organisations shaping decisions that affect them, and encouraging active engagement in the affairs of the organisation.

A key concern for the UTS Governance project is that these principles are not being fully realised across the higher education sector, including within UTS. The project therefore seeks to explore how these principles can be strengthened and better embedded in our own institutional context.

Australian higher education faces significant governance challenges threatening institutional effectiveness and public confidence. Current highly centralised, managerialist and corporate governance models at universities, including UTS, have led to concerns about the balance between efficiency, transparency, and participation. These pressures have been associated with outcomes such as growth in administrative layers, increased reliance on external consultancy, wage compliance failures, and reduced academic voice in strategic decision making.

UTS's governance structures, regulated by the [UTS Act 1989](#), are centred on Council which consist of a minimum of 11 and a maximum of 22 members. Staff representation currently forms a minority, consistent with governance arrangements at most Australian universities.

Currently, UTS Council has 3 official members (the UTS Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, and Chair of Academic Board), 12 appointed members who are external appointments made by the minister (2 members) and by Council Members (10 members), and 5 elected members (comprising 2 academic staff members, 1 professional staff member, 1 postgraduate student, and 1 undergraduate student). "[The Nominations Committee](#) recommends to Council candidates whom Council may either nominate to the Minister for appointment as Council members or appoint as Council members." It is composed of the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, and up to three Council members, with a current membership of three.

Meanwhile, the Academic Board has an important advisory role but limited formal oversight of organisational change processes or decisions affecting the university's strategic direction.

The Opportunity

UTS is one of Australia's leading urban universities, known for its innovation in teaching, research and industry partnerships as well as strong civic engagement with Sydney's diverse communities. UTS's vision of becoming a world-leading university of technology is being driven by its commitment to excellence, innovation, entrepreneurship and social justice – the university's core values. Social justice and social impact are central to UTS's mission and therefore ensuring that the university has good governance is critical.

This project is not a critique of individuals, but a collaborative and evidence informed exploration of how governance frameworks can evolve to best serve UTS's mission and values.

Principles of good governance for universities that have been identified include academic integrity and autonomy, shared governance and participation, transparency and accountability, financial sustainability with mission alignment, stakeholder engagement and civic responsibility, collegial culture and psychosocial safety, diversity, equity and inclusion in leadership, competence, independence and ethical conduct of governing bodies, strategic agility and risk management, and local as well as global responsibility and impact.

Drawing on these principles, we can develop evidence-based reforms that balance academic expertise with corporate requirements, protecting our 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 UTS Act 1989. It represents an open, collegial inquiry into ways that UTS can strengthen its governance in line with best practice nationally and internationally. This discussion paper is intended as an informative start to a community discussion.

PHASE 1: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

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

PHASE 2: PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

- **Finalised Reform Proposal:** The Governance Working Group collates feedback into comprehensive recommendations
- **Endorsement:** UTS open letter supporting the recommended governance reforms. Signatories become public once 100+ signatures achieved
- **Policy Engagement:** Presentation to policymakers, including State and Federal policymakers, 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: UTSGovernanceproject@gmail.com
- Nominate representatives for the Governance Workshop
- Endorse the finalised proposal and open letter as a public signatory

This initiative is intended as a constructive contribution to institutional sustainability. Effective governance supports high quality teaching, excellent research and public good outcomes for the community.

This discussion paper has been prepared independently by members of the UTS community in a personal capacity. It does not represent the official position of the University of Technology Sydney or any of its governing bodies.

Introduction

The Australian higher education system faces significant and complex governance challenges that may impact institutional effectiveness and public confidence, funding is constrained, and reputational risks are increasing. The capacity of universities to foster national intellectual growth, advance scientific and evidence-based public education, and sustain Australia's sovereign capability for research and innovation is critical. This capacity must be protected and strengthened, 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).

However, aspects of current higher education governance structures and incentive systems have been observed to prioritise short term financial or managerial objectives over longer term academic and social missions. This can sometimes result in tensions between fiscal sustainability and the broader educational, research and civic purposes of universities, as well as reliance on external consultancy advice that may not always reflect the unique institutional and disciplinary contexts of the sector.

Inspired by a similar staff-led [governance project at the Australian National University](#) (ANU), this initiative seeks to facilitate a constructive, evidence informed dialogue about governance reform at UTS. We believe it is important to develop stakeholder-led, collectively-designed governance reform commensurate with our mission to deliver public and social good for Australia in a responsible and efficient manner.

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

- **UTS community-led:** Designed and delivered by members of the UTS community in their personal capacities
- **Evidence-based:** Grounded in comparative analysis of successful governance models and informed by experts on governance, accountability, 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 project a comprehensive, credible reform proposal that could reshape internal governance and inform potential recommendations for improvement under the *University of Technology Sydney ACT 1989* and related policy frameworks. This proposal will be presented to UTS staff for their feedback, refinement and endorsement and to the university executive and key stakeholders including State and Federal policymakers for their consideration.

This work requires expertise from across the UTS community, and from across disciplines, schools, faculties and institutes. We invite participation from those who recognise that effective, transparent, and inclusive governance is essential infrastructure for academic excellence, institutional sustainability and public trust.

This discussion paper is intended to offer an analytical rationale for governance reform at UTS, 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 UTS
2. Existing governance processes at UTS.
3. Proposed solutions recommended by higher education governance experts, including alternative governance models that could be emulated at UTS.
4. How an inclusive, representative process including a workshop to develop solutions could be pursued at UTS; and
5. A set of example proposals for UTS governance reform for workshop discussion.

Key Governance Challenges for Higher Education

Pre-1987, Australia had a much smaller university sector in which institutions were research focused and largely concentrated in state and territory capital cities. During this time, funding for Australian universities was almost entirely from government grants split between federal and state sources, though from the 1970s the Commonwealth took a more dominant role. Student fees were minimal or non-existent and higher education was largely free for domestic students. Alongside universities, there were various colleges of advanced education which focused on vocational and professional training in teaching, nursing, business, and technical fields. These colleges were primarily funded by state governments, with targeted support provided by the federal government for expansion or specific vocational initiatives. The colleges had restricted capacity to raise independent revenue with some charging modest student fees but education largely subsidised.

From 1987-1991, the Federal Education Minister John Dawkins launched a series of reforms to the Australian higher education sector, merging colleges of education and granting university status to a variety of institutions, including UTS, to create a unified system. Income contingent loans to finance student fees, and a new range of performance monitoring frameworks and methods were also introduced. The vision was to end the divide between vocational and academic-research focused institutions and significantly expand access to higher education as well as the size of the Australian degree education workforce.

As stated on the institution's website: UTS's vision of becoming a world-leading university of technology is being driven by its commitment to excellence, innovation, entrepreneurship and social justice – the university's core values. When considering this mission and values as well as issues of governance, it is important to first understand the history of the university.

In 1987, The University of Technology Sydney ACT (NSW) was enacted to establish the then New South Wales Institute of Technology (NSWIT) as UTS which was reconstituted as such in 1988. NSWIT had itself amalgamated with the NSW Institute of Business Studies in 1968, and had established the first non-university Law School in the state in 1976. The original UTS act was soon repealed and replaced by the University of Technology Sydney Act 1989, with the university integrating the Kuring-Gai College of Advanced Education (KCAE) and the Institute of Technical and Adult Education (ITATE). By 1991, an academic structure of nine faculties and 25 schools was

established. This history of UTS is important as it reflects the core foundations of the university that should be reflected in its leadership, governance, and custodianship.

However, the Dawkins reforms and the introduction of a marketised system for higher education in Australia have been consistently associated with problematic governance outcomes (Horne 2020; Turner 2025). Reductions in Commonwealth 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. Indeed, in Australia 55.4% of tertiary education funding (before transfers) comes from public sources compared to the OECD average of 71.9% (OECD, 2025). Public investment in tertiary education as a percentage of GDP stands at 0.7% compared to the OECD average of 1%. This means that undoubtedly public investment in Australian universities is low, and in response universities have had to chase international student fees to balance the books. Addressing the broken funding model for Australian higher education remains a major priority.

Yet, beyond problems with the funding model, a range of issues across the Australian University sector, including UTS, that are associated with their forms of governance have been identified. These include:

Rapid growth in executive remuneration: Reports indicated that Vice-Chancellor (VC) salaries at Australian Universities, including UTS, are among the highest in the world. Historical data suggests VC remuneration has increased substantially since the mid-1980s, coinciding with regulatory changes introduced during the Dawkins reforms. In 1985 VC pay was equivalent to \$300,000 per year in today's terms and was partially regulated by the Academic Salaries Tribunal. Dawkins era deregulation took the brakes off, and in recent years, high remuneration has attracted public commentary that has raised questions about alignment between executive pay and institutional performance, particularly in a context of student financial pressures (Thrower 2025). Reports from the Senate Inquiry into University Governance note that over 300 universities executives in Australia earn salaries exceeding state premiers.

Administrative expansion: Proliferation of non-academic management roles especially at the centre of UTS under the Senior Staff Group and various Deputy Vice Chancellor Portfolios has unfolded over recent years, whilst core teaching and research academic positions remain precarious. Non-academic (professional) FTE (non-casual) roles employed at UTS increased from 1,918.8 in 2022 to 2,063.0 in 2023), an increase of approximately 7.5%. During the same period, academic FTE (non-casual) increased by approximately 4.4% following a reduction during COVID-19. With respect to the Senior Staff Group in 2023 there were 7 positions reported in the senior pay bands: Band 3 range). 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: Reports indicate that Australian Universities spent over \$734 million on external consultants in 2023 (NTEU, 2024). Concerns have been raised about transparency in

procurement processes and the balance between using internal expertise and engaging external consultants. A Senate Inquiry hearing noted that UTS reported expenditure on external consultancy services of approximately \$44m over the previous year. UTS has sustained media attention in 2025 due to expenditure of over \$7million with KPMG to assist with a change management proposal for the university that is known as the Operational Sustainability Initiative (OSI). In June 2025 the OSI became the subject of a “notice to give information” from SafeWork NSW, due to a complaint submitted to them that alleged “wilful and negligent mismanagement” associated with the restructuring (Kampark, 2025).

Employment practices and workforce structure: UTS, like many Australian universities, has relied on a substantial proportion of casual and fixed term staff. The university has committed to reducing casualisation by at least 20%, and converting certain fixed-term positions to ongoing roles.

Wage compliance issues: Confirmed underpayments exceed \$265 million across the sector (NTEU 2024), with the Fair Work Ombudsman identifying “entrenched non-compliance” (Cassidy, 2023). In 2023, UTS reached an enforceable undertaking with the Fair Work Ombudsman to rectify underpayments, including wages, superannuation and interest totaling over A\$5.7 million. This followed earlier findings that professional casuals were not correctly paid for agreed minimum hours. This undertaking related to more than 2,777 employees who were underpaid over a seven year period, with individual underpayment amounts varying and some exceeding \$200,000. This included back payment of approximately \$4.4 million in wages plus an approximate of \$1.3 million in superannuation and interest (Needs, 2023).

Casualisation: Extensive reliance on insecure employment creates workforce instability and limits academic staff capacity to participate meaningfully in governance. Casualisation across the higher education sector in Australia has been significant in recent years. UTS stated in 2024 that the level of casual employment at the university had remained steady at around 20% (Palgan, 2024). However, it is also noted that the OSI change management proposal outlines planned cuts of 32.7 full time equivalent (FTE) casual roles as part of the wider staff reduction.

Current governance structures appear to have some issues with adequate transparency and accountability mechanisms which include the following issues:

Representation of education, research and public-good expertise: Reports indicate that some university governing bodies, including UTS, have relatively few academic representatives compared to externally appointed members (Taflaga et al., 2025). Observers have noted the importance of balancing corporate expertise with specialist higher education knowledge, reflecting the distinct roles of universities as communities of scholars as well as large organisations (Taflaga et al., 2025). Universities have different distributed power-models compared to corporations. 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.

Differences in representation between senior management and academics may influence decision making processes and the alignment of institutional priorities with academic and public-good missions. Public discourse indicates ongoing debate around these issues (Parker et al., 2023). Effective Councils can provide mechanisms for staff representation in governance and oversight.

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 University of Technology Sydney Act 1989. The Act requires that the UTS Council consist of a minimum of 11, and a maximum of 22 members.* Currently, UTS Council has 3 official members (the UTS Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, and Chair of Academic Board), 12 appointed members who are external appointments made by the minister (2 members) and by Council Members (10 members), and 5 elected members (comprising 2 academic staff members, 1 professional staff member, 1 postgraduate student, and 1 undergraduate student).

The UTS Act 1989 states that of the members of the council, at least 2 must have financial expertise (as demonstrated by relevant qualifications and by experience in financial management at a senior level in the public or private sector), and at least one must have commercial expertise (as demonstrated by relevant experience at a senior level in the public or private sector). The Act also states that all appointed members must have expertise and experience relevant to the functions exercisable by the Council and an appreciation of the object, values, functions and activities of the University.

There is no requirement that other members have experience in the higher education sector. Importantly, the Act states that: The number of members in any one category of members must not at any time constitute a majority of the total number of members. As of 2024, 10 of 16 Council members were appointed through ministerial or Council processes, with 31% elected by staff and students (NTEU, 2024). This composition may limit the proportion of members with recent higher education experience relative to other expertise.

These factors lead to specific implications for university governance:

Decision-making transparency: University councils are not required to publish detailed meeting minutes, and processes for connecting council members with academic and professional staff vary. Unlike corporations, councils do not operate under shareholder oversight. These factors may influence the robustness of governance and oversight (O'Neill, 2025). University councils may rely primarily on information provided by senior executives, which observers note could influence their ability to fully exercise legislated oversight responsibilities (O'Neill, 2025). This reliance may also impact how councils evaluate and monitor executive performance.

Internal oversight: In many universities, Academic Boards or Senates oversee academic programs and degree conferrals, but typically do not participate in change management, budget strategies, or executive appointments. Observers note that this structure may limit opportunities for internal review

and input on decisions that could impact the university's ability to deliver on its academic and public-good missions ((O'Neill, 2025).

Constructive contestability: Observers have highlighted that decision making may benefit from additional transparency, review and feedback processes (Taflaga et al., 2025). Limited contestability can reduce opportunities for diverse perspectives to inform resource allocation and strategic decisions. Similarly, managerial leadership may face challenges when oversight or review mechanisms are limited. Managerial leadership requires sufficient autonomy to manage university operations sustainably, and the absence of formal processes to support contestability could have adverse effects on decision making. This is particularly relevant if senior management groups and/or Councils are not closely connected to the core business of teaching, research and public good activities. In the context of UTS, limited contestability may affect transparency and accountability processes. In some scenarios, this could influence the university's capacity to maintain focus on core teaching and research priorities, including areas such as teacher education, public health, international relations, and ethics and responsibility. Observers note that internal oversight mechanisms play a key role in supporting decisions that align with these priorities (Taflaga et al., 2025).

External oversight: Australian universities do not have the same accountability mechanisms as shareholder-based corporations. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) has statutory powers but limited scope compared with corporate regulators. Reports from the Expert Council on University Governance - pointed to the "inadequate" condition of higher education governance and has cited "far too many examples of universities underpaying staff and failing their responsibilities as employers" (Ministers' Media Centre 2025). However, the Expert Council 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).

UTS Governance Structures

Current UTS Governance structures reflect many of the issues noted in the previous section. Governance reform at UTS may involve changes to internal processes, as well as potential amendments to legislation and regulations that currently shape internal governance arrangements.

UTS governance is regulated by:

The University of Technology Sydney (NSW) Act of 1989.

This Act defines UTS 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 UTS Council as UTS's primary governing entity. Some relevant elements of the Act include:

"The University has the following principal functions for the promotion of its object—

- (a) the provision of facilities for education and research of university standard,
- (b) the encouragement of the dissemination, advancement, development and application of knowledge informed by free inquiry,

- (c) the provision of courses of study or instruction across a range of fields, and the carrying out of research, to meet the needs of the community,
- (d) the participation in public discourse,
- (e) the conferring of degrees, including those of Bachelor, Master and Doctor, and the awarding of diplomas, certificates and other awards,
- (f) the provision of teaching and learning that engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry
- (g) the development of governance, procedural rules, admission policies, financial arrangements and quality assurance processes that are underpinned by the values and goals referred to in the functions set out in this subsection, and that are sufficient to ensure the integrity of the University's academic programs.

The Act legislates that “Council is the governing authority of the University and has the functions conferred or imposed on it by or under this Act”.

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

As an Australian University, UTS must meet the Threshold Standards for higher education accreditation and comply with TEQSA investigatory and enforcement directives. A current investigation is underway as of August 2025 by TEQSA into compliance processes related to course suspensions at UTS as part of OSI (Karp, 2025).

UTS 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, and the Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000.

UTS Council

As noted above, under the UTS Act (1989), Council is responsible for the overall governance 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:
- Council appoints the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Chancellors, and Deputy Vice-Chancellors, and sets the terms and conditions of their appointments, including, monitoring performance and reviewing Council's own effectiveness.
- In practice, a rhetorical distinction has been created between ‘governance’ and ‘management’ of the university. Council's role has primarily been positioned as helping to govern the organisation rather than manage it, with day to day management delegated to the Vice-Chancellor, as chief executive officer. This distinction can shape perceptions of power distribution and the scope of Council oversight, particularly over financial management and strategic decisions of the university.
- The *University of Technology Sydney Act 1989 (NSW)* vests broad governing authority in the

UTS Council. The Council retains statutory responsibility for “the control and management of the affairs and concerns of the University,” including oversight of the Vice-Chancellor and the University’s overall performance.

- In order to effectively oversee governance at the university, UTS Council needs to have **(1)** sufficient access to relevant information and **(2)** time to process it. However:
 - IUTS Council primarily relies on information provided by the Vice-Chancellor and Chancellor to support accountability functions. Additional independent information may be available, but access varies.
 - Information provided to Council is often aggregated, which may limit visibility of detailed resource allocation or staffing decisions across Colleges or Portfolios.
 - Council papers are extensive, often numbering hundreds of pages, with limited time for review. This can present challenges for thorough preparation and analysis.
 - Appointed (non-staff or student) Council members have limited on-campus interaction, which may influence familiarity with operational aspects of the university.
 - Council Committees, such as the Finance Committee, currently include predominantly external appointees, with no formal staff or student membership. Observers note that this composition may affect the diversity of perspectives in committee discussions.
 - Minutes from the Council meetings are not routinely shared in detailed and timely formats, which may impact internal transparency.

Academic Board

Constituted under Rule G3 of the UTS General Rules, Academic Board is the University’s principal academic advisory body to Council. Its membership includes senior executives (the Vice-Chancellor, Provost, and Deputy Vice-Chancellors), the Deans of each Faculty, Pro Vice-Chancellors, the University Librarian, and other key leaders, all as ex officio members. In addition, elected academic staff from across the faculties and elected undergraduate and postgraduate student representatives contribute to its broadly representative character. The Chair of Academic Board also sits on Council, establishing a direct link between academic governance and the University’s governing authority.

- The Academic Board is tasked with ensuring the University maintains the highest standards in teaching, learning, scholarship, and research, and with safeguarding academic freedom.
- The Board provides a central forum for collegial discussion and debate on academic matters and plays a key role in connecting senior leadership with the wider academic community.

However its powers also include:

- Approving, accrediting, and re-accrediting award courses, and overseeing their review and discontinuation.
- Formulating and approving academic policies in areas such as admissions, assessment, and course management.
- Advising the Council and Vice-Chancellor on the University’s academic goals, strategies, and priorities.
- Confirming that academic authority delegations are implemented effectively across the

University.

The Academic Board's powers are defined by the University of Technology Sydney Act 1989 and the UTS General Rules, but remain subject to Council approval. This may limit its authority in some governance and change management processes. Observers note that this structure shapes the Board's role in strategic decision making and reform initiatives.

Convocation

Under the University of Technology Sydney Act 1989 (NSW), Convocation comprises:

- All UTS graduates, including those with associate diplomas or certificates of at least one year full-time duration.
- Continuing or fixed-term academic or professional staff members.
- Past members of the Councils of UTS and its predecessor institutions.
- Professors Emeriti and recipients of honorary awards, if not otherwise members.
- Others admitted by Council resolution for conspicuous service or special qualification.

Convocation's functions are prescribed by the UTS By-law 2005. The Council may establish committees of Convocation as it considers necessary. Historically, Convocation has been largely ceremonial. Meetings may be convened by the Chancellor or Vice-Chancellor, but a formal quorum requirement is set by the governing legislation or by-law. Currently, Convocation holds no formal role in university governance or decision-making. Its powers and existence are alterable through changes to the UTS Act, By-law, or Council resolution, rather than being constitutionally entrenched.

Current UTS governance structures include mechanisms for oversight and academic input but may present challenges in terms of staff participation, transparency, access to detailed decision making information, and accountability.

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 such as UTS. As a community, we may decide that some of the ideas should be adopted or adapted to suit the institutional conditions of UTS and the Australian Higher Education sector.

Corporate Governance

UTS, like most Australian universities, operates with a highly centralised, managerial and 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).

Because UTS is a public university established under New South Wales state legislation, Council must ensure compliance with statutory obligations and regulatory frameworks under the UTS Act

1989. It must also meet external regulatory and statutory obligations to bodies such as TEQSA, and in accordance with the Commonwealth Higher Education Support Act. This means some elements of corporate governance are unavoidable and legally necessary.

However, an over-reliance on corporate governance could risk an excessive focus on short term revenue and cost-cutting, including the closure of teaching and research programs and the retrenchment of staff - which should always be considered as a last resort and subject to extensive consultation. This can potentially undermine disciplinary diversity, important basic and applied research, and the quality of education. These short term outcomes might erode the sector's social license and reduce public support for government funding for higher education.

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 discussions about governance reform at UTS.

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

1. 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 democratic accountability and ensuring institutional autonomy by preventing non-scholars from driving the academic mission.

Examples and Implications for UTS:

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, comprising the 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, provides additional accountability by 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. Notably, Oxford's Congregation has exercised its powers to maintain academic freedom and resist governance changes that restrict staff and student rights. 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 UTS, this model suggests:

- Consider expanding the size and advisory powers of the Academic Board with increased elected academic members
- Enabling academic input into strategic goals, critique of executive proposals, and participation in executive appointments and resource allocation, where feasible and legally compliant.
- Strengthening the advisory role of the professoriate in maintaining academic standards and examining change proposals in a consultative framework.
- Increasing academic participation in governance and decision making could be complemented by changes to the UTS Council itself. Under the current UTS Act 1989, Council membership is largely determined by statute. Therefore, any move to shift the Council's composition - for example, to include a majority of academics, students plus alumni would require legislative amendment. Such an amendment could be designed to improve accountability, oversight, and representation while embedding collegial principles at the highest governance level while maintaining compliance with statutory and regulatory obligations.
- This could enable the UTS Council to better reflect the university community, foster stronger academic input in executive decisions, and balance corporate oversight with academic autonomy, supporting good governance without undermining legal compliance and fiscal responsibility.

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, in some models staff are provided training in development (Trakman 2008). There is also the risk of overemphasising independent academic missions at the expense of corporate capabilities for government or industry partnerships. Collegial bodies could become ineffective 'talking shops' if representatives prioritise narrow interests over university wide concerns (Barnes 2020). Furthermore, adapting historical or overseas models for UTS governance should account for Australia's statutory and regulatory requirements and institutional context.

2. Collegiality as Shared Leadership / Balanced Governance

This model acknowledges the vital but different roles of academic and corporate leadership in university governance. It seeks to rebalance power to increase effectiveness, assuming majority

academic leadership representation on, or oversight of, the Governing Council, with stronger Academic Board powers to balance executive decision making. Academic leaders, even in formal management roles, are expected to retain significant active involvement in teaching and/or research.

This model emphasises collaboration: academics and corporate leaders work together, manage tensions, and design governance structures for discussion, transparency and accountability. It promotes mutual understanding of complementary roles rather than hierarchical control. Here there is a higher component of collegial decision making than found in typical corporate models we currently find at UTS and across Australia.

Examples and Implications for UTS:

Harvard University has considered an Academic Senate to enhance faculty participation in strategic decision making, especially in response to President Donald Trump's attacks on the university and more generally on higher education. For Harvard this would present 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 Professor's (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 could allow UTS to integrate academic expertise into strategic decision-making beyond purely academic matters, fostering a more collaborative environment for developing university policies and processes.

For UTS, this could entail:

- Co-designing governance models that balance corporate and academic requirements
- Increasing elected academic positions on the UTS Council and/or incorporating Faculty Deans on Council
- Formally empowering the Academic Board to oversee management decisions that could undermine the academic mission. This could occur with UTS Council approval, without legislative reform, though changes could be reversed by Council in the 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 concern with this approach was to overly empower departmental heads and their 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 UTS 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.

Additional Proposals for UTS Governance Reform

In addition to the aforementioned proposals, several further measures could strengthen governance at UTS:

1. **Independent Audit and Oversight Committees:** Establish committees reporting to Council on finance, risk, ethics, and academic quality, including external members with expertise in governance or higher education - ensuring roles are advisory and legally compliant.
2. **Term Limits and Rotation for Council Members:** Introduce fixed, staggered terms where possible to prevent entrenchment and encourage fresh perspectives.
3. **Formalised Staff and Student Consultation Mechanisms:** Implement panels for staff (including casuals) and students to provide input on major strategic, budgetary, or structural decisions.
4. **Transparency and Reporting Reforms:** Publish Council minutes and committee decisions regularly, with redactions only where legally required, and produce an annual governance performance report.
5. **Strengthen Academic Leadership Development:** Provide targeted training for Deans, Professors, and Academic Board members in governance, risk management, finance, and policy.
6. **Codified Principles for Decision-Making:** Develop a Charter of Governance Principles outlining obligations to protect academic freedom, integrity, stakeholder consultation, and public interest.
7. **Hybrid Digital Participation for Broader Community Input:** Use secure digital platforms to allow staff and students to provide structured feedback on proposals.
8. **Independent Ombudsman or Governance Advisor:** Establish a role independent of the Vice-Chancellor and Council to monitor governance processes, investigate complaints, and advise on compliance, transparency, and fairness.

Collectively, these measures aim to enhance accountability, embed collegial participation, protect academic autonomy, and improve transparency, while remaining compatible with UTS's statutory and regulatory framework. Where necessary, legislative amendments (for example, to Council composition) could be considered to strengthen academic oversight and representation.

In essence, collegial governance reform at UTS is argued to restore meaningful decision-making power to academics, foster trust and shared responsibility, and prioritise academic values alongside corporate accountability, that could help create a more effective, accountable, and ethically sound institution that better serves the public good.

The UTS Governance Project: A Collaborative Process for 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 UTS - and we invite you to participate.

We aim to produce through this process a collaborative, comprehensive, credible reform proposal that could reshape internal governance and inform amendments to the University of Technology Sydney Act 1989 and related external legislation. This proposal will be presented to the broader UTS community for input and feedback and to the university executive and key external stakeholders including policymakers for their consideration.

This work requires expertise from across faculties, schools and disciplines. 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. **(Early October 2025)** The Governance Working Group presents a discussion paper on governance reform for discussion amongst UTS stakeholders (*this paper*).
2. **(Early-mid October 2025)** The UTS community (staff, students, alumni, 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. **(Mid-late October 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 UTS, to build broad support for the 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. **(Mid-late October 2025)** Based on the available data and insights from the UTS Governance Project we will make a submission to the Parliament of New South Wales Inquiry into the New South Wales University Sector.
4. **(Late October 2025)** Staff will host a Governance Workshop, including representatives from all Faculties aimed at capturing the diversity of UTS’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. **(Early-Mid November 2025)** The Governance Working Group collates feedback from the KTCs, the survey, and the Governance Workshop into a finalised reform proposal. We aim to do this as transparently as possible while ensuring staff confidentiality and safety are maintained throughout the process.
6. **(Mid-late November 2025)** We share the finalised proposal with UTS staff for public endorsement (as an open-letter). Signatories to the letter will be made public once we reach 100 or more signatures, and only with explicit consent from each participant.
7. **(Mid-late November 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 UTS community.

What we need from you, our UTS community:

Complete and share the public survey. Academic and professional staff, students, alumni, university executives, external stakeholders, and other members of the UTS community are welcome to complete our online survey on UTS governance. Identities will remain confidential but moderated (removal of off-topic, abusive, or profane) feedback will be published on our forthcoming 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 UTS governance reform proposal captures diverse lived experiences and the impacts on your discipline and work area. Facilitators ensure the conversation is meaningful; notetakers are responsible for ensuring key conclusions and action points from the conversation are shared with the UTS Governance Project for inclusion in the reform proposal. All participation is voluntary, and no individual will be identified in data used from the KTCs in the final report.

Contact us to participate in a KTC. UTS is a diverse institution. We want to know how governance reform would impact your work and help to safeguard areas of importance. We seek input from as many and as diverse an array of staff as possible. Please bring your colleagues. ParticiTo 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 UTS Governance Project at UTSGovernanceproject@gmail.com. All emails will be treated confidentially.

Nominate staff, students, and others to participate in the Workshop. To facilitate effectively, we are limiting participants in the governance workshop to around 30; but we are aiming to achieve a representative sample of our UTS community, including representatives from all Faculties 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 UTSGovernanceproject@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 UTS staff. UTS staff are 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 UTS as an innovative, groundbreaking model of higher education governance.

5. Proposed Governance Reforms at UTS - for Discussion

Below are examples of the types of reforms we could pursue at UTS. 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 UTS 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 UTS's Mission:** Reform should ensure that governing entities have a clear mandate and capacity to protect UTS's mission. This would also encompass robust protections for academic freedom.
- **Transparency:** As a public institution UTS 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:

- UTS 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.
- UTS could commit to best practice reporting (public disclosure and public reporting with a brief written summary of use case) of external consultancies.
- UTS could reverse the decision to abolish the role of the Provost - who should represent and safeguard the academic voice in governance
- The Academic Board's role could be altered by Council to provide official guidance to Council on protection of the university's mission during change management processes.
- UTS could un-redact the GIPA OSI documents currently heavily redacted so that staff can accurately assess the rationale behind the current change management process.

Examples of Medium or Long term reforms

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

Some examples:

- The UTS 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 UTS Act could be reformed to require a two-thirds majority of university-elected staff on UTS Council, while still preserving the requirements for specific expertise outlined by the Act.
- The 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 UTS community.

Conclusion

The governance challenges facing Australian higher education are systemic and require comprehensive reform. Governance reform at UTS can help support a transformation and help rethink academic governance and strengthen institutional effectiveness.

Proactive governance reform would enhance UTS's reputation by:

- **Support institutional sustainability:** Reconsider existing change management initiatives that are linked to governance problems and are damaging the institution
- **Demonstrate UTS leadership:** Advance UTS's role in 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
- **Retain and attract Quality Staff:** Position UTS 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, UTS can fulfil its potential and realise its mission, whilst contributing to the broader renewal of the higher education sector.

Once again, please do complete the [public survey](#).

If you have feedback you would like to share directly with us, please email the UTS Governance Project at: UTSGovernanceproject@gmail.com

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