



# **UTS: How Did We Get Here? How Can We Move Forward?**

Public Release: Draft Report for UTS Community  
Feedback

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**Prepared by the UTS Governance Project, Sydney, NSW**

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# The UTS Governance Project

Australia's universities have been characterised as driven by a “**culture of consequence-free, rotten failure**” according to Senator Tony Sheldon, chair of the first of two sittings of the Senate Inquiry into the Quality of Governance at Australian Higher Education Providers (Duffy, 2025a). The UTS Governance Project involves a group of University of Technology Sydney (UTS) academics and professional staff, students, and alumni who believe there is an opportunity to work constructively towards better governance of our university and the higher education sector more broadly. The UTS Governance Project believes that UTS has an opportunity to lead the transition towards stakeholder-led, co-designed governance reform, commensurate with our mission to deliver public and social goods for the communities we serve, in a responsible and efficient manner. By supporting a collectively designed proposal for governance reform of our university, the intention is to elevate UTS as a model of good governance in higher education. The implications of not addressing what project participants perceived to represent governance shortcomings are serious as exemplified by the following UTS Governance Project participant quote:

“Universities are central to the productivity of the nation. R&D and knowledge creation drives innovation which drives productivity. The proposed UTS Operational Sustainability (OSI) changes are going against the policy agenda for productivity, as well as social mobility. This is going to have a damaging impact on all - children, the community, and the country.”

Our intention in this report is not to personalise critique, but to contribute constructively to improving university governance through public interest discussion. Many members of the UTS community have contributed to this project, but this report is endorsed by the UTS Governance Project Academic Group. The UTS Governance Project Academic Group is comprised of 63 members (in alphabetical order):

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Associate Professor Sumati Ahuja, UTS Business School  
Professor Isabella Alexander, Faculty of Law  
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Associate Professor Amanda White OAM, UTS Business School

### **Independence of the UTS Governance Project**

The Governance Project is an independent, community-led initiative involving contributions from UTS staff, students, and alumni and other stakeholders that is focused on experiences and perceptions of, as well as ideas for reform of governance that will ensure a thriving future for our university and its staff, students, and public stakeholders. It is intended to engage constructively with both internal and external stakeholders. All project data is held only by the UTS Governance Project. Belonging to the UTS Governance Project does not preclude members from having the freedom to express their own individual views on issues related to UTS governance.

If you are interested in joining the mailing list of the UTS Governance Project, please contact us at [UTSGovernanceproject@gmail.com](mailto:UTSGovernanceproject@gmail.com) or at our [website: https://utsgovernanceproject-qsrcg.wordpress.com/](https://utsgovernanceproject-qsrcg.wordpress.com/)

### **Disclaimer and Purpose Statement**

This report presents findings from the UTS Governance Project, a community-led initiative involving contributions from UTS staff, students, alumni and other stakeholders. The material in this report reflects the views, perceptions, experiences, and opinions expressed by participants through surveys, kitchen table conversations, written submissions, and other engagement activities since October 2025. These views are reported in good faith and in the public interest, as part of a qualitative research and consultation process.

This a report on the way that governance at UTS is perceived by key stakeholders and includes a set of proposed remedies to address issues raised by stakeholder. The report does not make factual findings about the conduct, decisions, or performance of any individual or governing body. Quotations from participants are included to accurately represent the sentiments expressed during the consultation process; their inclusion does not imply endorsement of their content or conclusions.

Nothing in this document is intended to allege misconduct, wrongdoing, legal breach, or improper behaviour by any person or entity. Any descriptions of processes, governance arrangements, or organisational culture reflect the perspectives of contributors and do not constitute legal, financial, or regulatory findings. The contents of this document are prepared in the public interest to encourage critique and discussion about how to improve UTS.

Recommendations offered in this report are intended to support constructive dialogue, strengthen governance, and enhance transparency, accountability, and community engagement at the University of Technology Sydney. They are proposed as pathways for policy and governance reform and should be read in that context.

The UTS Governance Project has taken care to present participant perspectives responsibly and respectfully, and to distinguish clearly between community sentiment and matters of established fact.

# Executive summary

The UTS Governance Project was formed amidst growing concern from the UTS community regarding governance at the University of Technology Sydney. The UTS Governance Project involves a diverse group of academic staff, professional staff, students and alumni who began working together during 2025 with three main aims:

1. To listen to and capture staff and student experiences of governance at UTS, including how decision-making affects teaching and learning, research, service and administration, and collegial life.
2. To identify the values and principles staff and students believe should underpin governance reform.
3. To propose community generated solutions and reform that are both practical and credible.

The UTS Governance Project is founded upon a belief that there is an opportunity to work constructively towards better governance of our university and the higher education sector more broadly. The approach of this project is inspired and supported by the [ANU Governance Project](#), and offers a different approach to the way universities, including UTS, have attempted to solve governance and financial problems in recent years. Project participants expressed the view that external consultant-led restructures at universities often lacked detailed contextual understanding and, in their perception, did not always deliver the anticipated efficiencies. At UTS, participants reported significant psychosocial stress and raised questions about governance legitimacy, referring to media reports (Cassidy, 2025; Duffy, 2025b).

It is worth trying something different. The approach followed in the UTS Governance Project was to directly engage with and harness the expertise of the UTS community to address the current crisis. To this end, since October 2025 the project:

- 1) Ran an open survey launched on October 5, which to date has gathered 434 responses.
- 2) Listened deeply to 45 staff and students, as they engaged in small group discussions or ‘Kitchen Table Conversations’ (KTCs) to explore the impact and lived experience of UTS’s governance and financial decisions on everyday operations in the university. People were invited to come up with creative suggestions for improvements.
- 3). Incorporated views and feedback from staff, students and alumni shared with the UTS Governance Project email account.
- 4) Plans to convene a governance workshop in early 2026 which will bring together participants from across faculties, central divisions and portfolios, and student

groups to review the findings from our survey and conversations. It is aimed to invite representatives from every Faculty, alongside central service divisions and members of senior leadership.

This body of evidence is the most detailed community-led assessment of UTS governance to date. More than that, this report represents a good faith effort by the UTS community to be part of the solution. Many people donated many hours of time and brought their talents to the table to make this report happen. It is important to sincerely thank project participants and every member of the UTS community who took time to complete the governance survey. This public release of the draft report for UTS community feedback summarises what has been heard from the UTS community, and their ideas, suggestions and recommendations for a path forward to improve and uplift governance at UTS. It reveals a strong appetite for reform and a clear set of priorities.

An earlier draft of this report was submitted to the Parliament of NSW Standing Committee for Social Issues' Inquiry into the NSW University Sector in late October 2025. This current public release is now open for UTS community feedback, which is invited wholeheartedly by contacting the following email address: [UTSGovernanceProject@gmail.com](mailto:UTSGovernanceProject@gmail.com).

This will provide the opportunity for UTS community members to provide feedback on the draft public release of the UTS Governance Project report until 31st January 2026. It is then planned to incorporate the community feedback and views received and then release the final version of the report during February 2026.

## **The UTS Governance Project Survey**

The UTS Governance Project Survey was accompanied by a [discussion paper](#), and has been open since 5 October. This survey was open during several key milestones of the University's Operational Sustainability Initiative (OSI), including an Academic Change Proposal (ACP) and Operating Model Change Proposals (OMCP).

Due to the ongoing concerns about governance issues at UTS and for many, a reported fear of reprisals, the project has been run without the use of UTS software or platforms, and survey distribution was primarily through social media, messages, word of mouth, and flyers. This somewhat restricted the ability of the UTS Governance Project's to distribute the survey widely across UTS staff, students, and alumni. Yet, despite these restrictions, the survey was completed by 434 members of the UTS community (see Table 1), across whom 514 roles were held (with some participants holding multiple roles). Current UTS Academic staff members were the largest role cohort (52.5%), followed by Current UTS Professional staff members (15.4%), UTS Alumni and Former Students (12.3%), Current UTS Students (11.3%), Former UTS Academic or Professional staff (5.8%), and other members of the UTS community, such as parents, donors, and prospective students (2.7%).

**Table 1: Survey Participants by Role**

<b>Role summary</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>Current UTS Academic staff member</b>	270	52.5
<b>Current UTS Professional staff member</b>	79	15.4
<b>UTS Alumni and Former Student</b>	63	12.3
<b>Current UTS Student</b>	58	11.3
<b>Former UTS Academic or Professional staff</b>	30	5.8
<b>Other community member</b>	14	2.7
<b>Total</b>	514	100

Source: Survey data, 2025. Roles from distinct participants, n = 434

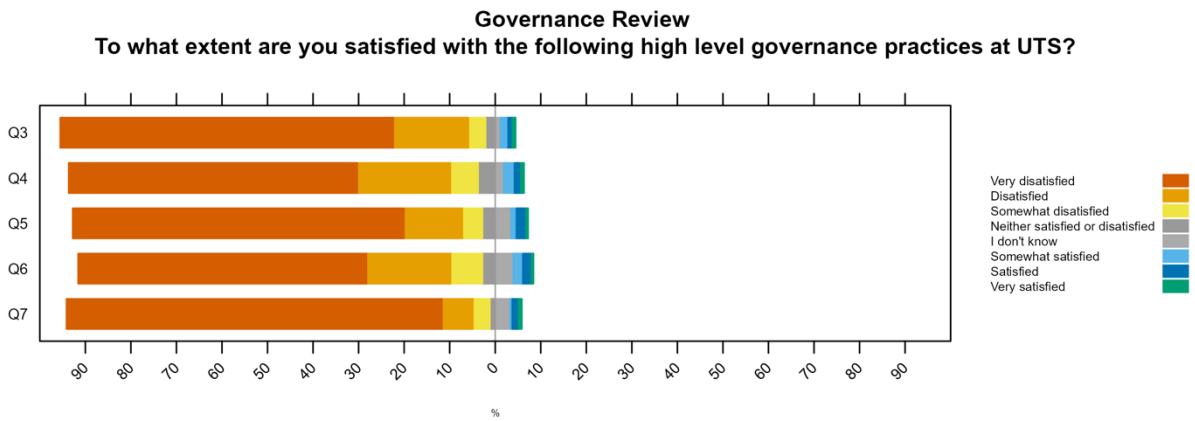
## **Key Findings:**

- 96.08% of survey participants and all discussion group participants believe current UTS governance is not fit for purpose and should be reformed, including 58.99% who said it required a complete overhaul (see Figure 1).
- Survey participants and discussion group participants expressed dissatisfaction with governance arrangements (89.91%), practices (93.4%), and adherence to best practice principles, rules and regulations (88.79%). With the majority 'Very dissatisfied' across these questions (63.38%, 73.11%, and 63.32%, respectively) (see Figure 2).
- 92.97% of survey participants said they were dissatisfied with current practices of transparency at UTS, including over 82.44% who were 'Very dissatisfied' (see Figure 2).
- 89.98% of survey participants said they were dissatisfied with accountability frameworks at UTS, including over 72.73% who were 'Very dissatisfied' (see Figure 2).
- In terms of important principles for UTS governance 98% of survey participants said that both accountability and transparency was either very important or important, with corresponding figures of 97% for academic freedom, 96% for collegial decision making, 95% for adherence to UTS's mission, and 76% for efficiency (see Figure 3).
- 91% of survey participants strongly disagreed or disagreed that decision-making processes concerning OSI have been transparent and accountable. 89% strongly disagreed or disagreed that governance processes for OSI have balanced financial concerns with UTS's academic, educational, research and community missions. 85% strongly disagreed or disagreed that UTS Governance has resulted in adequate opportunities for staff, students and alumni to contribute meaningfully to OSI (see Figure 4).
- Meanwhile, 76% strongly agreed or agreed that the OSI process has reduced their confidence in the leadership and governance of UTS (see Figure 4).

**Figure 1. The Need for Governance Reform**



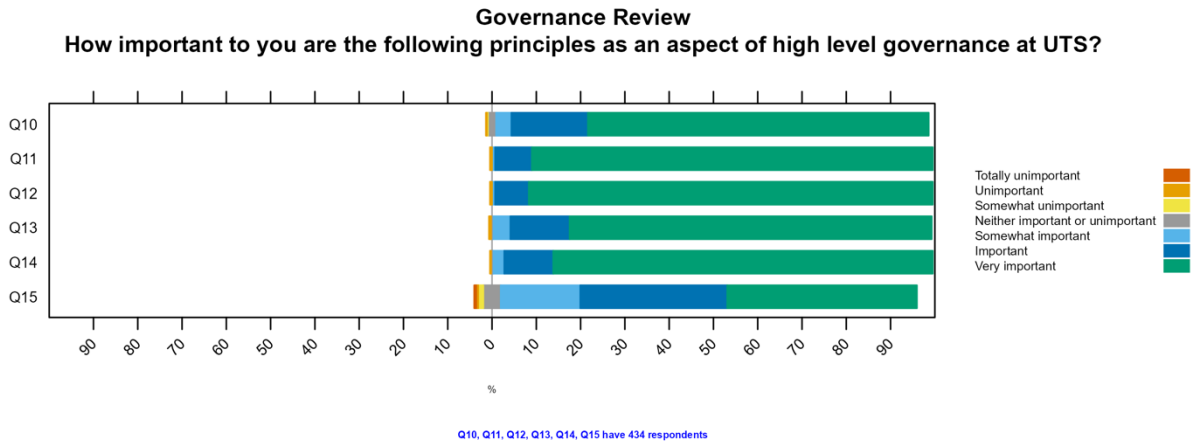
**Figure 2. Satisfaction with UTS governance practices**



Q3 have 424 respondents; Q4 have 426 respondents; Q7 have 427 respondents; Q6 have 428 respondents; Q5 have 429 respondents

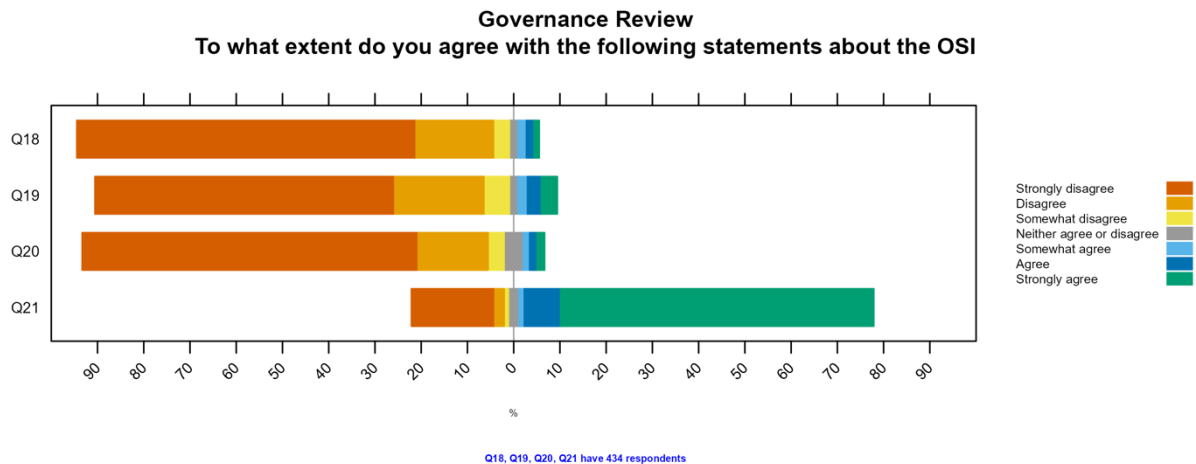
- Q3: With UTS leaders' decision-making processes and governance decisions
- Q4: With UTS's current governance arrangements (e.g., governance structure and appointments processes)
- Q5: With UTS's current accountability framework
- Q6: With UTS governance's adherence to governance best practice, rules and regulations
- Q7: With UTS leaders' current practices of transparency

**Figure 3. Importance of good governance**



Q10: Adherence to UTS’s mission (including its commitment to pushing the boundaries of knowledge, fostering entrepreneurial thinking, and championing social justice)  
 Q11: Transparency  
 Q12: Accountability  
 Q13: Collegial decision-making  
 Q14: Academic independence & academic freedom/professional judgement  
 Q15: Efficiency

**Figure 4. Perceptions of the Operational Sustainability Initiative**



Q18: The decision-making processes concerning OSI have been transparent and accountable.  
 Q19: UTS Governance has resulted in adequate opportunities for staff, students and alumni to contribute meaningfully to OSI.  
 Q20: The governance processes for OSI have balanced financial concerns with UTS’s academic, educational, research and community missions.  
 Q21: The OSI process has reduced my confidence in the leadership and governance of UTS.

## The appetite for change is clear

Participants (by which we refer to both survey and kitchen table conversation participants) in the UTS Governance Project expressed significant dissatisfaction in the way that UTS is currently governed. Participants also raised concerns about leadership, particularly relating to what they perceived as limited transparency and accountability. Participants overwhelmingly expressed the view that current governance arrangements were not meeting the needs of staff and students, and many believed this had negatively affected UTS's reputation. Project findings stand in stark contrast to the evidence given by members of the UTS council during the 1st hearing of the Parliament of NSW Standing Committee for Social Issues Inquiry into the NSW University which appeared to suggest there were no significant governance issues at the university. This points to the disconnect between the governing body and the UTS community.

Project participants specifically raised concerns regarding:

- **Concentration of Executive Authority:** Participants perceived a concentration of executive authority and expressed concerns about the number of senior management positions and remuneration levels, which some felt were difficult to reconcile with the financial constraints communicated to staff. Participants pointed to publicly reported increases in some senior appointments including [2 new Pro-Vice Chancellors \(PVCs\) hired in 2025](#), and executive remuneration which media reports have also documented (Winkler, 2025).
- **Transparency and Information Access:** Decision-making processes within the UTS Council and executive were widely perceived by project participants as opaque, with reported limitations on opportunities for staff and students, as well as elected Council members, to access detailed financial, operational, or policy information. Some participants questioned the adequacy of consultant-prepared data, and many described turning to GIPA requests to access information.
- **Accountability and Governance Integrity:** Participants raised concerns about the mechanisms for accountability and perceived these as being uneven and inconsistently applied. Project participants indicated that they perceived UTS's current governance structures as not transparent or accountable. Participants expressed concerns about what they saw as inconsistent application of governance rules. Participants also raised major concerns that the University's Operational Sustainability Initiative (OSI) proposes changes that could further weaken accountability and governance integrity, such as the proposed disestablishment of the office of the provost, and the removal of governance staff from the faculties. These changes could, in their view, reduce transparency or oversight.
- **Consultation and Participatory Governance:** Project findings illustrate that consultation processes at UTS, especially but not exclusively during OSI, were

widely described as limited, procedural rather than genuine, and with scant opportunities for staff and students to influence outcomes. Many participants reported feeling excluded from meaningful consultation or receiving communications framed in a directive, managerial and overly risk-averse tone that prioritised centralised institutional control over open discussion. Participants reported feeling that some engagement processes were perfunctory, and some expressed concerns about perceived negative consequences for speaking openly.

- **Decision-Making and Institutional Effectiveness:** Decision-making processes were widely described by project participants as fragmented and reactive and were perceived to be driven more by short-term pressures, opaque intentions, or internal political considerations rather than by coherent strategy. Participants reported burdensome bureaucracy without clear lines of accountability, contributing to what participants described as repeated operational problems that compromise UTS's teaching, research, community engagement, and impact functions.
- **Institutional Crisis:** Participants identified what they perceived as serious indicators of governance challenges at UTS. Many participants reported sustained high levels of psychological stress and felt that trust between leadership and the workforce had significantly deteriorated and that morale is at an all-time low. There were also frequent references to unfairness in processes and decisions. Participants highlighted that these internal pressures in their views are accompanied by serious risks to UTS's wider reputation as a leading public university, with increasing evidence of brand damage, negative impacts on student enrolment intentions, harm to industry partnerships, and lost research funding opportunities. Media reporting in 2025 noted that SafeWork NSW issued an improvement notice following a complaint. According to those reports, the complaint alleged 'wilful and negligent mismanagement' in relation to the OSI process (Wootton, 2025). This report does not make findings about these allegations.

It is also noted that a report prepared by National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) members of the Faculty of Law at UTS that was submitted to the Parliament of NSW Standing Committee on Social Issues Inquiry into the NSW University Sector found that a high volume of negative news stories painted a picture of university staff being stressed and anxious, and students confused from an unclear, extensive change process. The report shows that social media users on Reddit have expressed dismay, stress and shock at the plans of UTS to terminate staff, cut courses and subjects, increase class sizes, and reduce or "realign" teaching and research resources and professional support. Students and potential students reported considering enrolling elsewhere because of the large-scale cuts and changes, the perceived reputational damage to UTS and the uncertain future of the university (NTEU Members in the Faculty of Law, UTS, 2025).

## Rebuilding Trust and Legitimacy at UTS

A renewed commitment to fairness, transparency and integrity, as well as devolved local decision-making and responsiveness, is essential for rebuilding confidence in the governance of UTS. Across the university community, staff, students and alumni have expressed a strong desire for leadership and decision-making practices that reflect UTS's role as a public institution, underpinned by a commitment to the public good. These should include upholding respect, inclusion, and social responsibility. Based on the project findings, the UTS community wants and needs:

- **Values-driven leadership:** Leaders to be chosen and supported for their integrity, sense of stewardship, and capacity to uphold the principles and values that define UTS.
- **Informed and participatory decision-making:** Governance processes that draw on the depth of expertise within UTS and meaningfully incorporate the perspectives of staff and students.
- **Transparent and fair rules and processes:** Rules and processes that ensure procedural fairness, openness, and consistency to restore trust across the institution.
- **Accountability at every level:** Clear, well-communicated frameworks that apply equally to all members of the university community and are implemented consistently.
- **Collegial participation in change:** Leadership that actively invites and involves staff and students in safe, respectful, and genuine dialogue about change processes, rather than treating consultation as symbolic.
- **An inclusive and principled culture:** Visible commitment to academic freedom, equity, diversity, and inclusion, and the integration of multiple voices in decision-making, to strengthen the democratic and intellectual integrity of UTS.
- **Empowering faculties and local decision-making:** Faculties and local units should have the required resources and be enabled to make decisions that best meet their teaching, research, and operational needs effectively while upholding governance and standards, rather than having control overly centralised in the university administration.

These findings mirror sector-wide concerns but also highlight specific weaknesses in UTS's governance arrangements under the University of Technology Sydney Act 1989 (The UTS Act). These issues are urgent and addressing them effectively will require rapidly improving connection and information flows between the university community, its executive managers, and its governing bodies.

## Priority Recommendations for UTS Governance Reform

Contributions to the UTS Governance Project from the community have generated numerous genuine and credible reform recommendations. The innovative design of this project means that our initial draft of reform recommendations, outlined below, are drawn directly from the community and hold a level of internal legitimacy. It should be noted, however, that these are only an initial and interim set of recommendations arising from UTS community input gathered so far.

The UTS Governance Project will continue, with additional survey responses, KTCs, and an all-university governance workshop anticipated. Following a period during which community feedback is invited, subsequent final draft of this publicly released report that integrates this further input will then be published.

**Based on the current findings from the UTS Governance Project, we outline the following four priority recommendations for the reform of governance at UTS:**

**Recommendation 1.** Halt the Operational Sustainability Initiative (OSI) and conduct an independent financial analysis and risk assessment

**Recommendation 2.** Review of senior leadership at UTS

**Recommendation 3.** Reform of UTS Council composition and membership rules through changes to the University of Technology Act 1989 (NSW)

**Recommendation 4.** A comprehensive audit of UTS

**Recommendation 1. Halt the University's Operational Sustainability Initiative (OSI) and conduct an independent financial analysis and risk assessment**

Based on participant input collected through the UTS Governance Project it is recommended that UTS:

- a. Halt the Operational Sustainability Initiative (OSI) with immediate effect and commission an independent financial evaluation of the savings assumptions and financial projections underpinning both current OSI change proposals (Academic Change Proposal and Operating Model Change Proposal).
- b. Engage an independent and mutually agreeable panel of eminent accounting academics from other Australian universities, with no prior advisory or employment

- relationship with UTS or conflicts of interest with consultancy firms, to conduct this evaluation.
- c. Provide the panel with full access to all relevant financial data, modelling, and assumptions used in the preparation of the proposals with this process involving staff and student representatives to ensure fair representation and process.
  - d. Ensure that this review also evaluate the Alternative Financial Plan developed by UTS Business School Professors; and
  - e. Make the report of the independent experts publicly available to the University community prior to any further decisions being made.

**Rationale:** Halting OSI and conducting an independent review of the financial assumptions and modelling underlying current OSI proposals would provide assurance of integrity, transparency and accountability. It can help enable the university to make better-informed decisions, rebuild trust, and ensure financial strategy aligns with UTS’s mission, core values, and sustainability. The following participant quote reflects the concerns informing this recommendation: **“Governance is broken - stop OSI and go back to staff and students to work on solutions that do not destroy the university”**.

## **Recommendation 2. Review of Senior Leadership at UTS**

The second priority recommendation emerging from the findings of the UTS Governance Project is for a review of senior leadership of the university to be commissioned by the Parliament of NSW. This was a common and consistent view expressed by UTS staff, students and alumni project participants. It is not the purpose of the UTS Governance Project to criticise, single out or target specific individuals. However, based on the data shared and the findings of this project – there was a consistent and strong recommendation that a review of leadership may be required at UTS. Participants expressed serious concerns regarding the actions, accountability and culture of UTS executive leadership as exemplified by the contract term of the VC being extended but this not being communicated to staff or students and only becoming apparent at the 1st hearing of the Parliament of NSW Standing Committee on Social Issues Inquiry into the NSW University Sector.

**Rationale:** UTS Governance Project findings revealed a loss of confidence in senior leadership and widespread concerns about accountability, transparency, and ethical governance among project participants. A leadership review may therefore help to restore trust, rebuild institutional culture, and ensure UTS fulfils its public mission.

### **Recommendation 3. Reform of UTS Council composition and membership rules through changes to the University of Technology Act 1989 (NSW):**

The third priority recommendation emerging from the findings of the UTS Governance Project is that the Parliament of NSW amend the *University of Technology Act 1989* (NSW) (The UTS Act) to reform the composition and governance of the UTS Council to enhance representation, accountability, academic oversight, and the university's capacity to uphold its public mission. This should ideally be carried out following a **co-design process** with the involvement of the UTS community of academic and professional staff, and students as well as policymakers. **As an immediate action, it is noted that the NSW Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education has the power to appoint additional members of Council who could take a proactive role in reviewing the current governance concerns at UTS.**

Various models of university governance are reviewed in the following [discussion paper](#). We note favourably the civil liability measures in the Adelaide University Act 2023 as providing genuine accountability for breach of duties. Similar to the recommendation of the Federal Government's Expert Council on University Governance calling for a code of conduct to govern the actions of university councillors, it may be argued that genuine accountability requires genuine enforceability. **It is recommended that any code be enforceable through specified duties and corresponding liability provisions in the UTS Act.** While an enforceable code of conduct would help to clarify the duties of councillors, in the absence of such a code, it is recommended that the UTS Act be amended to provide duties of councillors with an enforceable legal status akin to directors' duties under the *Corporations Act 2001*, such that any person (including a student, academic, employee, contractor, regulator (e.g. TEQSA), trade union, corporation, etc) has standing to bring an action for any breach of the code of conduct.

In terms of the composition of governing bodies, the proposed statutory reforms include:

- a. **Majority elected representation:** Ensure that the UTS Council comprises a majority of members elected by UTS staff and students. Currently UTS Council has 18 but can have a maximum of 22 members. Specifically, at least 60% of the UTS Council should be elected members of staff and students, comprising: Academic staff: 40% (e.g. 8 members), Professional Staff: 10% (e.g. 2 members), and Students: 10% (e.g. 2 members). Note that these percentages should remain consistent to equate to at least 60% of the UTS Council being composed of elected members, with the specific number of members in each category outlined here being based on the size of council being 20 members. Also note as an example of elected proportionality that between 1850 and 1989 the University of Sydney Governing Body the Senate had 24 Fellows with 18 of these elected by the University's graduates (alumni).
- b. **Reform of Current UTS Council Self-Nomination Arrangements:** Remove the current provision allowing UTS Council members to nominate new members, thereby reducing the potential for conflicts of interest, facilitating greater university

staff and student representation, and promoting transparency in appointments and diversity in the composition of governing bodies, including council.

- c. **Committee representation:** Guarantee that elected staff and student representatives have the same minimum 60% majority representation on key Council committees, including the Finance Committee, Audit and Risk Committee, Governance Committee Infrastructure Committee and Remuneration Committee.
- d. **External member expertise:** Ensure that external members are predominantly drawn from the university and public sectors, with relevant experience in higher education governance, public administration, or policy oversight. Based on the size of council consisting of 20 members, and assuming that 12 of these 20 members would be staff and student elected representatives to form a 60% majority on council, then this would mean of the remaining 8 members - a minimum of 5 should be drawn from the university and public sectors.
- e. **Corporate expertise limitations:** Restrict the inclusion of corporate or private sector members to those whose expertise is strictly necessary for financial, legal, or corporate governance advice when such expertise is not freely available from not-for-profit sector candidates, thus avoiding an overrepresentation of corporate perspectives that could potentially misalign with the University's public mission.

**Rationale:** Amending the UTS Act to ensure a majority of elected staff and student representatives, fair committee representation, and limits on external corporate influence would rebalance power, increase accountability, and embed community voice in decision-making. This should ideally be done following a co-design process which is the strong preference of project participants from the UTS community. These changes would strengthen academic oversight, transparency, and alignment with UTS's core values and public mission. Having a majority of elected members could also help ensure the risk of mission drift is mitigated and that student and staff concerns are addressed through formal governance mechanisms rather than having to engage in alternative advocacy efforts such as this project in the future. The following participant quote illustrates the UTS community views relating to this recommendation: “The UTS Act should be changed by the Parliament of NSW to do the following: **“The Chancellor and the Deans should be elected by staff. The composition of Council should be changed to have a majority of staff and students as members, while appointed Councillors should include more people with higher education and/or public sector experience. New non-elected Councillors should not be appointed by the existing council members without any checks and balances”**”.

## **Recommendation 4: A comprehensive audit of UTS**

The fourth priority recommendation emerging from the UTS Governance Project is that the Audit Office of NSW be requested to undertake a comprehensive performance and governance audit of UTS. It is noted that the interim report of the Australian Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee Inquiry into the Quality of Governance at Australian Higher Education Providers flagged some concerns with the thoroughness of existing audits (The Australian Senate, 2025). Based on the project findings, it is recommended that a comprehensive performance and governance audit of UTS should consider:

- a. The integrity and effectiveness of current governance and accountability mechanisms
- b. The adequacy of financial management, transparency, and risk controls
- c. The alignment of major change initiatives, including the Operational Sustainability Initiative, with the University's statutory obligations and public purpose under the University of Technology Sydney Act 1989 (NSW); and
- d. The extent to which decision-making processes uphold principles of procedural fairness, consultation, and evidence-based policy.

**Rationale:** A performance and governance audit would assess current governance, financial management, and decision-making processes, as illustrated by the following participant quote: **“UTS governance needs to be audited (preferably Audit Office of NSW) to identify gaps in the existing governance framework”**. This would identify reform needs, improve transparency, and better align governance with statutory obligations and UTS's public mission.

## **Other Emerging Recommendations from the UTS Governance Project**

Beyond the four priority recommendations outlined in this submission, the project has identified several additional recommendations for reform that will continue to be explored as the work of the project progresses. These include measures to:

1. Improve financial transparency through the publication of a detailed, disaggregated university budget
2. Initiatives to strengthen community engagement such as senior leadership 'listening tours' to hear directly from staff and students
3. Reforms to executive performance management, including clearer, publicly available selection criteria and key performance indicators aligned with university values.
4. Electing Deans who should remain on academic not senior staff group employment contracts and return to faculty positions after their term for a set and reasonable minimum period of time. In several German universities, Deans are elected by the Faculty Council and following their term they usually return to their substantive faculty position.
5. Enhancing the accessibility and transparency of Council meetings through allowing staff and students to attend meetings, exploration of broadcasting meetings (similar to local

government meetings), and ensuring publication of publicly available minutes of meetings.

6. Strengthening the oversight of the Academic Board and reviewing its composition to better reflect representative views from university staff and students.
7. Establishing an independent internal audit and review office reporting to Council.
8. Insourcing i.e., adopt transparent and inclusive policies that prioritise using internal expertise before outsourcing to external consultants.
9. UTS should establish a formally recognised professoriate body—within Faculties and at the whole-of-university level—as a key source of academic leadership, expert advice, and constructive scrutiny. A representative Professoriate Body should provide independent academic input into major decisions affecting teaching, research, staffing, and strategy, ensuring that governance is informed by disciplinary expertise, evidence, and the university’s public mission. Strengthening the professoriate’s advisory and consultative role will improve decision quality, protect academic standards, and support accountable, transparent, and collegial governance across UTS.

The project will also continue to consider broader governance reforms - both internal and legislative - aimed at modernising Council and Academic Board charters and standing orders, embedding genuine community participation in decision-making, and ensuring the voices of First Nations and Culturally and Racially Marginalised staff, students and communities are represented, and meaningfully integrated into university governance. These emerging ideas reflect a shared commitment and strong desire of the community to rebuild trust, accountability, and transparency at UTS and in NSW universities.

# Introduction

## Focusing on Solutions: The UTS Governance Project

The potential reputational and institutional risks entailed in not effectively addressing the current concerns regarding governance at UTS were frequently raised by project participants as matters of importance. This draft report summarises what has been heard from the UTS community and their recommendations for the path to improve and uplift governance at UTS. This draft public release of the UTS Governance Project report has been published to invite feedback from the community ahead of the release of the final report.

UTS is one of Australia's leading urban universities, known for its longstanding 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 self-described as being driven by its commitment to excellence, innovation, entrepreneurship and social justice - the university's core [values](#). Therefore, upholding these core values and delivering on UTS's mission means that ensuring the university has good governance is critical (Turner, 2025).

As a group of academic and professional staff, students and alumni passionate about the future of our university as an important public institution, the UTS Governance Project has established a collaborative, consultative process to develop community-informed and evidence-based governance reform proposals for UTS. The aim is to produce comprehensive, constructive and credible reform proposals to uplift internal UTS governance and inform amendments to the *University of Technology Act 1989* and related legislation. These proposals have been developed through a process of engaging the community in thoughtful dialogue and reflect the highest standards of governance design.

A key feature of the UTS Governance Project is engagement with the UTS community - current and former staff, students, alumni, and broader stakeholders - as collaborators in governance reform. As a result, the recommendations for reform proposed by this project reflect the perspectives gathered through this process and may support efforts to rebuild trust and enhance relationships across the university community.

The Project launched with a public survey on 5 October 2025. The number of responses garnered in a short period of time, despite survey distribution being limited to non-university platforms, and during a time of substantial organisational change associated with the University's Operational Sustainability Initiative (OSI), suggested a significant appetite within the community to contribute constructively to solutions. By the time of publicly releasing this draft report for

community feedback, the survey has been completed by 434 staff, students, alumni, and other stakeholders.

Simultaneously, a further 45 staff and students have so far participated in ‘kitchen table conversations’ (60-to-90-minute small group discussions). The survey will remain open, with plans to also hold a pan UTS governance workshop. The governance workshop is planned to bring together representatives from across the university community to further develop and endorse specific recommendations arising from the feedback. Representatives for the governance workshop will be drawn from academic staff, professional staff, graduate and undergraduate students, and fixed-term and sessional staff. The workshop is intended to bring views reflecting the diversity of our institution, with all Faculties represented and members attending from Central service portfolios and senior leadership circles.

This report is separated into four sections:

- **In Section One**, the report locates UTS’s governance within the context of Australia’s higher education sector.
- **In Section Two**, a summary of the experiences of current UTS governance as shared through the project survey and KTCs is presented. These experiences are based on participant perceptions and describe the gaps between the values that should be enshrined in our governance processes, and the experiences of UTS staff and students on the ground.
- **In Section Three**, there is an outline of the values of good university governance that the community expects to see at UTS. This analysis draws on the public survey, KTCs, and the governance workshop.
- **In Section Four**, key recommendations for community generated solutions for better aligning UTS governance with the expectations of people who work and study at UTS are provided. These are presented in order of ranked priority starting with the most urgent recommendations for both internal and legislative reforms and actions.

The UTS Government Project considers this report as opening the possibilities for strengthening relationships between university leadership, the Council, and the UTS community. The solutions in here are aimed at improving and enhancing our governing bodies, risk management, and compliance mechanisms. If taken up, these suggestions may support efforts to ensure UTS governance aligns with community expectations of accountability, transparency, integrity, and prioritisation of our mission and core values.

# Section One: The UTS Experience in the Context of Australia's Higher Education Sector

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, commentary within the sector has suggested that aspects of current governance structures and incentive systems may sometimes prioritise short-term financial or managerial objectives over longer-term academic and social missions. According to these perspectives, this can create tensions between fiscal sustainability and the broader educational, research, and civic purposes of universities, and may contribute to a reliance on external consultancy advice that some observers view as insufficiently tailored to the unique institutional contexts of the sector.

Inspired by a similar community led [governance project at the Australian National University](#) (ANU), the UTS Governance Project seeks to facilitate a constructive, evidence-informed dialogue about governance reform at UTS. The project is grounded in a view, shared by contributors, that stakeholder-led, collectively-designed governance reform is commensurate with the UTS vision of becoming a world-leading university of technology that is being driven by its commitment to excellence, innovation, entrepreneurship and social justice – the university's core values.

The project has developed a highly consultative, collaborative process to develop a comprehensive, credible governance reform proposal for UTS. 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

At the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), we have a mandate to maintain distinctive concentrations of excellence in research and education in areas of importance that align with our core values: excellence, innovation, entrepreneurship and social justice. However, feedback gathered through the UTS Governance Project indicates that many participants perceived gaps or limitations in existing internal and external oversight mechanisms, particularly regarding how these mechanisms support the maintenance of excellence in areas of significance. These views reflect participant perceptions and should not be read as findings of fact about UTS's compliance or performance. Based on the findings of the UTS Governance Project, participants expressed significant concerns about aspects of governance at UTS. Similar concerns were also described in a submission to the Parliament of NSW Inquiry into the NSW University Sector, which raised issues relating to perceived reputational risks (NTEU Members in the Faculty of Law, UTS, 2025).

The problems that have been identified are systemic and complex and were described by participants as issues that cannot be addressed without deeper engagement with the university community. Contributors also emphasised that governance challenges of this nature are not unique to UTS but reflect broader sector-wide pressures.

## **A brief history of UTS in the Australian Higher Education Sector**

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 (Barnes 2020). 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 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 1987* (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 Act was soon repealed and replaced by the *University of Technology Sydney Act 1989* (NSW), 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 provides important context for discussions about leadership, governance, and custodianship today, and helps illustrate the institutional foundations that community members often refer to when considering governance reform.

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; Wesley, 2023; Turner, 2025). Reductions in Commonwealth funding per student has pushed universities towards corporate operating models that prioritise revenue generation and efficiency over their academic mission and, in recent years, led to a reliance on fees from international students (Trakman, 2008; Forsyth, 2014; Howard, 2021). 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, have been identified in published analyses as relating to governance structures and institutional design.

## **Key Issues in Australian University Governance**

### **Limited voice of the community in decision-making**

Like many other universities, UTS has a governing council which includes a majority of externally appointed members, consistent with legislative settings across NSW and Australia.

The prioritisation of corporate over staff and student representation, or specialist higher education expertise (see Cortese, 2025) has been noted as a feature of governance legislation for many Australian universities. UTS's governance structures, regulated by the UTS Act, 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, the UTS Council has 18 members in total. There are three official members: the UTS Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor and the Chair of Academic Board. The Chancellor and the Vice Chancellor are appointed by the council itself, and the Chair of Academic Board is elected to that position by the members of the Academic Board and then serves on council. There are currently eight additional members that are appointed directly by council, and two appointments made by the NSW State Minister for Education. The remaining five members of the UTS Council are directly elected: two academic staff members, one professional staff member, and two student members (comprising 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. At present, the Nominations Committee comprises the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, and one additional Council member.

The UTS Act 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, 12 of 20 Council members were appointed through ministerial or Council processes, with 31% elected by staff and students (NTEU, 2024). This composition has been described by education sector commentators as potentially limiting the proportion of members with recent higher education experience.

This reinforces observations that UTS, similar to most other NSW and Australian universities, has relatively few academic, professional staff and student 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; Cortese, 2025). As Cortese (2025, p9) writes “The dominance of university council members with affiliations to corporate, consulting and industry sectors—comprising over half of all appointments—signals a profound shift in the governance culture of NSW universities”. 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 who prioritise efficiency (Trakman, 2008) has been noted as a potential influence on decision-making premises. Differences in representation between senior management and academics may shape decision-making processes and the alignment of institutional priorities with academic and public-good missions. Public discourse indicates ongoing debate and criticism concerning these issues (Parker et al., 2023). Effective Councils can provide mechanisms for staff representation in governance and oversight.

Effectively, this legislates a minority voice for academic and higher education expertise. UTS Governance Project participants reported concerns about limited opportunities for engagement and perceived insufficient internal accountability. Staff and students who participated in the project expressed the view that they had limited representation and influence on key decision-making bodies, and that they felt unable in practice to provide critical input into executive decision-making. These are perceptions expressed by participants, not findings of fact.

Corporate expertise on the UTS Council and among Executives is useful but must be appropriately balanced with higher education and academic expertise to ensure internal oversight of the ability of UTS to continue to meet its mission and represent its core values.

For example, the Academic Board is tasked with maintaining the highest standards in teaching, scholarship and research and with ensuring that TEQSA threshold standards are met. 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). This report does not make findings about that investigation and refers to it only as a matter of public record. Furthermore, the current governance framework does not provide the Academic Board with a formal role in providing oversight on the impact of decisions on UTS’s academic mission during change management, budget strategies, or other transformational processes, according to project participants and publicly available institutional documents. While the Chair of Academic Board is a member of the UTS Council, the Chair’s contribution is generally understood to involve presenting information and responding to

questions during Council processes rather than participating as a voting member, other than providing an annual report.

Project participants expressed the view that the limited formal decision-making role afforded to Academic Board within UTS's governance structure may constrain opportunities for academic perspectives to inform strategic or operational decisions. These observations reflect participant perceptions of structural arrangements, not findings about the performance of individual officeholders.

The diminished voice of academic and professional staff and students on UTS and other university councils in Australia diverges from principles of good governance and accountability. Good governance cannot be achieved without genuine accountability, and for accountability to be genuine there must be mechanisms for stakeholders to hold executives and management to account for their conduct. The concept of 'stakeholders' comes from the corporate world - where shareholders own a stake in a company. Stakeholders have rights and interests that are protected through accountability mechanisms (Mulgan, 2003, 117-19). As public bodies, established to serve the public interest, universities have a broad set of stakeholders whose rights and interests are affected by management conduct. But first and foremost, these stakeholders are the staff and students at the university. Secondary stakeholders include the indirect beneficiaries of university teaching and research, such as industry, government and the general public. For accountability to be genuine, university executives must be accountable to these stakeholders. While it is important that parliament holds universities to account for their expenditure of public funds, the duties and responsibilities of university executives and management go well beyond this, as is made clear by the objectives set out in the various university Acts.

The low representation of elected members, and particularly staff and students, in Australian universities (as prescribed in their Acts) is a relatively recent development. It is also not reflective of practice at prestigious universities overseas, where decision-making often lies with an academic senate comprising graduates as well as staff and students (though this model is less prevalent than it once was) (Rowlands, 2017). The challenges of governance standards that have accompanied the diminution of staff and student voices, as documented below, is evidence of the limitations of a corporatised governance model, as discussed in the literature (Forsyth 2014; Connell 2019).

### **Limited access to relevant or high-quality information**

Participants in the UTS Governance Project expressed the view that information at UTS does not always flow freely. According to participant accounts, pathways for upward flow of relevant information about the impact of high-level decisions on quality of teaching, research, and other university activities appear limited or may not always operate effectively.

For example, the UTS Council is not required to publish detailed meeting minutes. Participants also reported that processes for connecting Council members with academic and professional staff sometimes felt insufficient or lacked transparency, in their experience. Participants suggested that Council's ability to offer robust oversight could be affected if it relies primarily on high-level or aggregated information, noting that they were unsure whether Council regularly receives more detailed information about operational impacts. These observations are presented as participant perceptions rather than findings of fact about Council practices.

Participants also noted their belief that members of Academic Board and Council receive extensive documentation shortly before meetings and expressed concern about whether staff or governance members have the capacity to review such large volumes of information in detail. They reported that some documents appeared to them to lack detail about key processes or underlying decision pathways, which they felt made it difficult to understand the basis for major proposals. These views reflect participant experiences and are not findings about the adequacy of Council documentation.

Insights from our survey and KTCs highlighted that both staff and students reported significant frustration about what they perceived as limited transparency around executive decision-making, particularly in relation to change management and resourcing. Participants contrasted the level of information provided at UTS with practices they had observed at some overseas public universities, where more detailed financial information is routinely reported or where governing body meetings are livestreamed. This comparison is included to illustrate participant perspectives rather than to assert that these models are universally applicable.

Many participants expressed a desire for improved transparency of disaggregated financial information, noting that increased accessibility could help rebuild trust within the UTS community. Participants also suggested that Council should have clearer visibility of resource allocation and staffing decisions across Faculties and Portfolios to support its oversight function. These comments reflect participant perceptions of governance needs rather than findings about the current performance of Council or the Executive.

### **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. Dawkin's 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). References to these trends reflect wider sector analyses and public reporting and are not findings about the performance or conduct of

any individual at UTS. Reports from the Senate Inquiry into University Governance note that over 300 universities executives in Australia earn salaries exceeding state premiers. Participants in our project highlighted these sector trends as a contextual factor contributing to their concerns about governance models more broadly.

### **Expansion of Executive Management**

Like many universities, UTS has seen a proliferation of non-academic executive management roles whilst core teaching and research academic positions remain precarious (Winkler, 2025). There has been a notable expansion in senior professional roles in recent years, consistent with national sector-wide trends. This has occurred alongside ongoing concerns about academic precarity, a tension widely documented across Australian higher education. 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. Participants also expressed concern about what they saw as the growth in senior roles during a period of financial pressure, although these concerns are reported here as participant perceptions rather than findings about the appropriateness of any particular role or appointment.

### **Consultant dependency**

The rapid growth in senior executive positions is also described by some observers as connected to an increasing reliance on the paid services of consultants. 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 (Cortese, 2025). 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). These statements reflect findings reported in published sources and commentary, rather than conclusions drawn by this project about UTS procurement processes. Cortese (2025, p.9) argues that consultancy firms have gained significant influence in some university governance processes across Australia. A Senate Inquiry hearing noted that UTS reported expenditure on external consultancy services of approximately \$44m over the previous year. This figure is drawn from public evidence and is included here as contextual information, not as an evaluative finding about the appropriateness of that expenditure.

## **Systematic employment practice failures**

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. 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.

Failure to follow procedure has undermined institutional capacity and led to wage compliance failures across the higher education sector. 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 totalling over A\$5.7 million. This undertaking involved more than 2,777 employees underpaid over a seven-year period. These figures are drawn from the Fair Work Ombudsman’s published enforcement documents and are included for factual context only. Staff received a notice regarding their underpayments during the OSI consultation period by email on 15 October 2025. Participants reported that the timing of this communication contributed to heightened stress, although the project does not make findings about the reasons for, or appropriateness of, that timing. These issues, as described by participants, have contributed to concerns among staff about governance and institutional trust.

## **Lack of accountability for members of council and executive officers**

These governance problems have been described by observers as arising in part from a lack of formal accountability mechanisms for breach of duties or for general performance on the part of university councils and executives. All university Acts set out duties of council members. These generally reflect principles of good governance and mirror the duties of members of corporate boards and of holders of public office, requiring councillors to act in good faith and in the best interests of the university; to act honestly, with care and diligence; not to improperly use their position; and to declare any conflicting interests.

A key difference between the obligations applying to university councillors and to corporate boards and public officeholders is that, while they provide for the removal of council members for breaching statutory duties, university Acts generally do not impose civil liability for breaches. Commentators argue that this limitation may reduce the formal mechanisms available to enforce accountability obligations, a concern raised in multiple governance reviews.

The exception to this is the *Adelaide University Act 2023*, which imposes civil liability on council members for breaches of duty. This brings it into line with the expectations we have for the management of our interests in other domains, whether they be private interests, for example as shareholders, or public interests, as with the management of public funds and the appropriate exercise of government powers.

University statutes, including the UTS Act, also generally lack provisions prescribing elements of accountability that can be found, for example, in legislation regulating various industries, such as transparency and reporting requirements. According to governance scholars, these provisions play an important role in protecting the rights and interests of those affected by corporate or institutional conduct (Mulgan, 2003, 117-19).

The interim report of the Education and Employment Legislative Committee's Inquiry into the Quality of Governance at Australian Higher Education Providers asserts that the growing corporatisation of Australian universities has raised concerns regarding the accountability and transparency of university governance. Prominent Australian academics and educators, some with over fifty years' experience in the tertiary sector have raised alarm bells regarding a sharp decline in the quality of public education, research and the working conditions of academics because of this corporatisation (Forsyth, 201; Watts, 2016; Connell, 2019).

The Australia Institute has observed that corporatisation had resulted in governance that reflected 'the worst of both worlds: not properly accountable to the Australian people, nor subject to the pressure of "market forces":

Each year, billions of public dollars are spent on universities, but they do not receive nearly as much scrutiny as that faced by government agencies or for-profit corporations who are answerable to parliaments, the [Australian Competition and Consumer Commission] or [Australian Securities and Investments Commission]. While shareholders keep companies on their toes, university councils are poor at reigning [sic] in vice-chancellor remuneration or consultancy spending" (Adhikari et al., 2025).

This quotation is included here as published commentary and does not reflect a finding of this project about the conduct of UTS Council or executives.

Some governance experts argue that this lack of accountability must be addressed. In particular, the key decision-makers in NSW universities – members of their Councils – must be accountable for breaches of their duties, and stakeholders need an avenue of redress to enforce those duties and to penalise their breach.

The final report from the Expert Council on University Governance recommends the introduction of a code of conduct which would, among other things, spell out consequences of failure to

follow governance requirements – which should apply to the governing body and committee members alike:

A Code of Conduct should apply to all governing body and committee members, management and staff. It should clearly set out required conduct, including in relation to providing a safe environment for staff and students, free from discrimination, harassment and vilification. The Code of Conduct should clearly state what is required and the consequences of failure to follow those requirements. Clear processes for enforcing the Code of Conduct and consistent, demonstrable application of the Code in practice is key to its effectiveness in shaping university culture and performance (Cilento et al., 2025).

The Report also emphasises the importance of clarity in both members' duties and in how they are to be enforced:

It is important that the duties, responsibilities and expectations of all members are documented and clearly understood. Importantly all members of the governing body must always act in the best interest of the university and maintain confidentiality of information and discussions of the governing body. Consequences for failure to meet these responsibilities should be clearly stated and enforced (Cilento et al., 2025).

These measures form part of a set of principles that would set a benchmark for the governance of Australian universities. Critically, however, the Expert Council, and federal education minister Jason Clare, contend that these principles should operate on an 'If not, why not' basis, where 'any departures from the Principles will require the governing body to explain clearly and convincingly the circumstances and reasons behind that decision and how the university will seek to achieve the desired outcomes of the Principles.' Supposedly, this approach 'seeks to recognise the unique circumstances of each university, while ensuring appropriate information about the university's governance choices and commitments is readily available.'

Some commentators have expressed the view that this approach may not provide sufficiently robust accountability, as genuine accountability generally requires formal enforcement mechanisms, not only explanatory obligations. On this view, the NSW university Acts would benefit from amendment to provide clearer remedies and penalties for breaches of councillors' duties, analogous to those in the Adelaide University Act or the Corporations Act 2001, while recognising the distinct context of universities as public institutions.

## **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. Observers note that these factors may influence the robustness of governance and oversight (O’Neill, 2025). University councils may rely primarily on information provided by senior executives, a structural feature that some commentators suggest could affect their ability to fully exercise legislated oversight responsibilities (O’Neill, 2025). According to these analyses, 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. Commentators have noted that this structural separation may limit opportunities for formal 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). These observations relate to sector-wide governance arrangements rather than findings about the conduct of specific individuals or bodies at UTS.

**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 commentary suggests that 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, project participants expressed the view that 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 – with UTS also following a similar path as many other Australian universities in reducing focus and questioning the legitimacy of the social sciences despite the complex social problems facing the country (MacIntyre, 2010). These reflections are based on published literature and participant perceptions rather than findings of fact. 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 a more limited scope compared with corporate regulators. Recent reports from the Expert Council on University Governance characterised aspects of

higher education governance as “inadequate” at a sector-wide level, citing concerns such as “far too many examples of universities underpaying staff and failing their responsibilities as employers” (Clare, 2025). These observations relate to the national university sector, not to specific findings regarding UTS. However, the Expert Council’s role is advisory, and it does not have regulatory powers to enforce governance changes. Its recommendations focus on improving voluntary transparency by encouraging governing bodies to disclose more information about their processes, including matters such as senior executive remuneration (Hare, 2024).

## **UTS Governance Project Findings: Overview of Community Data**

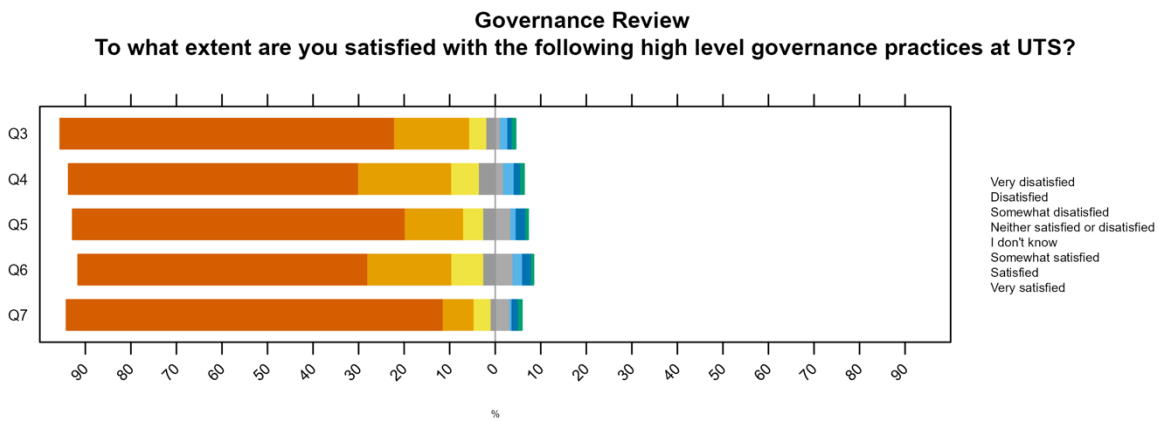
Close to 500 members of the UTS community have participated in this project. Most did so through our public survey (n = 434), for which we collected quantitative as well as qualitative data. Qualitative data was drawn from the survey, KTCs (n = 45 participants), direct emailed feedback, and the project workshop. UTS academic and professional staff and graduate and undergraduate students were also invited to attend KTCs and a forthcoming project governance workshop. The following sections outline what members of the community have shared with us regarding their experiences and perceptions of current UTS governance, the values of good governance they believe should be reflected at UTS, and their ideas for how governance could be reformed. These insights are presented as the views and perspectives of participants and are intended to support constructive discussion about strengthening governance at UTS and positioning the university as a model for good governance in the higher education sector.

The next section provides details of lived experiences of governance issues by UTS staff, students, alumni and community members who have participated in the UTS Governance Project. It draws on survey responses and kitchen table conversations (KTCs), using participants’ own words to illustrate how they described their experiences of UTS governance, including their perceptions of disconnected university leadership, concerns about use of power, secrecy and weak accountability, tokenistic consultation and decision-making processes, incoherent strategy, and perceived disregard for psychosocial safety.

# Section Two: UTS Staff & Student Experiences of Governance

These problems reflect participants’ subjective experiences and interpretations of governance, shaped both by long-standing practices across UTS and by recent change proposals as part of the University’s Operational Sustainability Initiative (OSI). While these experiences are presented as distinct themes, they intersect and have a cumulative effect, according to participants, resulting in a perceived lack of trust in leadership, low morale, high stress, reduced agency, a sense of injustice, and what they saw as reputational damage to the university.

The data in this section provides an overview of how participants reported experiencing governance, and points to the kinds of solutions and underpinning values they felt would restore accountability and trust and reaffirm UTS’s commitment to advancing knowledge and positively impacting society through research, teaching, and community engagement with a focus on social justice, equity and sustainability.



Q3 have 424 respondents; Q4 have 426 respondents; Q7 have 427 respondents; Q6 have 428 respondents; Q5 have 429 respondents  
 Q3: With UTS leaders' decision-making processes and governance decisions  
 Q4: With UTS's current governance arrangements (e.g., governance structure and appointments processes)  
 Q5: With UTS's current accountability framework  
 Q6: With UTS governance's adherence to governance best practice, rules and regulations  
 Q7: With UTS leaders' current practices of transparency

- Survey and KTC participants expressed dissatisfaction with governance arrangements (89.91%), practices (93.4%), and adherence to best practice principles, rules and regulations (88.79%). With the majority 'Very dissatisfied' across these questions (63.38%, 73.11%, and 63.32%, respectively).
- 92.97% of survey participants said they were dissatisfied with current practices of transparency at UTS, including over 82.44% who were 'Very dissatisfied'.

- 89.98% of survey participants said they were dissatisfied with accountability frameworks at UTS, including over 72.73% who were 'Very dissatisfied'.

## 1. Executive power dynamics: Elitism and concentrated power

Participants described their perception that UTS governance is characterised by a small, senior leadership group. According to these participants, this group was viewed as fostering what they described as a “culture of patronage and fear”, and as being disconnected from the day-to-day concerns of staff and students, as well as lacking familiarity with the higher education sector. Participants in the project described their impression that leadership practices reflected a more corporate approach, which they felt lacked transparency and accountability and differed from what they believed to be the university’s public purpose. Many participants reported perceiving a culture of fear and expressed concerns about what they viewed as inappropriate uses of authority, perceived cronyism concerning patterns in senior appointments, concerns about executive remuneration, and perceptions that resources were not distributed transparently. One staff member summed up their personal view: “UTS’ governance practices make me ashamed. They are letting down students, letting down professional staff and letting down academics.” Participants pointed to what they saw as the need for more democratic governance processes with principled, ethical, transparent and accountable leadership, and appointments based on merit and higher education expertise.

### Elitism and disconnected leadership

UTS’s executive leadership was widely perceived by participants as an elite and disconnected class. One participant described their view as follows: “High-level governance is the formation of an “aristocrat class” in top leadership positions that appears largely disconnected from the everyday operations and core academic experiences of the university.” These descriptions represent subjective perceptions, not factual findings.

According to some participants, leadership was not viewed by them as benign. These participants perceived the University Leadership Team (ULT) as maintaining highly centralised decision-making structures and a culture they described as involving “**patronage and fear.**” These terms reflect participants’ interpretations only. Perceptions of elite and disconnected leadership were also linked, by participants, to what they saw as a lack of accountability and transparency. Senior executive roles were described by some participants as having “too much power and [not being] held to account for the poor financial management.” Participants also described decision-making processes as, in their view, “being made in a vacuum, without fully understanding their impact on staff morale, student experience, or on-the-ground operational realities.”

One respondent expressed the personal view that management “do not care to listen to or consult properly with staff and students.” Some participants called for more democratic governance arrangements, using language such as: “Elect the vice chancellor. Democratise the university.” These comments express views about governance models, not allegations of wrongdoing.

## **Lack of accountability structures**

Concerns about structures to hold leadership power in check were repeatedly raised by participants. Respondents noted that they felt there were **limited mechanisms for involving the UTS community in selecting or endorsing senior management roles**, and many expressed uncertainties about how, in practice, the University Council holds management to account. These perspectives reflect **participants' interpretations**, not verified assessments of governance processes.

Some participants expressed the perception that Council was not sufficiently aware of, or responsive to, issues raised by staff, and that it did not, in their view, effectively hold the University Leadership Team (ULT) to account. One participant described their perception of Council's engagement as **"asleep at the wheel"**. These reflect individuals' subjective assessments rather than an objective finding.

The composition of the University Council was also seen by some participants as failing, in their view, to adequately **represent staff and student perspectives**, with the majority of the body being unelected. These statements reflect **views about representativeness**, not assertions that any improper conduct occurred.

A KTC attendee noted dissatisfaction with what they described as **"a lack of transparency and lack of communication"** relating to the potential reappointment of the Vice-Chancellor. It was later confirmed through publicly available information at a hearing of the Parliament of NSW Inquiry into the NSW University Sector that the Vice-Chancellor's contract had been extended for five years in mid-2024. Some participants expressed concern that this decision had not been communicated to staff or students, but these comments reflect **expectations about communication**, not allegations of wrongdoing.

Respondents stressed the desire for stronger staff and student representation in selecting university leaders and Council members. As one participant stated: **"I think it is crucial to ensure that the majority of Council members are elected representatives of staff and students."** This represents a **governance preference**, not a factual statement about the adequacy of current arrangements.

## **Issues of power**

Respondents described their perception that a high concentration of decision-making authority within UTS leadership contributed to what they viewed as a culture that did not sufficiently prioritise staff and student concerns, and to behaviours they perceived as inappropriate uses of power. These perceptions represent individual viewpoints, not factual findings. This "excessive centralisation of power" was linked by participants to what they felt was a "disregard for suggestions made by academics and professional staff" and a culture where staff were "conditioned in the fear of not speaking up" and felt "treated with contempt." These descriptions reflect personal experiences and interpretations, not verified assessments of conduct.

Some respondents expressed the belief that certain staffing decisions were handled in ways they perceived as abrupt or lacking transparency. For example, one participant claimed that some senior staff departures were presented in ways that they believed did not reflect their own understanding of those circumstances. These statements reflect participant impressions and have not been independently verified. Another participant interpreted the seemingly sudden and unexpected departure of the provost, and the subsequent disestablishment of the Provost's Office, as signalling, in their view, insufficient regard for academic governance. This is the participant's interpretation rather than an established finding.

Some staff shared accounts of situations in which they felt that complaint-handling processes lacked transparency or fairness. These participants described perceptions that complainants were disadvantaged in certain cases, while individuals subject to complaints remained in their roles. These accounts reflect participant perceptions and were not independently investigated as part of this project.

Some participants expressed concerns that Heads of School were, in their view, constrained in their ability to advocate for staff. Others perceived that existing complaint-handling structures did not always meet their expectations for independence or responsiveness. Again, these statements reflect individual experiences and perceptions, not factual findings about organisational processes.

### **Lack of transparent leadership**

Participants who reported concerns about decision-making processes viewed these as part of what they perceived to be a broader pattern of limited transparency within leadership structures. Examples were provided by KTC participants about how, in their experience, Council members were encouraged not to discuss Council matters with the university community. These statements reflect participants' impressions, not verified descriptions of governance practice.

Some participants expressed the view that Council members did not always receive the breadth of information they expected. Others felt that certain information provided to the Council was incomplete or insufficiently detailed, and that there was "excessive secrecy surrounding meetings and internal deliberations." These perceptions represent subjective views and have not been independently verified. Participants perceived that limited transparency in some processes reduced Council's ability, in their view, to exercise oversight effectively. Some participants expressed concern that proposed academic and operational changes as part of OSI could intensify their perception of centralised decision-making. These statements reflect participant concerns, not findings of fact.

Notably, the proposed disestablishment of the Provost's Division and the centralisation of key support-service activities were seen by some participants as particularly problematic because, in their view, such changes could reduce academic oversight in institutional decisions. Some felt that these structural changes might allow senior management to influence resource allocation in

ways that favoured some faculties over others. These interpretations reflect individual perceptions, not substantiated claims about how decisions were made.

Staff called for strengthened governance structures to ensure transparency, accountability, and what they described as shared decision-making across the institution. One participant stated: “To rebuild confidence, UTS should embed genuine consultation, transparent communication, and shared accountability at every level of governance.” This reflects a preference for reform, not a factual statement about existing governance practice. A strong desire for reforms to governance structures and processes was expressed by many participants, with calls for more democratic, participatory decision-making mechanisms within the university. These comments represent the aspirations and values identified by project participants, not findings about organisational compliance or conduct.

### **Mismatch in leadership skills**

Participants described what they perceived as a mismatch between the corporate skillsets of certain senior leaders and the requirements of leadership within a higher-education institution. Some participants felt that specific senior leaders did not, in their view, possess the depth of experience in higher education, academic culture, or research that they believed was necessary in a university organisation. These observations represent participant perceptions, not verified assessments of qualifications or performance.

Staff also pointed to what they viewed as the rise in appointments of senior leaders with a “corporate sensibility”, who they felt prioritised “corporate-style management and financial metrics over genuine academic stewardship.” One participant expressed frustration with what they perceived as a managerial approach they described in strongly negative terms. The same participant expressed a view that resources were not allocated in ways they considered appropriate. Participants also raised concerns about what they perceived as an imbalance between corporate interests and educational expertise on the University Council. Some participants expressed concern that the Council had, in their view, a predominance of external members with corporate backgrounds, which they felt limited the level of higher-education expertise informing decision-making.

One participant felt that “corporate-style governance at UTS is prioritising financial engineering and aggressive restructuring,” which they saw as “a troubling shift away from the core mission of higher education.” Respondents consistently called for leaders who, in their view, possess the appropriate expertise to lead “a public institution that exists for the public good.”

### **Preferential appointments**

Participants raised concerns about what they perceived as preferential treatment in some senior staff and Council appointments. Participants described what they saw as patterns resembling cronyism or favouritism in certain hiring or promotion decisions. One participant expressed their frustration using the phrase “the fish rots from the head,” suggesting their belief that perceived

leadership issues influenced hiring practices. They described these practices as involving “nepotism” or “senior people having favourites.” These statements reflect individual perceptions and interpretations, not findings of wrongdoing.

Some participants expressed the view that certain appointments did not appear to them to follow transparent or merit-based processes and felt this resulted in individuals being placed in roles for which they perceived them as lacking sufficient experience or qualifications. Participants also described what they perceived as a culture in which some senior staff lacked the knowledge or skills they expected for those roles and instead engaged in what they described as “role playing their position,” “playing house,” “performative governance,” or “governance theatre.”

Concerns about appointments to the University Council were also raised as part of participant commentary on the governance framework. Some participants expressed concerns that the process through which Council members were appointed lacked independence.

One participant expressed their frustration by stating: “They are using universities as playthings where they don’t have to face stakeholders. ....”. Respondents emphasised the need—based on their perspectives—for more democratic processes for the selection of Council members, as well as more transparent and equitable hiring processes throughout the institution.

### **Excessive pay and allocation of resources**

Many participants expressed concerns about the scale of executive remuneration and incentive structures, and what they perceived as a lack of transparency surrounding remuneration and bonuses. Some participants interpreted these practices as reflecting a centralisation of resources and authority. These views represent participants’ perceptions rather than findings about improper financial conduct. These concerns arose in a context where staff were being asked to “rationalise programs and cut costs.” Participants frequently expressed frustration about what they perceived as inconsistencies between financial constraints described to staff and resource allocation at senior levels.

Some participants described performance bonuses as misaligned with what they believed the university’s values and public purpose required, characterising such incentives as “compromising the mission of public good.” These are value-based perspectives, not factual findings. Several participants stated that, in their view, leadership performance did not meet their expectations relative to remuneration levels, and some believed executive pay practices were insufficiently transparent.

Participants called for changes to remuneration practices, including clearer links between performance expectations, ethical leadership, and the university’s educational and research mission. They also identified a desire for public transparency around remuneration processes as part of a broader call for governance reforms. The concerns raised by participants indicate that they believe reform is urgently needed to ensure stronger staff and student representation in

university structures, more transparent appointment and remuneration processes, and clearer oversight of resource allocation. These comments reflect participant perspectives, and do not constitute verified findings about financial mismanagement. However, participants emphasised that effective reform cannot be left solely to internal decision-makers. They identified a need for clearer regulatory standards governing university remuneration and governance practices, and for more transparent and accessible reporting to the university community.

## **2. Management problems: Outsourcing, opacity, and weak accountability**

The overuse and reliance on external consultants were consistently raised by respondents and was widely perceived by participants as a misuse of public funds, with some also expressing concerns about potential conflicts of interest. These views reflect perceptions rather than verified findings. Participants described governance processes as secretive “at every level,” indicating that they felt key deliberations were hidden and important information was withheld. Staff frequently noted that what they saw as a lack of transparency and accountability pervaded the organisation, leading to engagement processes they perceived as tokenistic, and to communication they often viewed as overly scripted or jargon heavy. Staff expressed a desire for greater use of internal expertise, more transparent and accountable governance processes, open communication channels, and access to financial modelling associated with major change initiatives. Participants’ comments reflect their experiences of the university’s communication and governance practices rather than findings that any rules or laws were breached.

### **Outsourcing to consultants**

Participants frequently questioned what they perceived as the value and appropriateness of engaging external consultants, with some expressing the view that this represented poor use of resources. Some participants also speculated about potential conflicts of interest in consultancy selection. These concerns were based on participant impressions, not verified by the project, and no conclusion is drawn about the existence of any such conflicts.

University leadership was widely perceived by participants as overly reliant on external consultants. This overreliance was seen as problematic by many survey respondents and KTC attendees. One reason tied issues of consultancy with issues of remuneration as a survey respondent queried: “If their salaries are justified by their great responsibilities and expertise, why do they need to rely so heavily on external consultants?”.

Many also raised concerns about how this reliance contributed to their perception of secrecy around financial modelling. Respondents questioned the accuracy and adequacy of consultant data for decision-making and expressed frustration about needing to seek information via GIPA requests. The use of KPMG in aspects of the OSI process was raised repeatedly, with

participants questioning whether external consultancy advice was sufficiently tailored to the UTS context. One participant expressed this view as follows:

“The secrecy around the financial modelling and the poor level of detail provided is very telling. If management can't tell a workgroup how much will be saved by getting rid of them, we have to assume that either they don't know or it will actually cost more than it saves.”

Participants called for greater reliance on internal expertise: “The revolving door of consultancies to high level UTS positions has to stop. UTS is largely funded by ourselves — taxpayers — to teach students and to research.”

### **Marginalisation of staff expertise**

Disregard for internal staff expertise was also frequently described by participants in relation to outsourcing to consultants. Survey participants and KTC attendees raised concerns that academic and professional expertise seemed, in their view, to be insufficiently incorporated into senior leaders' decision-making processes. One participant felt that alternative models to OSI for achieving savings—including an alternative plan developed by internal academic finance experts—were not sufficiently considered. They expressed concern that they did not feel clear reasons were provided for this: “Alternative models for saving costs have been put forward by experts in the financial field and their proposal has been categorically refused without clear reasons.”

One participant believed that reliance on consultants and what they perceived as disregard for staff expertise extended beyond OSI, describing examples such as the use of external companies for researcher training. They expressed the opinion that this was more costly than using internal expertise and questioned the quality of the services provided. Overall, participants pointed to what they saw as a clear need to draw more consistently on internal expertise, particularly for decisions affecting staff, students, and core academic work.

### **Opaque information and communication**

A lack of transparency of information and communication was noted at all levels of UTS and, according to participants, compounded frustration with governance processes. Participants frequently described Senior Leadership and Council processes as lacking the level of transparency they expected and noted that even Faculty and School leadership were often not “privity to information that would have benefited” decision-making. This perceived culture of limited information-sharing was said by some to cascade down to Faculty and School levels.

“There is way too much secrecy – even at Faculty level,” one participant stated, expressing the view that communication practices could be improved.

Participants also expressed concern about whether information was relayed effectively back up through the University Leadership Team or down to faculty committees and managers. A KTC participant articulated this sentiment as follows: “Information doesn’t flow up, but it also doesn’t flow down.” Committee processes were also described by some participants as tokenistic because they felt they did not receive adequate information or opportunities for meaningful discussion. One participant characterised a board they served on as largely procedural, stating that: “the meetings were always very bizarre – it was just a rubber-stamping process.”

Access to information was also described as opaque. Participants said they often learned about high-level university decisions or outcomes from external channels and media coverage of “UTS failings” or major announcements (such as subject or course suspensions, or the extension of the Vice-Chancellor’s contract), rather than internal communication channels. Some participants felt that learning about developments through the media rather than from the university reflected negatively on governance processes. Several participants described such situations as “shameful,” noting that this was their personal reaction, not an objective assessment. Many participants also described some official updates through internal channels as insufficiently detailed or overly general, leading them to perceive communications as insincere or uninformative. “All we get is corporate waffle that carries no actual information.”

Another commented: “The university’s communication style has felt more like damage control than genuine engagement, and this has eroded trust in leadership.”

Student participants likewise described feeling marginalised in decision-making processes and felt that students’ interests were not being prioritised: “As a student I feel like a cash cow for UTS and that students have zero say in the terrible state we’re being led into. Absolutely disgusted.” Participants consistently pointed to transparent information-sharing and open communication as essential elements of robust governance.

### **Issues with accountability at senior levels**

Project participants highlighted strong perceptions of a lack of accountability among senior leaders and managers. One participant felt that senior leaders did not appear to see themselves as accountable to staff, stating: “They do not see themselves as serving us or being accountable to us, quite the reverse.” This reflects the participant’s subjective view rather than an objective finding. Another participant expressed concerns about what they perceived to be conflicts of interest within senior leadership and felt that these issues reflected deeper tensions around ethics and governance. These statements are based on participant impressions only and have not been independently verified.

Some KTC participants pointed to “no accountability, just layers and layers of process.” Others highlighted what they described as senior managers “managing up” to satisfy perceived expectations of higher leadership rather than focusing on supporting staff. Some participants

believed that certain senior leaders focused on expanding their areas of influence in ways they felt were aimed at pleasing higher-level leadership, “in order to look good in front of their boss.”

Participants also described senior leaders as “insulated from consequences,” stating that they felt poor decisions often went unaddressed. “There is no accountability for poor performance at the management level,” one participant said, expressing the view that management performance was not always subject to transparent accountability mechanisms. While university leadership and senior staff were perceived by some participants as insulated from consequences, participants felt that the costs of mistakes were borne by frontline staff. “The current practices lack accountability for poor management and decision-making at the university level which is severely impacting staff at the frontline.” Some participants highlighted that the effects of poor decisions on academic and professional staff were rarely acknowledged: “In many cases they have simply made our jobs harder.”

Some participants believed that leadership emphasised information that supported preferred outcomes and did not give equal consideration to evidence that suggested alternative interpretations. This is a perception shared by some individuals and not a factual finding. Participants also described being under constant pressure to find cost savings, which they felt were not equally applied to executive levels. One participant noted feeling that senior decision-makers should take responsibility for financial decisions they believed contributed to the need for budget reductions. “If we are overspending, as the VC said in the FDS Roadshow, then maybe the ROI on overseas travel needs to be analysed to identify overspend.”

Another participant expressed the view that senior decision-makers should take greater responsibility for decisions that they believed contributed to financial pressures: “and have led to the NEED for cuts.”. Inconsistent application of rules was also raised as a concern. A participant described intense scrutiny on staff and course costs, contrasting this with what they perceived as limited scrutiny on executive spending, again expressing an individual perception.

### **Financial narrative(s)**

Some participants felt that leadership placed strong emphasis on framing the situation as a “financial emergency,” which they believed did not fully reflect internal financial analyses. These concerns reflect participants’ interpretations and have not been independently verified. Participants raised concerns about the proposals for substantial course and subject cuts, which they worried reflected insufficient attention to the potential impacts on teaching quality, research integrity and the university’s reputation. Several participants stated that internal financial experts in the UTS Business School had provided alternative analyses of the university’s financial position, including modelling that they felt offered credible options to avoid large-scale staff redundancies.

One participant expressed the view that the rationale for describing the situation as a “financial crisis” was unconvincing and believed this framing supported changes they saw as undesirable or

“unpopular.” Another participant said: “Further consideration was needed regarding the framing of UTS financial ‘emergency’ and all actions to address any financial concern without substantial restructure or job losses.”

Several participants felt that existing rules were not consistently applied in practice, which reinforced their belief that “accountability reform” was “unavoidable.” These views represent the sentiments of participants and are reported as such. Participants suggested that certain improvements—such as publishing comprehensive financial data, providing clearer rationales for decisions, and ensuring transparency in expenditure and modelling—could be introduced internally without legislative change. However, many participants believed that meaningful, structural reform would require legislative changes to strengthen transparency obligations and rebalance power between staff, university leadership, Council and Academic Board.

### **3. Safety and wellbeing problems: Mismatched values and psychosocial (un)safety**

Participants frequently shared concerns about what they perceived as misalignment between the values emphasised by senior leadership and those held by many staff. These accounts reflected participants’ impressions that university governance practices were shifting toward more corporate logic, which they felt did not fully recognise the university’s public purpose or its commitments to teaching, research, and social good. Participants described internal consultation processes as “**performative**” or “**tokenistic**,” expressing frustration that feedback did not appear to influence outcomes. Participants also raised concerns about psychosocial safety, reporting perceptions of a workplace culture characterised by high stress, fear of speaking up, and strained working relationships. These concerns were especially prominent in discussions of recent major change processes. References to psychosocial risk, including mentions of SafeWork NSW actions, represent participants’ interpretations of publicly reported regulatory activity and are not statements about findings of wrongdoing.

#### **Values misalignment**

Participants described a growing sense of disconnect between the values of staff and the perceived priorities of leadership. Some stated that they were drawn to UTS because of its longstanding focus on social justice and felt that recent processes did not adequately reflect those commitments. One participant felt that the OSI process was shaped by a financial logic that, in their view, was “**a black box**” and did not fully consider broader academic or institutional values. This is a subjective assessment. Some participants expressed concerns that external consultants may not have been familiar with academic cultures or staff expectations regarding reflexive, inclusive change processes. Others felt that staff from equity groups were not sufficiently engaged in consultations.

One participant questioned how value was conceptualised within university governance, stating: **“We need to completely reform the way we understand value in university governance.”**

### **Issues with consultation processes**

Participants frequently described their experience of consultation processes as limited or insufficient. Some participants believed that certain staff groups were excluded from consultation opportunities. For example, one participant reported that staff supervisors of HDR students were not invited to a meeting held by the DVC (Research) with HDR candidates, which they felt reduced the effectiveness of engagement. Some participants also described meetings where they felt discouraged from expressing dissenting views. Others expressed the view that proposals in consultation documents appeared to reflect predetermined outcomes. These perceptions reflect participant experiences and are not verified findings about the conduct of consultation processes. Student participants frequently described feeling excluded from decision-making, with one student stating: “As a student I have had zero say in the OSI.”

### **Concerns about psychosocial safety**

Participants raised concerns about psychosocial safety, frequently referencing stress, high workloads, and perceived pressures related to change processes. One participant characterised governance process as “chaotic” and felt these contributed to stress in the workplace. Some staff described experiences where they felt discouraged from voicing concerns. One participant reported: “On faculty board I was once snapped at for raising a concern... on which I had not been consulted.” Workload concerns were also frequently reported. Participants noted the pressures facing permanent academic staff and what they perceived as inadequate pay structures for casual staff. One participant wrote: “The casual staff are not adequately paid for the work they do. The permanent academic staff are overworked...”. Some participants referred to publicly reported SafeWork NSW involvement regarding psychosocial risks, including a temporary prohibition notice. Participants interpreted this as indicating the need for strengthened workplace processes. Participants expressed the view that psychosocial risks, stress, and workload pressures affected morale and should be considered within governance reform efforts.

## **4. Decision-making problems: Lack of strategy, influence and data**

Participants commonly described governance at UTS as “**lacking strategic direction**” or coherence. A participant expressed the view that decision-making structures felt highly centralised and insufficiently accountable. A lack of appetite for engagement with staff and student concerns was highlighted, as well as forced compliance with leadership decisions.

### **No clear strategy**

Participants often described leadership decisions as rapid, “**chaotic**”, and difficult to follow, and felt that the underlying long-term direction was not always clear to them. As an example, participants described top-down OSI change proposals that sought:

“too much change, too quickly, driven by short-term agendas and **no clear vision of what UTS would be after OSI**”.

Another staff member noted that: “As the tertiary industry is under major changes with fundings and students seeking TAFE etc., it would be wise to have a plan to address these and to position UTS better.” The authors do not suggest that the leaders of UTS do not have a plan to position UTS better, just that some participants do not see those plans.

### **Questionable decision making**

Participants frequently expressed concern that decision-making processes did not always feel collegial or sufficiently consultative. One participant felt that senior leaders did not adequately engage with concerns raised by staff or students, describing this as a lack of attentiveness to “concern for staff and students.” Some participants reported that information about program changes and potential staffing impacts was communicated through limited channels, which they felt constrained openness and discussion. For example, one participant described a communication chain in which Heads of School were not permitted to share certain details, which they felt limited meaningful feedback. This account represents the participant’s interpretation, not a verified institutional practice.

A participant described their experience on a committee with financial responsibilities, expressing concern that: “...the intent was that this perspective was to be brought to the committee solely through my own view, without access to the data the uni in fact collects from staff about the issue.”

Perceptions that committees had limited influence were also common. Some participants felt that major decisions were formulated largely outside committee processes. One participant described committees as having “limited influence” and another stated that there was “not enough discussion,” reflecting their sense of limited input into major decisions. Several participants used strong language to describe their perceptions of centralised authority or predetermined outcomes. These perspectives reflect participants’ interpretations and emotional responses and do not constitute findings about governance practices. Participants expressed a desire for decision-making processes that involved more opportunities for staff and students to access relevant information, contribute to deliberations, and influence outcomes.

## **Presentation of data**

Concerns about the presentation and use of data were also raised. Some participants perceived instances in which data was, in their view, “interpreted in ways” that aligned with existing organisational directions. Participants consistently reported frustrations that underlying data sets or methodologies informing major decisions were not always available to them. Many described reliance on GIPA requests to obtain information they felt was relevant for understanding proposals.

Some participants felt that communications about major changes relied heavily on generalised or strategic language without providing detailed evidence. For example, a participant felt that references to concepts such as “risk appetite” were used without accompanying detail, which they believed limited scrutiny. Another participant questioned the use of the “diamond model” presented during restructuring discussions, expressing concern that they did not consider the evidence underpinning it sufficiently robust. Likewise, the concept of “standardisation” was cited by another participant as a justification they perceived as insufficiently detailed in relation to professional staff changes.

Participants emphasised the need for data transparency, access to evidence-based rationales for decisions, and mechanisms for reviewing and challenging proposals prior to implementation. The concerns raised by participants about decision-making processes indicate a desire for more transparent, consultative, and deliberative governance practices. While some internal improvements could be adopted, such as enhanced evidence-based decision logs or strengthened pre-consultation processes, participants also expressed views that broader structural or legislative reforms may be needed to rebalance roles and responsibilities across governance bodies.

## **5. Erosion of trust and other symptoms of an institutional crisis**

Problems identified by participants were described as having cumulative effects that were perceived as symptoms of a broader institutional crisis, including a significant erosion of trust in leadership, chronically low morale and distress, and a perceived lack of agency and justice. Indeed, UTS governance was almost universally described by participants as not fit for purpose, with many expressing the view that the university’s approach to governance had failed staff and students, resulting in what they perceived as significant damage to the university’s reputation. As such, there were strong calls among participants for major governance reforms.

### **Reduced trust in leadership**

Loss of trust in leadership was commonly reported and largely perceived as the cumulative effect of issues of power, lack of transparency and accountability, poor change processes, and limited staff and student consultation and engagement in decision-making processes. One participant stated their perception that “There is no trust in the leadership, and I feel that no improved processes or structures can repair it.” Others echoed this sentiment and felt that leadership did

not appear closely connected to day-to-day staff and student experiences but “has become increasingly disconnected from the lived experiences of those who actually constitute the university community.”

Many participants indicated that tinkering with governance was insufficient and advocated for major reforms, stressing what they perceived as a lack of structures or leadership to drive accountability and good governance. A participant expressed the view that high-level governance processes lacked transparency and did not provide sufficient opportunities for staff and student input: “University-wide decisions are made centrally by leadership and communicated downward, with little opportunity for meaningful input or challenge.” Participants reported that leadership responses sometimes came across as dismissive or overly general, with a reliance on soundbites such as “the University Leadership Team is looking at the bigger picture” or “this will be beneficial in the mid to long run.”

### **Low morale**

Staff commonly reported feelings of low morale and a sense of hopelessness. As one staff member stated: “I feel very bleak right now. I hope we can come through this.” Another staff participant described their sense of psychosocial harm and felt that “staff and students have been completely disregarded”, believing this had seriously affected morale and the university’s reputation. While many participants communicated a strong sense of care, connection and stewardship for the university, a sense of grief and despondency pervaded many responses: “For the first time, I’m embarrassed to say I work at UTS—something I never thought possible.”

Staff were feeling particularly dispirited about the OSI process and proposed changes. One KTC participant felt that staffing reductions had significantly affected their motivation and sense of purpose: “We have lost all professional staff. Why bother turning up?” and another stated: “How did we get here?”

### **Lack of agency and justice**

A KTC participant reflected on “How little agency the individual academic has.” One participant expressed the view that current governance structures were ineffective and felt that existing accountability mechanisms did not adequately address concerns about leadership performance. In relation to change processes associated with OSI, many participants referred to a perceived lack of agency, input and involvement in decisions that directly impacted their work area, particularly related to programs they taught in, while others referenced specific examples of “explicit unfairness” in the manner that workload, teaching requirements and resources were proposed or allocated. These statements reflect participant perceptions rather than verified findings.

## **Reputational damage**

Participants stressed that UTS governance problems had been highly publicised, and many believed this had significantly affected perceptions of the university. One staff member expressed concern that reputational recovery would be difficult: “There is very little chance for UTS to gain back its lost reputation.” Project participants believed that what they saw as poor decision-making and challenges in managing psychosocial risks had contributed to declining confidence among key university stakeholders such as students, staff, alumni, funders, and research partners.

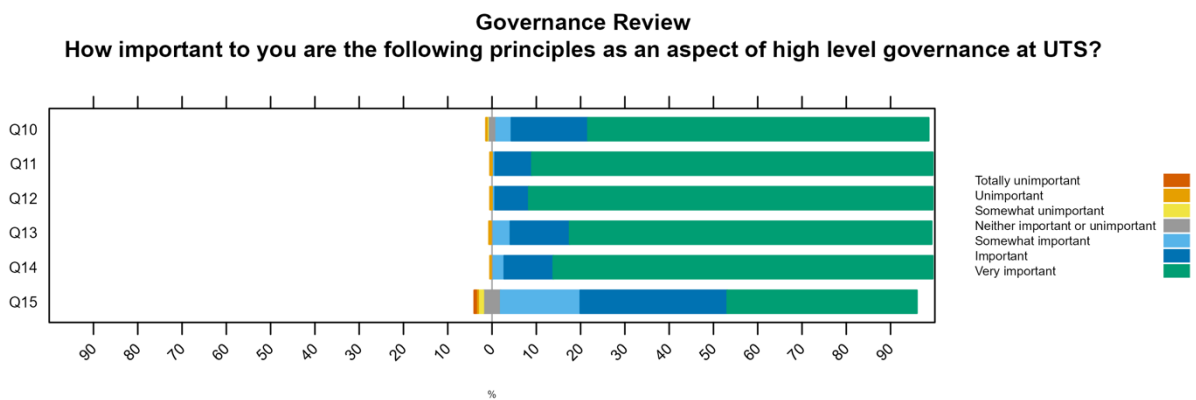
The collapse of trust and morale, and the perceived loss of agency and justice at UTS as described by project participants, were identified as symptomatic of what participants viewed as failures in governance processes and change management that had harmed morale and the university’s reputation. Many expressed the view that legislative reform may be needed to strengthen accountability and procedural fairness. The next section highlights the values held by the UTS community as represented by project participants, and how these can shape governance reforms.

# Section Three: Values held by the UTS community

It is clear from participant contributions that there are deep care and concern among staff, students, alumni and community members for the wellbeing, mission and institutional success of UTS, and a strong desire to see and be a part of change for the better. Participants expressed clear views of the values which they believe underpin good university governance and were able to provide experiences where these values were not being upheld. According to participants, perceived degradation of these values has resulted in many project participants expressing feelings of disillusionment, disappointment, and shame.

Participants identified a discreet group of values but often referred to these in combination, supporting the highly connected inter-relationship between these principles. The data reveals that the UTS community participants who contributed to this project overwhelmingly reported that they value the principles of accountability, transparency, collegial decision-making and academic freedom.

Similarly, there was strong support for adherence to the UTS mission as a public university serving the public good. The UTS community values efficiency, but there is greater variation in views about its relative importance compared to other governance principles suggesting the participants considered it within the context of the importance of other values identified.



Q10, Q11, Q12, Q13, Q14, Q15 have 434 respondents

- Q10: Adherence to UTS's mission (including its commitment to pushing the boundaries of knowledge, fostering entrepreneurial thinking, and championing social justice)
- Q11: Transparency
- Q12: Accountability
- Q13: Collegial decision-making
- Q14: Academic independence & academic freedom/professional judgement
- Q15: Efficiency



## 1. Commitment to public purpose

Since its inception, built on and inclusive of the similar focus of its many antecedent institutions, UTS has long upheld a deep and enduring commitment to social justice and public purpose, embedded across its research, teaching, and community engagement. As part of a public institution, participants identified strongly with the University's mission of "pushing the boundaries of knowledge, fostering entrepreneurial thinking, and championing social justice," with 97.7% of survey respondents identifying adherence to UTS mission as important, including 76.96% who saw this as 'Very important'. Qualitative project participant responses reinforced this view of the need to serve public good, and that Australian Universities (UTS included) should not, in their view, be seen as corporations through a lens of profit and loss.

### Mission-based decision making

Participants felt strongly that good governance and decision-making is central to enabling and supporting the stewardship of this mission, and that "social justice should be at the core" of UTS governance. "Governance should not only comply with formal processes but also uphold the values of fairness, democracy, and social justice that a public university represents."

Several participants felt strongly that university governance models should focus on protecting and enabling this public purpose, including 'prioritising the learning of students,' with leadership functioning as 'stewards' of this mission. One participant contrasted their preferred model of leadership with what they described as a more command and control style: "**All defined leadership positions must be conceptualised as roles of service and stewardship, rather than authority. Position holders are expected to view themselves as enablers for staff, the student body, and the broader society, thereby rejecting a top-down, command-and-control model in favour of a leadership approach that is responsive and facilitative.**"

Some participants perceived a growing tension between UTS's public-purpose values and what they viewed as an increasingly corporate governance approach and what they referred to as "**corporate managerialism**". They felt this tension could risk diverting focus from the university's core mission and its underlying "**responsibility to society as a public university.**"

### The role of University Council

Participants identified the importance of experience specific to the context and purpose of public institutions as paramount for those serving in governance and decision-making roles, including Council members and senior leaders. One participant expressed the view that non-university Council members should ideally have experience in the governance of public institutions: "non-university [Council] members should have a background in the governance of public institutions... All decisions and planning should be demonstrably driven by the public-interest mission of the university to deliver education and research of the highest quality. These are the highest priorities of the university."

Many participants expressed disappointment and frustration, noting what they perceived as gaps in Council's advocacy for, and experience with, the University's public-purpose mission. Participants expressed concerns about the structural composition of the UTS Council as a governing body, and thus its ability to play an effective, public-interest role in governance at UTS. Though it was recognised there is utility to have some members with experience of other industries and commercial contexts, some participants felt that Council membership did not include enough individuals with direct experience in the university sector, which contributed to reduced confidence among those participants about the direction of governance. This led to participants feeling a lack of confidence about the future direction of the university, and about UTS's ability to maintain its social licence as a public institution to serve the public good.

More broadly, championing and modelling a commitment to public purpose was also seen to be a highly valued quality in broader university leadership roles. Participants called for deliberate consideration of the skills and experience needed for leaders to support the university's public-interest mission, noting that universities are very distinct in mission and nature to commercial entities, and thus may require different knowledge and skills.

### **Balancing public purpose and financial sustainability**

Participants were aware of the current financial context and challenges experienced by the higher education sector but felt that public purpose could and should remain an essential and enduring underpinning of university governance and decision-making. Participants strongly believed this would serve a dual beneficial purpose: "Decisions should be made that maintain commitments to public good as well as financial stability."

Some participants characterised current managerial practices as reflecting a more corporate style of governance and expressed concern that this appeared to emphasise financial efficiency and restructuring over community-focused activities. This was perceived by participants to reflect a troubling shift away from the core mission of higher education, and participants viewed this trend as indicative of what they saw as weakened governance frameworks and increased reliance on consultants.

"Sustainability and integrity should underpin all decisions, ensuring that financial planning supports, rather than undermines, the university's academic mission and public purpose."

Participants believed that recent decision-making appeared to prioritise short-term operational considerations. Participants expressed a desire for senior executives to articulate more clearly how decisions "uphold the university purpose of being accountable to the public good," and wished for a renewed focus on mission-based decision-making considering public good, academic excellence and social responsibility.

Some participants were concerned that recent financially driven decisions, including aspects of the OSI, did not clearly demonstrate alignment with the University's long-term public-purpose mission or reputation. One participant stated that they found it difficult to identify clear explanations of how the OSI proposals would support public-good outcomes:

“It is difficult to see any explicit claims about how the OSI change proposals actually enables UTS to deliver outcomes for the public good” ...and they then commented that the change proposal aligns with the “belief that a university's public purpose can be best achieved by commercialization and service to industry.”

Many participants found it hard to reconcile the University's mission, particularly its commitment to social justice and public purpose, with decisions such as the recent proposal to discontinue programs in public health, palliative care and teacher education, which participants felt was occurring despite widespread staff, student and community opposition and notable skills shortages in these areas.

Championing the value of public purpose and “safeguard[ing] public interests” was identified as very important, with participants recommending “a thorough review of governance, making legislative changes where needed”

“Above all, [I hope] that UTS renews its founding purpose: to serve the PUBLIC, current and future students through truth, wisdom, and public service.”

## 2. Transparency

Transparency and accountability were overwhelmingly identified and valued as essential principles for good governance. **99.54% of survey respondents identified principles of transparency as important in high level governance at UTS as important**, including 90.55% who saw this as ‘Very important’. Participants identified open and honest communication, clear and transparent access to data and information and evidence-based rationales for decision-making, and meaningful consultative practices as critical to healthy, trust-centred interactions with governance.

Many respondents expressed a deep sense of pride and care about the role of the university - and their place within it - in contributing to the public good but felt that what they saw as limited transparency inhibited their ability to contribute fully to UTS's public-purpose mission and negatively affected organisational culture and morale. The following participants expressed their perceptions that reflect this sentiment:

**“The lack of consistency and transparency has been mind blowing and damaging.  
“We just want to be able to be proud of the work and the institution.”**

Participants reported examples of good governance within local level decision-making processes and governance structures, where transparency is high and decision-making participatory. However, this was not seen to be consistent across faculties, and many participants did not see a commitment to transparency within high-level governance processes. Participants also perceived there to be a ‘huge disconnect between central University governance mechanisms and decision-making with those at Faculty level’, with faculty level mechanisms more likely to be transparent, and be based on sound evidence (‘data and input from those working in the particular/affected area’). Some participants viewed central governance processes as “opaque” and believed they relied heavily on advice from external consultants.

The obligation of ensuring transparency of its decisions and operations in consideration of the university’s role as a public institution was also identified as highly important. One participant felt that governance transparency at UTS was limited compared with other sectors and expressed concern that **“the public need visibility into UTS governance and there needs to be accountability”**.

### **Open and honest communication**

Participants lamented an observed trend away from open and honest communications with staff and students, particularly about significant organisational changes and decision-making and its impact on staff and student trust, engagement and wellbeing.

“Major changes, including the proposed structural and staffing reforms, have been announced suddenly, leaving students and staff blindsided and anxious about the future.”

This was acutely felt in communications related to the University’s Operational Sustainability Initiative. Several examples were given including when asking for the reason behind the immediacy rather than deferment of the payment of a bond. Some participants were unclear about the reasons given for limitations on information relating to financial decisions and expressed a desire for greater transparency around how public resources are used, especially when universities concern “the spending of what is essentially public money - meant for the public good.”

Of acute concern for many participants was the need for staff and union representatives to pursue freedom of information requests to access information that they felt should be publicly, or internally, available. One participant commented that significant information about recent decisions had become available “because of GIPA” requests, rather than through routine internal communication processes. Participants were also disappointed much of the information subsequently provided was heavily redacted. One participant expressed frustration that some information was not readily shared internally, leading staff to pursue access through GIPA

processes and stated that they “dream of a uni where that threshold (for sharing information transparently) is our default as staff, and we can work towards a ‘community interest standard that shares even more information”.

## **Decision making and data**

Lack of transparency around governance and management decisions, and difficulties and delays and requirements for repeated requests to accessing data to understand and provide feedback on decisions was of concern to many participants. Participants reported difficulties accessing documentation relating to several governance bodies and felt that this limited visibility contributed to reduced confidence in decision-making processes. Some participants perceived governance as “increasingly centralised”, with limited visibility over how oversight by Council and Academic Board was “exercised in practice”.

Some participants who had been involved in governance bodies felt there was limited visibility over meetings and deliberations and believed that the balance of perspectives on Council did not adequately reflect faculty, professional staff or student views believing that there was “significant over-representation of industry perspectives and dramatic under-representation of Faculty, professional staff and student voices”. They expressed concern that this reduced their sense of connection with, and accountability to, the broader university community.

Participants identified several areas where they felt processes lacked transparency, including leadership appointments, changes to senior roles, and aspects of remuneration-related decisions. A range of specific points of concern were raised by participants, from the nomination process for the new Chancellor, the sudden disestablishment of the Provost role without consultation, and the contract extension of the VC which was not communicated to staff and only became apparent and confirmed during the 1st hearing of the Parliament of NSW Committee for Social Issues inquiry into the NSW university sector.

Participants expressed disappointment, cynicism and perceived significant shortcomings in consultative processes. Some participants felt that consultation activities occurred “after decisions have been made”, limiting opportunities for meaningful input. One participant felt that consultation processes did not genuinely influence outcomes, describing a perception that staff feedback had limited impact and that: “They've already decided what they are going to do”.

Participants cited the adverse impacts of lack of consultation and evidence-based rationale for decisions, with particular regard to the university’s Operational Sustainability Initiative. A participant believed that recent consultation processes did not provide sufficient information for meaningful engagement and felt that the level of transparency was inadequate “where staff are asked to comment on proposals for which insufficient information has been provided.” Some respondents reported that when they sought clarification about proposals, the responses they

received felt vague or insufficiently detailed, and were often framed through a narrative that "tough decisions need to be made".

Even senior leaders reported being excluded from critical decision-making processes, expressing that the proposals could have been greatly enhanced with broader consultation prior to the proposal being formed.

“I am a leader in a faculty, and I have been actively excluded from many OSI discussions. In particular ones where operations in the faculty will drastically change if OSI proposals are adopted. These proposals could be greatly enhanced with broader consultation prior to the proposal being formed. We are now wasting countless hours detailing why said proposals won't work only to hear that "the detail" is yet to be ironed out.”

### **Leadership and appointments**

Ensuring transparency extends both to the decisions of, and the appointment of members responsible for key governance and decision-making bodies, was frequently cited as important by participants. Participants felt that key decision-making bodies, including UTS Council and its committees, were difficult to access. Some participants perceived that external Council members were not readily available for direct engagement and that staff correspondence was often handled through management channels. One participant felt there were “limited opportunities to engage with the Academic Board which leaves little room for academic representatives to raise questions” and perceived that “there is no indication that alternative proposals are being considered.”

Some participants expressed concern that they did not have sufficient clarity about Council membership or its decision-making processes, and asked “How do people get appointed to UTS Council? How do people get appointed to the finance committee? It would be good to have transparency, staff elections, more staff on these.” The authors are not suggesting that UTS Council processes of appointment are not public, just that some participants are not aware of where this information is published.

Some participants felt that greater clarity about appointment processes and the management of potential conflicts of interest would strengthen confidence in governance. They believed that limited visibility over these matters contributed to current concerns stating their perceptions that “many colleagues and I believe this is at the heart of current difficulties.”

Participants described experiences in which they felt the processes for senior leadership appointments lacked transparency and reported receiving responses from HR that they perceived

as dismissive when concerns were raised. Some participants expressed concern that remuneration and performance-related decisions for senior roles were not communicated clearly.

## **Trust**

The importance of trust in management, decision-making processes and governance structures was a recurrent theme and seen as paramount for the university to move forward. Participants felt that there had been a “**decline in transparency, collegial consultation and accountability**”, and believed that some major academic and structural decisions had been made “without meaningful engagement with those most affected”. One participant felt this had “eroded trust, weakened collegial culture” and led them to express uncertainty about how recent processes aligned with the university’s statutory obligations under the UTS Act to “serve the public good and uphold academic freedom”.

The lived experiences shared by staff and students in relation to the University’s Operational Sustainability Initiative was repeatedly cited by participants as undermining their trust in decision-making processes and ultimately the university’s leadership. Many staff demonstrated deep pride and care in working at and for UTS, but for the first time reported feeling ashamed or embarrassed to say they worked at UTS. This was also the case for some students and Alumni. Participants felt that staff and student perspectives had not been adequately considered in recent decision-making processes, especially concerning the OSI. Some participants believed that the OSI process reflected a highly centralised approach to restructuring, which they felt reduced trust among staff and students and negatively affected perceptions of the university.

## **Reputational damage**

Participants felt that what they perceived as limited transparency, insufficient consultation, and governance challenges had negatively influenced perceptions of the university. They believed that this contributed to psychosocial risks and increased regulatory scrutiny with “multiple interventions by SafeWork NSW, including two Notices for Information, and one Prohibition Notice”, and felt that greater transparency was needed. These comments reflect participant perceptions of those processes and not formal findings regarding WHS compliance or legal obligations. Participants expressed the view that inadequate consultation may have undermined effective psychosocial risk management and believed this had adversely affected perceptions of the university. These concerns were raised as participant opinions rather than established findings about legal compliance.

## **3. Accountability and integrity**

Accountability is seen as a fundamental pillar of effective governance by the UTS community, with high expectations of leadership demonstrating responsibility for decisions, outcomes and impacts. This was identified as one of the most highly valued principles of good governance by

participants, 99.54% of survey respondents identified principles of accountability as important in high level governance at UTS, including 91.24% who saw this as ‘Very important’.

One participant expressed concern that adherence to governance legislation and policies appeared inconsistent and believed that some processes were streamlined in ways that, in their view, reduced safeguards intended to support effective governance. Their view was that as a university “we need to be publicly accountable for decisions. I feel this is getting lost.”

Given the university’s role as a public institution, the importance participants placed on accountability thresholds was high, extending beyond staff and students to the broader community and society at large. Participants highlighted the importance of integrity, openness and ethical behaviour, as well as the challenges of holding power to account in current governance structures. Some participants felt that accountability mechanisms for senior leadership were unclear or insufficiently visible, which they found “immensely frustrating” and shared the view that “we are a public institution but the mechanisms for accountability seem highly ineffective.” Participants felt that accountability expectations were not consistently reflected across governance and decision-making bodies, including the ULT, Council, and Academic Board.

### **Senior Leadership**

Lack of perceived accountability of senior leaders, including the Vice-Chancellor, was a particular concern for participants. This included “how their decisions affect university performance and culture.” Perceptions and experiences of limited transparency, consultation and poor communication exacerbated these concerns: “Having a clear and transparent governance structure and a clear articulation of the checks and balances as well as accountability that are in place” was deemed as important. Some participants were concerned that major decisions appeared to be made with limited community input and felt this reduced confidence in how those decisions aligned with the interests of the broader UTS community. One participant argued that if senior roles adopt corporate-style practices, there should be corresponding accountability expectations. They felt that transparency around major decisions at a publicly funded institution should be strengthened.

Given the assertion of a long-term decline in the university’s financial position, some participants questioned the appropriateness of current leadership to lead the university through present challenges, given their apparent lack of accountability for performance to date, noting a **“lack of accountability for how their decisions affect university performance and culture.”** Some participants questioned whether those currently leading the Operational Sustainability Initiative were the most appropriate individuals to do so, given their perception that past financial decisions had contributed to current challenges

Some participants made note of an absence of accountability regarding documentation provided by KPMG as part of the consultancy's multi-million-dollar work supporting the university's Operational Sustainability Initiative, including their perception that staff felt misled about the existence of a spreadsheet of academic performance and concerns about a lack of transparency of whether it was ever used or not. One participant was dissatisfied with the explanations provided regarding the consultancy arrangements and believed that the level of communication around these matters was insufficient and queried "why (UTS) did not hand over more detailed information/evidence pertaining to its hiring of KPMG to figure out 'the best way' to save UTS from debt". These comments reflect participant interpretations and are not findings about the conduct of the consultants or UTS. Participants felt that the disestablishment of the provost role without broader consultation raised questions about governance structure and how responsibilities would be distributed between senior roles.

### **UTS Council**

Accountability and selection processes of UTS Council to staff, students and the community was of particular concern. Some participants expressed concern that potential or perceived conflicts of interest could arise where Council members held external roles and suggested that clearer processes for managing such risks would enhance confidence in governance. A few participants perceived the nominations process to be limited in its openness and expressed a desire for greater transparency. Some participants advocated for reform of the Nominations Committee to enhance independence and broaden representation, sharing their view that "**The Nominations Committee of University Council should be disestablished.** Instead, appointed members of council should be selected by a representative body, with due regard to their expertise with respect to the sector and the public interest role of universities."

Participants felt that when senior office-bearers sit on multiple committees, it may reduce opportunities for diverse or dissenting viewpoints.

"When the Vice-Chancellor and the Chancellor hold key positions, as chair or members, across multiple committees, **it becomes difficult to ensure that diverse perspectives are heard and that dissenting views are given fair consideration**".

Participants expressed concern that governance structures placed considerable authority with a small number of senior roles, which they felt reduced opportunities for academic input and did not align with governance norms they were familiar with.

**"Such a structure provides limited opportunity for independent scrutiny and may create an environment where senior executives exert disproportionate influence over governance outcomes.** There do not appear to be term limits for the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, as they serve ex officio on the Council and multiple committees".

Some participants believed that overlaps between governance and management roles created a perception of reduced independence and transparency in decision-making. They shared their view that “In well-structured organisations, a clear separation between management and governance roles is maintained to safeguard independence and avoid conflicts of interest”.

Participants identified the implications of this in practice, raising the Finance Committee’s approach when offered an alternate understanding of the UTS Financial position by a highly regarded group of academics from the business school. Participants stated that there was no consideration that some decision-makers were the owners of the first version, and they perceived that independent evaluation of the two financial models was not undertaken; they evaluated it themselves and rejected the alternative proposal. This reflects participant concerns about potential perceived conflicts of interest rather than a conclusion that any legal conflict existed.

Taken together, these concerns led many participants to feel that UTS’s current governance framework does not provide adequate checks and balances. The concentration of influence among senior executives and council leadership was perceived by participants to diminish opportunities for independent scrutiny and diverse viewpoints, both of which they considered essential for effective, balanced, and trustworthy governance. One participant, drawing on experience in other institutions, expressed surprise at aspects of UTS governance and believed that Council appointment processes did not provide sufficient visibility or representation and shared their view that “I think it is crucial to ensure that the majority of Council members are elected representatives of staff and students.”

## **Academic Board**

Participants felt that the importance and effectiveness of the Academic Board as a representative body for academic voices in the governance process has been significantly undermined by inadequate representation, reduced opportunities for debate and discussion, and meaningful opportunities for engagement. Participants felt that opportunities for staff and student involvement in decision-making were limited and that representation on key bodies, including the Academic Board, could be strengthened. Some Academic Board members reported finding it difficult to place items on agendas, perceiving that meetings were largely shaped by senior leaders.

Support for a stronger and more accountable Academic Board was frequently mentioned. Participants emphasised that Academic Board decision-making should “enable proper discussion and decision making” rather than being procedural. Recommendations included **increasing the power of Academic Board “to provide checks and balances and accountability on ULT,”** and “Academic board involvement in decisions affecting academic matters needs to be foregrounded and built into the Act and all UTS’s rules and policies.”

## **Centralisation of power and decision-making**

Concerns were raised about an increasing centralisation of power at UTS, particularly around the senior executive, and that Council were insufficiently engaged in university matters to provide sufficient oversight and understanding of the impact of executive decisions. This was seen as contributing to a reduction in accountability, transparency and integrity.

**“The increasing concentration of authority within a small executive group has reduced the role of collegial bodies and diminished the influence of academic expertise in shaping the university’s direction. Council oversight also appears limited, with little visibility of how governance responsibilities are exercised or how risks to academic quality, staff wellbeing and the university’s reputation are managed.”**

Participants perceived that there were insufficient governance mechanisms to address staff concerns about executive decisions. Some participants felt that major decisions appeared to be made without mechanisms for independent review or “method of recourse or dissent”, which they believed reduced confidence in governance processes. Another participant felt that: “Governance has also become increasingly centralised, with authority concentrated at senior executive levels and limited visibility of how Council and Academic Board oversight is exercised in practice.” Some participants perceived that governance bodies such as the Academic Board were not always able to influence decisions meaningfully and felt that their role was largely procedural. A participant observed that where committees raised concerns about high-risk initiatives, these were sometimes not reflected in final decisions. They characterised this as a shift toward more centralised decision-making. One participant, drawing on their experience in other institutions, felt that decision-making at UTS had become highly centralised and that governance processes appeared symbolic rather than substantive.

There was widespread support for an increased commitment to accountability to maintain trust and confidence and deliver on the university’s mission. Several participants believed that stronger accountability mechanisms were needed and suggested that legislative reform through “government intervention from both state and federal level” or external review could improve governance transparency. They felt that “failure to do this will permanently shift universities from a public good to a profit-making business”.

**“There is a strong need for renewed commitment to shared governance, clear communication of decision-making processes and genuine inclusion of academic and professional staff in shaping the future of the university.”**

“If these managers want to run the university like a corporate entity and receive remuneration of a similar magnitude, then they should also be judged and assessed

accordingly. For a largely taxpayer funded institution to have such little accountability or transparency over major decisions which affect the broader public seems wrong.”

## **Integrity and Ethics**

Integrity and ethical behaviour were identified as a critical component of maintaining accountability, but also essential to underpinning the university’s public purpose (see Kenny et al. 2024). It was perceived that governance could not be separated from culture, and ‘people at the top’ should be setting the culture of the organisation. Participants valued “having a principled and ethical approach to governing a public institution that exists for the public good.”

**“Adherence and reinforcement of a positive ethical culture. This has been whittled down** as a result of choices made that undermine what makes a university a public good.”

The concept of integrity was also reflected in views about the need to justify the merit of decision-making and data provenance and transparency was also important for credible and trustworthy leadership.

**“In the entire OSI process to date, I could not see any transparency, any justification for suggested restructure.** Furthermore, the expenditures on external consultation is not explained at all.”

To restore integrity KTC participants suggested the need for greater public scrutiny either through an NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) inquiry, regulation (including changes to the UTS Act), and/or public pressure. These suggestions reflect participants’ views about potential oversight or inquisitorial mechanisms rather than any conclusion that corrupt conduct has occurred. The authors do not suggest that an ICAC inquiry is appropriate, rather that a commission of inquiry to review UTS would be appropriate.

One participant commented that: “The issues are public and need to be communicated to the public. The key is that universities are public institutions and that there is no accountability for the misuse of public funds.” This quote reflects that participants opinion rather than a finding that misuse of funds has taken place.

## **4. Participatory Decision-Making**

Participants highly valued governance and decision-making processes that enabled the diverse voices of the university community to contribute and be heard. 99.08% of survey respondents identified principles of collegial decision-making as important in high level governance at UTS, including 81.8% who saw this as ‘Very important’. There was a strong desire to “let the talented staff have more seats at the governance table” and consistent calls for greater representation of

staff and students in governance bodies and more opportunities for meaningful codesign and collaboration.

**“UTS future governance should be strongly focused on the university's mission as set out in the legislation - public education and research as a public good.** It should be led by academics not external business executives. And yes, we need to be efficient as a university, but we are not a business and should not emulate that culture or model.”

### **Meaningful consultation and co-design**

Participants expressed frustration in the ubiquitous use of processes that seemingly only pay lip service to consultative practices. Participants felt that some “consultations frequently occur after decisions appear to have already been made, and staff input has limited influence on outcomes.”

Some participants felt discouraged from raising concerns in certain forums and reported that responses to critical questions sometimes made them uncomfortable or reluctant to speak further. They shared that they felt **“Staff are often given little opportunity to input into decisions”**. Participants felt that feedback was not always reflected in outcomes and perceived that their concerns were not consistently addressed.”

To ensure meaningful consultation and integration of feedback, participants were keen to shift to co-design processes to inform decisions. Participants also suggested that these be established around clear terms of reference, timelines, and outcome assessment frameworks and a commitment to safe, respectful environments where open discussion is welcomed. In addition, such a co-design approach was proposed to develop a model of governance that works for UTS:

**“I hope UTS can rebuild trust through governance that truly reflects the values of a public university - fairness, transparency, collaboration, and social justice.** I want to see a culture where staff, students, and researchers are not just consulted but are genuine partners in decision-making.”

### **Respect**

Participant’s experiences of consultation, open communication and debate were seen to be at odds with the University’s ‘employee value proposition’ which advocates “your voice and perspective are critical” and “diverse views and robust debate” are celebrated, encouraged and respected.

Many reported consultatory experiences that felt exclusionary, lacking authenticity or genuine listening and respect:

“Major decisions, such as the Operational Sustainability Initiative and proposed faculty mergers, have been made with minimal transparency or meaningful consultation.

Some participants felt depersonalised by recent processes and did not feel their contributions were fully recognised, sharing that they “feel excluded from genuine participation in governance and treated as numbers, not colleagues.” Some participants felt that alternative financial proposals were not given sufficient consideration and interpreted this as a lack of responsiveness to staff and student perspectives.

### **Democratic decision-making**

Democratic practices in governance and decision-making processes were seen as essential to re-establishing trust in the senior leadership: “This approach has eroded trust, weakened collegial culture and created uncertainty about whether the University is meeting its statutory obligations under the UTS Act to serve the public good and uphold academic freedom.”

**“I believe there is an urgent need to rebuild transparent and participatory governance structures, where decisions are evidence-based, open to scrutiny and made with genuine academic and community input.”**

Democratic practices would also help draw out the wide expertise, experiences and willingness of staff to contribute to the university’s decision-making.

**“A university’s strength lies in its people, and governance should empower them to shape its direction with integrity and care. My hope is for a UTS that leads by example: a democratic institution that values equity as much as efficiency, and community wellbeing as much as financial stability.** If we learn from the challenges of recent years, UTS can emerge stronger, more inclusive, and more aligned with its mission to serve the public good.”

Suggestions were made including implementing governance principles and structures that reflect Tony Benn’s ‘Questions for Power’: 1) In whose interests do you exercise your power? 2) To whom are you accountable? 3) How can we get rid of you?

Participants expressed a strong enthusiasm for the potential to renew and revitalise university governance through increased staff and student participation and representation in governance bodies to restore trust, and deliver greater alignment, focus and protection of the university’s public purpose outcomes, impacts and obligations.

Many felt that greater emphasis on democratic decision making would strengthen the university, volunteering a range of ideas and examples more prevalent in international contexts. These included suggestions to establish an Academic senate or formal consultative roles for the

Professoriate body; increases or majority staff and student representation on Council and Academic Board; or a shift to elected, or responsibility for staff-selected shortlisting of candidates for key academic roles, such as Provost or Deans to ensure representation of academic interests to management, rather than the reverse. **“The Dean is supposed to represent the academics to the executive, not the other way around.”**

### **Insourcing expertise**

As a highly regarded knowledge-based institution, utilising the University’s own expertise was viewed by participants as a unique opportunity to enhance traditional approaches to governance and decision-making.

“The work of the business school (presented by the professoriate) is a light of what's possible here. We need to institutionalise ways for us to have our 'own people' routinely solve our problems.... We have a great business school with finance, management, and accounting functions. Let's use what we know and routinely turn our best minds, hearts and experiments inwards. Can we become a university cooperative - Australia can be narrow minded, with low horizons. Let’s show how to govern and run an institution (specifically, a university) for the public good by applying what we know from research, theory, and transdisciplinary experimentation.”

The rejection of a detailed “alternative financial plan” prepared by a number of academic experts from the UTS Business School in response to the financial assumptions presented in the University’s Operational Sustainability Initiative was frequently cited as a lost opportunity to engage and leverage the knowledge and expertise within the university, and was interpreted by some participants as evidence that value was not placed on the expertise of academics and professionals employed at UTS. Some participants believed that internal accounting experts had offered to contribute alternative financial modelling and felt that these offers were not taken up.

Some participants viewed management’s (perceived) dismissive attitude to in-house expertise, particularly the distinguished authors of the alternative financial plan. One participant recalled a comment in a faculty meeting that they interpreted as dismissive of accounting expertise, which they found concerning. Several participants expressed concern about the level of reliance on external consultants and believed that the advice provided did not fully align with their understanding of the university’s context. Some participants felt that internal expertise was not fully utilised in recent decision-making processes and questioned the adequacy of the analyses presented by external consultants and felt that they did not reflect the complexity of the university’s operations.

Participants reported that they were not aware of any “internal validation” processes for the consultancy reports and felt that greater transparency about their use in decision-making would improve confidence.

One participant expressed frustration about limited detail in the financial modelling and speculated about its accuracy, though these comments reflect personal perceptions rather than any findings regarding the conduct of those involved. They encouraged management to: **“Trust your staff, we actually know things and we chose to work at UTS so have our feet on the ground!”**

# Section Four: Recommendations for UTS

## Governance Reform

The governance problems identified through this project are not only contextual to UTS but are also structural. At the sector level, higher education is shaped by market logic and consultant playbooks that push universities away from their national mission. Participants felt that the UTS Act and current Council composition and practices do not provide sufficiently strong mechanisms to enforce transparency, accountability, or alignment with UTS's mission and core values. They also described administrative systems as heavy and inconsistent, and perceived that decisions by senior leaders could sometimes override established processes. In cultural terms, participants felt that governance had drifted from academic values of collegiality, integrity, and public service. Together, these factors were seen by participants as contributing to a significant erosion of trust. Participants generally felt that addressing this would take more than procedural fixes. It means embedding reliable, statutory channels for the UTS community voice and accountability into the architecture of governance. Council, Academic Board, and other governing bodies must be equipped and required to make decisions in line with UTS's mission and values and must do so in dialogue with those on the front lines of the university's work. Only reforms of this kind can rebuild trust, restore loyalty, and ensure governance supports the public good that UTS was created to serve. Through this project, the UTS community has offered countless credible recommendations for reform. These reforms emerged from the survey and KTCs and will be further developed as the project continues. In this section, we summarise community-oriented recommendations for reforms to offer a pathway forward for effective governance at UTS. This includes immediate, implementable actions to generate trust, as well as steps towards more systemic reform.

### Priority Recommendations

The findings from the UTS Governance Project inform the following four priority recommendations for the reform of governance at the University of Technology Sydney:

**Recommendation 1.** Halt the Operational Sustainability Initiative (OSI) and conduct an independent financial analysis and risk assessment

**Recommendation 2.** Review of senior leadership at UTS

**Recommendation 3.** Reform of UTS Council composition and membership rules through changes to the University of Technology Act 1989 (NSW)

**Recommendation 4.** A comprehensive audit of UTS

## **Recommendation 1. Halt the Operational Sustainability Initiative (OSI) and conduct an independent financial analysis and risk assessment**

The first recommendation emerging from the UTS Governance Project participants findings is that UTS resolves to:

- a. Halt the Operational Sustainability Initiative (OSI) with immediate effect and commission an independent financial evaluation of the savings assumptions, financial projections underpinning, and risks associated with both current OSI change proposals (Academic Change Proposal and Operating Change Proposal).
- b. Engage an independent and mutually agreeable panel of eminent accounting academics from other Australian universities—with no prior advisory or employment relationship with UTS—to conduct this evaluation.
- c. Provide the panel with full access to all relevant financial data, modelling, and assumptions used in the preparation of the proposals.
- d. Require that this review also evaluate the Alternative Financial Plan developed by UTS Business School colleagues; and
- e. Make the report of the independent experts publicly available to the University community prior to any further decisions being made.

Such a review would enhance transparency and assist Council in fulfilling its fiduciary and governance oversight duties under the UTS Act.

**Rationale:** This recommendation is based on evidence from the UTS Governance Project indicating widespread participant concerns about what they perceived to be the strategic purpose, logic, assumption, financial modelling, risk analysis, and transparency underpinning the Operational Sustainability Initiative. An independent financial review and risk analysis by an independent and mutually agreeable panel of external academic experts would provide the necessary assurance of integrity, accountability and due diligence, helping to rebuild confidence in UTS’s governance and decision-making processes, and establishing a clear pathway for effective changes that support UTS’s mission as well its sustainability.

**UTS Governance Project findings in support of this recommendation:** Project participants expressed strong concerns about the Operational Sustainability Initiative (OSI). Many felt that senior management and governance bodies continued to advance OSI despite what they perceived as widespread opposition from staff, students and community members. One participant stated that, in their view, “**governance is broken**” and argued to “**stop OSI and go back to staff and students to work on solutions**” to co-develop alternatives. This reflects an individual participant’s perspective rather than a factual finding about governance performance. Project participants called for:

“Transparency at every step of the way, genuine consultation with staff who are experts in their field, **review the make-up and operations of the University Council and Academic**

**Board, and review the relationship between the University Council, the chancellor and the VC. Follow the interim recommendations of the Senate inquiry- each and every one of the recommendations. Stop OSI until all those recommendations have been put in place”.**

One participant felt that the development and advancement of OSI “highlighted significant weaknesses in UTS’s current governance practices”. This represents the participant’s interpretation that the process lacked transparency, meaningful consultation, and clear accountability, not an established assessment of governance compliance.

Concerns regarding OSI were flagged in relation to its original development, which participants understood to have involved the use of external consultancy firm KPMG at a cost reported internally as over \$7m. Participants felt that internal expertise in business, accounting, economics, management, and change processes had not been adequately utilised in this work. Participants raised concerns about the consultancy processes underpinning OSI. Some felt that external consultants did not fully understand UTS’s context, that the analytical methods were not sufficiently transparent, and that there was limited engagement with staff and students. One participant expressed the view that:

**“Never ever use consultants. The OSI reveals top-down decision-making, limited consultation, and opaque communication at UTS. Governance must prioritise transparency, shared decision-making, and ethical leadership. Future initiatives should be co-designed with staff, grounded in trust, procedural fairness, and accountability, replacing corporate management logic with collaborative academic governance and genuine psychosocial care”.**

Another participant felt that OSI reflected longstanding concerns “about how the University is governed” including what they perceived as secrecy, high reliance on external consultants, and consultation processes that did not appear to them to influence final decisions.

This has led to a belief that the strategic case, and financial justification for OSI has not been made by the UTS senior staff group. Participants noted that an alternative financial plan developed by Business School academics reached different conclusions about UTS’s financial position, and some felt these raised questions about the necessity and scale of OSI. One participant felt that the case for OSI had not been clearly communicated and attributed this to what they perceived as limited transparency, weak consultation, highly centralised decision-making and a lack of visible accountability. They expressed the following opinion: "How do you expect to make good change when you don't bring staff implementing those changes along with you?"

**“There is a lack of strategy behind the OSI, so staff are not clear of what is the overall strategy behind the change plan. It has been proposed as a cost saving measure--this is not a strategy”.**

One participant stated that they could not see sufficient transparency or justification for the OSI restructure or for expenditure on external consultants and believed that decision-making and financial management needed substantial improvement. They felt that a major review of leadership was warranted.

“The lack of accountability and transparency - the changes proposed through OSI does not seem to be for long term strategic purposes but for short term financial savings only. Too many staff are being affected over short term changes. We've seen these restructure (e.g. centralisation and decentralisation) happen over the years and across the industry, only to revert to previous state when centralised services are not able to meet academics or staff requests adequately and then we see hiring of staff happening to fill the gap”.

Since OSI was announced, some participants felt that key decisions related to OSI had already been made before consultation occurred and described the process as tokenistic. Participants reported that they found it difficult to engage directly with Council about the impacts of OSI on staff, reputation and educational quality. Some participants felt that criticism of OSI was discouraged or not meaningfully taken up by the Senior Staff Group. Some participants speculated about the circumstances surrounding the former Provost’s departure and expressed concern about the lack of publicly available information about this change. These comments represent participant speculation and perceptions only, and the project makes no findings about the reasons for her departure.

These concerns are reflected in a participant quote referring to a proposal by the Vice-Chancellor to disestablish the provost role—a proposal they believed should have been treated as a major change and subject to consultation.

**“The removal of the provost (whether it was premeditated or of the provost's own volition, and the subsequent disestablishment of the provost position, should be regarded as a major change proposal and be consulted by staff.”**

The participant considered this centralisation of authority to be inappropriate and potentially ineffective, particularly given its likely workload implications for faculty leaders. Through the OSI process, some participants described experiencing behaviour they perceived as bullying, which they felt created pressure to accept the change proposals. These descriptions reflect individual participant perceptions and do not constitute findings of misconduct. One participant felt that the way OSI had been advanced created pressure and anxiety for staff, and they

perceived some interactions as intimidating. People also reported that the lack of clear justification, limited opportunities to contest, and perceived lack of clear explanation of OSI contributed to stress and what they described as psychosocial risks. A participant described OSI drop-in sessions as confusing and internally inconsistent and felt that this contributed to stress and uncertainty among staff and that **“no one can even make sense of it”**.

Participants further questioned the logic of OSI, stating that internal experts had provided alternative financial analysis which, in their view, challenged the rationale for the consultancy-informed change proposals and outlined what they considered to be a less harmful alternative plan. **The ‘Alternative Plan’ was developed by expert Accounting and economist academics from UTS Business School.** Numerous project participants referred to the alternative plan, expressing strong support for the proposal as a viable solution for UTS:

**“Listen to the specialists from home. It went public that a group of distinguished UTS professors have analysed the situation, finding significant issues with official analysis. Moreover, the group has proposed an alternative plan that would not cause the harm this OSI has been causing to the entire community”**.

Participants reported that senior management advised that the alternative plan did not align with their risk appetite. Several participants found this explanation unconvincing and felt that the alternative plan had not been fully considered.

**“The alternative plan developed by Professors in UTS Business School was dismissed. –... [there are] serious and valid questions over whether such major cuts are even necessary”**.

Others expressed similar dismay at the summary dismissal of the alternative plan and asked that senior management: “meaningfully engage with the report developed by the accounting and business schools”. One participant expressed scepticism about the use of large external consulting firms for complex university reforms and argued that their staffing models may not always align well with the specialised needs of higher education institutions. For the future, project participants stated that decision-making at UTS should involve consultation within, and draw on internal expertise: “consult internally, such as the alternative Business School proposal that includes far fewer staff cuts and much more realistic efficiency measures”. These major concerns about the logic, influence of external consultants on, strategy behind, financial justification for, and problematic processes surrounding OSI, as well as the existence of a viable alternative plan, underpin our recommendation that OSI is halted, and an external independent review of UTS’s financial position, the OSI, and the alternative plan is conducted.

**This reiterates the recommendation that UTS immediately halts OSI, and commissions an independent and mutually agreeable panel of external academic experts to undertake a comprehensive review and risk analysis of the financial assumptions and modelling underlying current OSI proposals, UTS’s finances, and the UTS Business School alternative plan to provide assurance of integrity, transparency and accountability. It would enable the university to make better-informed decisions, rebuild trust, and ensure financial strategy aligns with UTS’s mission, core values, and sustainability.**

## **Recommendation 2. Review of Senior Leadership at UTS**

Our second priority recommendation emerging from the UTS Governance Project concerns the need for a review of senior leadership of the university, that could perhaps be commissioned or requested by the Parliament of NSW. This was a common and consistent view expressed by UTS staff, students and alumni. It is not the desire of the UTS Governance Project to single out or target specific individuals. However, based on the data shared and the findings of this project participants commonly recommended that a substantial refresh of senior leadership be considered to restore trust and enable UTS to move forward. Based on the project findings, a review of, and potentially changes in leadership in some of these key positions may be necessary to enable UTS to move forward.

**Rationale:** UTS Governance Project participants expressed an overwhelming and consistent loss of confidence in the current senior leadership, citing what they perceived as poor governance practices, centralisation of power, a lack of transparency, and failures of accountability. Concerns extended to decision-making processes associated with the Operational Sustainability Initiative (OSI), which were widely viewed as poorly justified, inadequately consulted, and damaging to the university’s culture and reputation. Project findings indicate these are participant perceptions and interpretations, and that for participants restoring trust and institutional integrity now requires a clean slate in senior leadership—to refresh governance, collegiate culture, and the university’s public mission.

**UTS Governance Project findings in support of this recommendation:** UTS Governance project participants identified that senior leadership commonly refer to corporate logic as having primacy in how the university is run. One participant argued that, if UTS were structured like a shareholder corporation, its recent performance would have prompted significant leadership changes.

Much of this appears to stem from a lack of accountability which was expressed by several participants. Some participants felt that the Vice-Chancellor and Council were not sufficiently accountable and should be subject to more robust scrutiny. Relating this to OSI, there was a strong desire to “make VC, Council and boards accountable for decisions made that have led to

the NEED for cuts”. One area in which participants perceived senior leadership to be falling short, as flagged elsewhere in this report, concerns consultation processes, especially with respect to OSI which is illustrated in the following quote: “All consultation feels performative and is done after decisions have been made”. Some participants reported feeling that their expertise was not respected or valued in interactions with senior leadership.

One participant strongly criticised the OSI process, stating that they believed it was inconsistent with UTS’s mission and that decision-making had been overly centralised. They alleged non-compliance with various regulatory frameworks and expressed concerns about how senior leadership changes and restructures had been handled. These statements reflect participant perceptions and allegations only and do not constitute findings of fact or wrongdoing. Another participant alleged that aspects of OSI and related governance practices may not have complied with health and safety, information-access, or employment requirements, and claimed that communication about a particular spreadsheet of academic performance data had been misleading. These are participant allegations and not verified findings. Participants perceived that significant authority was held by the Senior Staff Group (SSG) and some reported experiencing a culture of fear or reluctance to speak openly. One participant felt that accountability mechanisms for senior roles, such as the COO, were not clearly visible. These concerns again reflect participant views, not established conclusions.

Participants sometimes used very strong language to describe governance, with some likening current arrangements to a ‘dictatorial’ system in contrast to a more inclusive model. Such descriptions represent participants’ subjective characterisations. Participants raised concerns that this “risks driving away the University’s best talents and reputation”.

A participant described governance as highly centralised and felt that staff experienced communication from leadership as dismissive or invalidating. They reported having no confidence in the current senior leadership team.

Sadly, many people expressed a forlorn sense that UTS has no, or a very poor future without a change of the leadership team. Project participants flagged issues with reputational damage to the university, describe giving up hope, and raised concerns that UTS may never recover due to poor leadership:

“UTS's leaders have already caused so much damage to UTS's reputation, I fear whether it is possible to recover from this. I hope it does not lead to further cost cutting measures in the future.”

**“I don't see any good future for UTS unless there is major governance reform and a change in leadership and culture”.**

One participant felt that recent events had seriously harmed UTS's reputation and expressed the view that communication from leadership had often been unclear or unconvincing.

These quotes illustrate UTS Governance Project participants' experiences of what they perceived as a lack of transparency, insufficient responsiveness to staff and student concerns, and harm to UTS's reputation. Again, these are participant perceptions, not verified assessments of leadership conduct. Many project participants felt that these issues had contributed to a poor workplace culture at UTS. Several project participants argued that, considering perceived governance and decision-making problems, senior roles should be reviewed, and that leadership renewal may be needed. The following participant quote shared the view that:

**“The UTS Act should be changed by the Parliament of NSW to do the following: The Chancellor and the Deans should be elected by staff. The composition of Council should be changed to have a majority of staff and students as members, while appointed Councillors should include more people with higher education and/or public sector experience. New non-elected Councillors should not be appointed by the existing council members without any checks and balances. The power of Academic Board should be increased to provide checks and balances and accountability on ULT. The role of Provost should be maintained and not allowed to be removed by a VC”.**

“I have been very disappointed with UTS governance over the last few years... There are clearly significant breakdowns with poor decision making related to inadequate risk management, weak council oversight, no ULT accountability to how UTS got to the point OSI was needed. This had led to complete breakdown of trust, culture and other negative consequences”.

The UTS Governance Project reiterates that there is no desire or intention to single out specific individuals when making this recommendation and reflecting these findings. However, given the strength of feeling and the weight of participant data shared through the project concerning this matter it is unavoidable and would be unrepresentative to ignore this and avoid making this recommendation. **Therefore, it is recommended that there is a review and consideration of what necessary changes in senior leadership may be required, with immediate effect. This recommendation reflects participant sentiment and does not imply any finding of wrongdoing or misconduct by any individual.**

### **Recommendation 3. Reform of UTS Council composition and membership rules through changes to the University of Technology Act 1989 (NSW):**

The third priority recommendation from the UTS Governance Project is that the Parliament of NSW amend the *University of Technology Act 1989* (NSW) to reform the composition and governance of the UTS Council to enhance accountability, academic oversight, and the university's capacity to uphold its public mission. This should ideally be carried out following a **co-design process** with the involvement of the UTS community of academic and professional staff, and students as well as policymakers. **As an immediate action, it is noted that the NSW Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education has the power to appoint additional members of Council who could take a pro-active role in reviewing the current governance arrangements at UTS and this possibility was raised by some project participants.**

Tying recommendations to those made by the Expert Council on University Governance for a code of conduct to govern the actions of university councillors, it is contended that genuine accountability requires genuine enforceability and therefore it is **recommended that any code be enforceable through specified duties and corresponding liability provisions in the UTS Act**. While an enforceable code of conduct would help to clarify the duties of councillors, in the absence of such a code, it is recommended that the UTS Act be amended to provide duties of councillors with an enforceable legal status akin to directors' duties under the *Corporations Act 2001*, such that any person (including a student, academic, employee, contractor, regulator (e.g. TEQSA), trade union, corporation, etc) has standing to bring an action for any breach of the code of conduct. This reflects participants' views and suggested reforms, not findings that existing councillors have breached duties.

In terms of the composition of governing bodies, the proposed statutory reforms include:

- a. **Majority elected representation:** Ensure that the UTS Council comprises a majority of members elected by UTS staff and students. Specifically, at least 60% of the UTS Council should be elected members of staff and students, comprising: Academic staff: 40% (e.g. 8 members), Professional Staff: 10% (e.g. 2 members), and Students: 10% (e.g. 2 members). Note that these percentages should remain consistent to equate to at least 60% of the UTS Council being composed of elected members, with the specific number of members in each category outlined here being based on the size of council being 20 members. Also note as an example of elected proportionality that between 1850 and 1989 the University of Sydney Governing Body the Senate had 24 Fellows with 18 of these elected by the University's graduates (alumni).
- b. **Reform of Current UTS Council Self-Nomination Arrangements:** Remove the current provision allowing UTS Council members to nominate new members, thereby reducing the potential for conflicts of interest, facilitating greater university staff and student representation, and promoting transparency in appointments and diversity in the composition of governing bodies, including council.

- c. **Committee representation:** Guarantee that elected staff and student representatives have the same minimum 60% majority representation on key Council committees, including the Finance Committee, Audit and Risk Committee, Governance Committee Infrastructure Committee and Remuneration Committee.
- d. **External member expertise:** Ensure that external members are predominantly drawn from the university and public sectors, with relevant experience in higher education governance, public administration, or policy oversight. Based on the size of council consisting of 20 members, and assuming that 12 of these 20 members would be staff and student elected representatives to form a 60% majority on council, then this would mean of the remaining 8 members - a minimum of 5 should be drawn from the university and public sectors.
- e. **Corporate expertise limitations:** Restrict the inclusion of corporate or private sector members to those whose expertise is strictly necessary for financial, legal, or corporate governance advice when such expertise is not freely available from not-for-profit sector candidates, thus avoiding an overrepresentation of corporate perspectives that could potentially misalign with the University's public mission.

**Rationale:** This recommendation is grounded in evidence from the UTS Governance Project indicating that, in participants' views, the current composition of, and appointment processes to, the UTS Council have contributed to a perceived concentration of power, reduced accountability, and limited meaningful staff and student participation in decision making. By amending the UTS Act to ensure a majority of elected academic, professional staff, and student representatives, remove self-nomination of Council members, guarantee fair representation on key committees, and restrict external members to relevant expertise, the University of Technology Sydney would embed robust, statutory channels for community voice and oversight. Having a majority of elected members could also help ensure the risk of mission drift is mitigated and that student and staff concerns are addressed through formal governance mechanisms rather than having to engage in alternative advocacy efforts such as this project in the future. These changes would strengthen transparency, align Council governance with UTS's public mission and core values, and rebalance power to support academic values and strategic decision-making that reflects the interests of the University community. Implementing these reforms would be a crucial first step towards rebuilding trust, ensuring procedural fairness, and creating governance structures capable of upholding UTS's academic, social, and public objectives. These statements summarise participant perspectives and do not assert misconduct or legal breaches by existing members of Council.

**UTS Governance Project findings in support of this recommendation:** Project participants consistently flagged common concerns with the existing composition, and practices of the UTS Council. They were also consistent in their recommendations, namely that the UTS Act should

be changed to alter the composition of the UTS Council, the rules governing council, to improve transparency, to strengthen checks and balances, particularly in relation to managing potential conflicts of interest, and to clarify consequences where governance obligations are not met. People strongly identified a clear need for “council member reform” and that “we need a complete overhaul — we need a new system with a majority of students plus staff in council”. A consistent desire for majority staff and student representation was expressed: “the composition of council needs a complete overhaul. Increased staff membership and people with higher education and other public purpose experience - and fewer consultants!”. These views are participants’ opinions, not factual findings. Project findings provided strong and consistent support for this priority recommendation for NSW State Parliament MPs to change to the UTS Act and to change the composition and rules for the UTS Council. The following participant quote exemplifies this recommendation:

“The UTS Act should be changed by the Parliament of NSW to do the following: The Chancellor and the Deans should be elected by staff. The composition of Council should be changed to have a majority of staff and students as members, while appointed Councillors should include more people with higher education and/or public sector experience. New non-elected Councillors should not be appointed by the existing council members without any checks and balances”.

Changing the UTS Act is seen as a critical starting point by many UTS staff, students, alumni and community members for addressing what they saw as governance failures that: “needs an overhaul starting at the UTS Act and moving on to the By-Law, Council composition and powers of Academic Board”. The role of NSW State Parliament MPs is vital here, and this was clearly expressed by participants, who conveyed a strong sense of urgency that politicians act:

“I hope that policymakers act and enact urgent reform relating to governance for the Australian University sector, and that NSW policymakers specifically intervene to impose governance reform at UTS - especially through changing the UTS Act”.

There are myriad reasons why UTS Governance project participants recommend changes to the UTS Act in relation to the UTS Council. One participant felt that Council’s approval of OSI did not appear to be supported by a sufficiently detailed implementation plan and described the process as poorly managed, particularly given the scale of proposed redundancies. They reported that “**Staff are crying in their offices**”. This reflects the participant’s personal experience and perception.

A common refrain during KTCs was that there has been a separation of strategic governance and management operations oversight at UTS. One participant was highly critical, stating that:

“Given we have no shareholders there is nobody else management is ever held accountable to. For example, time and again major infrastructure projects are delivered behind schedule, over budget and are inadequate for their purpose, yet nobody is ever held accountable, and the same thing happens again next time”.

A sense of distance between the UTS Council and the everyday workings of the university also came out: “council currently is NOT representative of the academic/professional staff, nor of the students. It's like another culture entirely, completely removed from the actual everyday workings of the university”. One participant advocated for a majority of staff and student members on Council and expressed concern about what they saw as an over-representation of corporate backgrounds among current appointees. These are participant perceptions, not objective findings.

Participants gave a perception that council members are not fully informed of or aware of financial matters at UTS: “council need to be fully informed of any financial issues very early on”. This theme is also reflected by another participant stating that: “members of Council do not appear open to hearing staff concerns”. Overall, this creates a perceived lack of accountability on the UTS Council: “accountability should align with management and expertise.

Another critical concern raised is a lack of transparency concerning UTS Council with meetings not having proper and freely available agendas and minutes, and with major decisions made that impact students, staff and the community without any meaningful consultation or input. A participant reported that they found it difficult to access Council agendas and minutes and felt that existing transparency arrangements were inadequate.

Participants also reported that, in their experience, there is a lack of accessibility, with students and staff unable to contact, meet or discuss any issues with council members, and very little information about said members being made available on the UTS website. Participants also reported that, in their experience, communications from UTS community members addressed to Council members were redirected to the Vice-Chancellor’s office for response, which they felt limited direct access to Council. These issues led one participant to comment that: “transparency must be improved. There is currently no access to Council”. Another participant recommended: “make UTS Council meetings public. Fill the Finance Committee with UTS Professors (e.g. from Accounting and Finance). Make the names of all governance personnel public”.

Major issues were also raised with the current appointments process to the UTS Council. There appears to be a perceived lack of transparency in how members get appointed as expressed here: “how do people get appointed to UTS Council? How do people get appointed to the finance committee? It would be good to have transparency, staff elections, more staff on these”. Issues with council appointments processes were linked by participants to UTS’s current governance

problems: “transparency regarding appointments to the governing body ... many colleagues and I believe this is at the heart of current difficulties”. A critical issue raised here is that members of council can nominate new members to join council, which creates a feedback loop in which members seem hand-picked by their people in their network, or who are close to the Senior Staff Group, and therefore may struggle to provide checks and balances on UTS leadership. One participant, drawing on experience elsewhere, believed that Council appointment processes gave existing members substantial influence over new appointments and argued for more direct election of members by staff and students.

“The Nominations Committee of University Council should be disestablished. This body currently consists of three individuals including the Vice Chancellor and the Chancellor. They select the very people who are meant to play a role in governance checks. Instead, appointed members of council should be selected by a representative body, with due regard to their expertise with respect to the sector and the public interest role of universities”.

It was also pointed out that there need to be implications for poor governance practices on council that instil accountability, including penalties for Council members who breach governance rules:

“Governance is not obligatory though. We need to hold the ULT and council liable through the UTS Act as well. I agree that governance is important, but breaches of governance do not necessarily lead to change. There needs to be obligatory requirement of adherence to governance to make it meaningful”.

“Amend the UTS Act to make decision makers accountable for non-compliance. There are no checks and balances in place right now to ensure accountability”.

Several clear suggestions for amending the UTS Act and changing the composition, and operation of the UTS Council were made. UTS community members believe the current arrangements with limited staff or student representation is inadequate. Most commonly, rebalancing to ensure a majority of elected staff and student members was preferred, as well as ex-officio members with strong university and public sector experience rather than the current predominance of corporate representation on the UTS Council. Several participants also perceived a lack of gender, cultural and sector-expertise diversity on the UTS Council and expressed concern about what they saw as an over-representation of white men from corporate business backgrounds. These concerns reflect participant perspectives on diversity, not factual findings of discrimination. These concerns are reflected in the following set of several participant quotes which illustrate the commonalities in the recommendations made:

**“Changes to the UTS Act to amend the makeup of UTS Council to be far more representative”.**

“Appropriate and proportionate representation of the full range of stakeholders. Current council membership of 2 elected academic staff and 2 students is inadequate. Attention should also be paid to subcommittee membership - where interests of external members currently goes completely unchecked. All governance positions should be actively vetted for COI - self report declaration alone is inadequate”.

“Council to be entirely elected; 45% academics, 25% alumni, 5% students, 5% support staff, remaining 20% can be appointed by remainder of council. Key is that two thirds of Council must be elected by staff and alumni”.

“The composition of Council should be changed to have a majority of staff and students as members, while appointed Councillors should include more people with higher education and/or public sector experience. New non-elected Councillors should not be appointed by the existing council members without any checks and balances”.

“Hope all of current Council moves toward elected model by appointing elected members to the Council-appointed spots, in preparation for legislative change to lock this in.”

“Complete overhaul is needed, and leaders need to be held accountable. Academies need more freedom in decision making and less administrative tasks and hoop jumping. Academics (a committee of elected ones) should be on the council and should have a say in electing executives. Check the recommendations from the recent review of university governance- some great suggestions there.”

“Independent non-co-opted council members, council members with expertise with the running of university to understand the consequences of their decisions, more elected members from academic and professional staff, longer tenure for elected members (why is their tenure shorter than council appointed members? Are they less important? Less valued?), meetings minutes to be made available, yearly self-reflection on Council governance efficiency, skill matrix of council members.”

“Broader representation from across the community - for example, the current UTS Council has little diversity (too many men, businesspeople, Anglo) and from the big end of town (I do not include the staff/students reps in this observation.”

Students should play an important role in changes to the UTS Council linked to any amendments of the UTS Act: “Students should have a meaningful seat at the table of governance. All meeting

notes of Council should be made public”. Furthermore, ensuring that meetings and minute notes should be made public, improved transparency practices, and stronger safeguards around the appointment of members with close links to consulting firms involved in large-scale university change programs, to avoid perceived conflicts of interest or misalignment with the university’s public purpose. The following participants expressed their views that:

“More involvement by staff. For external members, while it is useful to have members with experience of other industries and commercial contexts, it is outrageous that there is nobody on Council who has direct experience of universities and the sector. There should be more experienced external members (e.g. former Deans and academics who have left the sector or retired). Also reports and minutes of Council meetings should be much more fulsome. The publicly available records are laughably opaque. Members should not be chosen based on who they mingle with at party and industry events, or who they live next door to”.

“Academic voice to be increased on UTS Council. Transparency of minutes. Any change proposal needs to take into account T & L, research and service impacts. Decision-making processes need to align with why UTS was established. There should be a requirement for Council members and the Chancellor to spend time in the business or demonstrate a deep understanding of UTS work across Faculties”.

“Rebalance council membership - more staff, more people with HE/public purpose experience, a ban on consultants”

It was felt that such reform would help ensure that governance improves, and decision making becomes more democratic and effective at UTS: “Reform to make it genuinely democratic. The council need to better understand and represent the day-to-day experience of the university. Expertise should be drawn from within”. **Therefore, based on these findings we strongly recommend that NSW State Parliament MPs urgently undertake to change the UTS Act to enact majority elected staff and student representation, impose transparency rules and conflict of interest rules, ensure university and public sector experience of ex-officio members is prioritised, and that strict penalties for breaches of governance are introduced. Following our community consultation approach, we recommend that such changes to the UTS Act should be informed through a co-design process with the UTS community of staff, students and alumni to clarify the fine details of the necessary changes to the Act. These recommendations reflect participant perspectives and do not imply misconduct by any current members of Council. The authors do not suggest that Council members have breached any laws.**

#### **Recommendation 4: A comprehensive Audit of UTS:**

Our fourth priority recommendation is that the Parliament of NSW instructs that the Audit Office of NSW be requested to undertake a comprehensive performance and governance audit of UTS, focusing on:

- a. The integrity and effectiveness of current governance and accountability mechanisms
- b. The adequacy of financial management, transparency, and risk controls
- c. The alignment of major change initiatives, including the Operational Sustainability Initiative, with the University's statutory obligations and public purpose under the University of Technology Act 1989 (NSW); and
- d. The extent to which decision-making processes uphold principles of procedural fairness, consultation, and evidence-based policy.

**Rationale:** This recommendation arises from participants' concerns and perceptions shared through the UTS Governance Project, which indicated significant participant-reported concerns about transparency, financial assumptions, and procedural fairness relating to decision-making at the university. A formal independent audit conducted by the Audit Office of NSW would ensure that governance practices at UTS meet the standards expected of a publicly funded university and would address the issues as they were described by participants, without implying that any legal or regulatory breach has occurred.

**UTS Governance Project findings in support of this recommendation:** Survey and KTC participants raised concerns about aspects of financial decision-making, potential or perceived conflicts of interest, and governance processes, which they believed warranted independent review. UTS community members articulate that external audits can create accountability and ensure that "governance bodies must be answerable to their communities through regular reviews, performance assessments, and external audits". One participant expressed concern that compliance obligations were not clearly emphasised in governance communications and argued that external audits should be conducted to verify adherence to legal and regulatory requirements. These are participant views and do not represent established findings of non-compliance.

Several participants identified that regular external governance audits are necessary to ensure that UTS is compliant with state guidelines and best practice: "Commission regular external governance audits to ensure compliance with the NSW Universities Governance Guidelines and to benchmark best practices against leading institutions". Some participants suggested that governance support functions should be reviewed to ensure they are operating effectively and in line with best practice: "The GSU (UTS Governance Support Unit) need to be audited by an external auditor". A preference for external auditing was consistent with the Audit Office of NSW the preferred choice:

**“UTS governance need to be audited (preferably Audit Office of NSW) to identify gaps in the existing governance framework”.**

Beyond compliance issues, participants raised serious concerns about aspects of financial management at UTS, including what they saw as a lack of transparency and clarity around decision making. Participants identified that there is a need for auditing of financial management at decision making at UTS and expressed that “good financial management that is audited independently” is a necessity for the university. Participants expressed concern about what they perceived as the cost and value of some centrally led initiatives and recommended a thorough review of activities and expenses. This led participants to suggest that: “there needs to be an audit of all the activities and costs at UTS. All of the non-value add activities and related expenses need to be removed” to ensure better financial decision making.

One participant believed that Council’s approach to considering alternative financial models created a perception of conflict of interest and argued that an independent evaluation would have been preferable.

Indeed, UTS community members expressed that there should be full public disclosure of the financial modelling and the business cases for major initiatives such as OSI, and post implementation audits of such changes to assess their effectiveness or not. This is reflected in the following quote: “Public disclosure business cases for and post implementation audits of key initiatives”.

These perceived issues relating to compliance, financial management, and potential or perceived conflicts of interest led participants to consistently call for ‘regular external audits’ of UTS, and that these should be broad and not just concern financials but also governance, and cultural safety issues. This desire is reflected in the following quote by a participant who proposed: “external audit and review cycles: not just financial audits, but periodic cultural / safety / governance audits; either by ANAO, TEQSA, or independent experts”. Overall, UTS Governance Project participants expressed a high demand for comprehensive external audits at UTS – which, in turn, led participants to support an external, independent, high-priority and wide-scope audit of governance and compliance, financial decision-making and conflicts of interest. These recommendations summarise participant concerns and do not assert that any breaches or improper conduct have occurred.

### **Other Emerging Recommendations from the UTS Governance Project**

Beyond the four priority recommendations outlined in this submission, the project has identified several additional recommendations for reform that will continue to be explored as the work of the project progresses. These include measures to:

1. Improve financial transparency through the publication of a detailed, disaggregated university budget

2. Initiatives to strengthen community engagement such as senior leadership ‘listening tours’ to hear directly from staff and students
3. Reforms to executive performance management, including clearer, publicly available selection criteria and key performance indicators aligned with university values.
4. Electing Deans who should remain on academic not senior staff group employment contracts and return to faculty positions after their term for a set and reasonable minimum period of time
5. Enhancing the accessibility and transparency of Council meetings through allowing staff and students to attend meetings, exploration of broadcasting meetings (similar to local government meetings), and ensuring publication of publicly available minutes of meetings.
6. Strengthening the oversight of the Academic Board and reviewing its composition to better reflect representative views from university staff and students.
7. Establishing an independent internal audit and review office reporting to Council.
8. Insourcing i.e., adopt transparent and inclusive policies that prioritise using internal expertise before outsourcing to external consultants.
9. UTS should establish a formally recognised professoriate body—within Faculties and at the whole-of-university level—as a key source of academic leadership, expert advice, and constructive scrutiny. A representative Professoriate Body should provide independent academic input into major decisions affecting teaching, research, staffing, and strategy, ensuring that governance is informed by disciplinary expertise, evidence, and the university’s public mission. Strengthening the professoriate’s advisory and consultative role will improve decision quality, protect academic standards, and support accountable, transparent, and collegial governance across UTS.

The project will also continue to consider broader governance reforms - both internal and legislative - aimed at modernising Council and Academic Board charters and standing orders, embedding genuine community participation in decision-making, and ensuring the voices of First Nations and Culturally and Racially Marginalised staff, students and communities are represented, and meaningfully integrated into university governance. These recommendations summarise themes raised by project participants and are not intended to imply any improper conduct by current officeholders or governing bodies. These emerging ideas reflect a shared commitment and strong desire of the community to rebuild trust, accountability, and transparency at UTS and in NSW universities.

# Conclusion

The public release of this report for community feedback marks a significant milestone for UTS, and for governance in Australian higher education more broadly. A community-led listening and engagement process of this scale and depth has never been undertaken before at UTS. Through a survey, kitchen table conversations (KTCs), and a planned forthcoming governance workshop, UTS staff, students, alumni and other stakeholders have worked and will continue to work together to identify core challenges, shared values, and practical recommendations and solutions. This process has built internal legitimacy for reform and produced credible, experience-based proposals grounded in the priorities of the UTS community.

The UTS Governance Project encourages internal as well as external stakeholders to engage with the ideas presented in this report. We also encourage UTS community members to continue to engage as the project continues as the survey remains open, further KTCs are organised, and the governance workshop is planned and undertaken. The recommended reforms to UTS governance presented here have been developed through good faith collaboration and open dialogue, with a shared commitment to constructive, evidence-based improvement. They represent the collective voice of the UTS community - people who understand this university intimately and care deeply for its future.

UTS now has an opportunity to be a leader in the university sector with respect to governance reform. Participants expressed that, by adopting the pathway to reform outlined here, UTS could demonstrate the qualities they believe characterise strong university governance — transparency, accountability, participation, co-design, and alignment with the public mission of higher education. In doing so, UTS can strengthen trust within its community, reinforce its social licence, and set a new benchmark for universities in NSW and across Australia.

Realising this vision will require courage, collaboration, and sustained commitment. It calls on Federal and NSW Parliament policymakers, the UTS Council, and the wider sector to work together to strengthen UTS governance, ensuring it continues to embody principles of trust, ethics, integrity, and democratic participation. An open invitation is extended to all who share a stake in UTS's future to join in advancing this important work.

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