

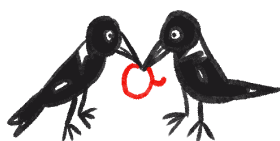
ANU Governance Project: Draft Report For Community Feedback

9 September 2025

Prepared by the ANU Governance Project Working Group, Canberra, ACT.

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The ANU Governance Project Working Group

We are a group of Australian National University (ANU) academics and professional staff who believe there is an opportunity to work constructively towards better governance of our national university and the higher education sector more broadly.

We believe the ANU has *an opportunity to lead the sector* as a model of stakeholder-led, collectively-designed governance reform, commensurate with our mission to deliver public and social goods for the nation, in a responsible and efficient manner.

As ANU scholars and professional staff, we know that the ANU community is uniquely well-positioned for such a task: we have a proud history of, and deep expertise in, contributing to cutting-edge, evidence-based Australian public policy and higher education reform. By supporting a collectively-designed proposal for governance reform of our national university, we intend to elevate the ANU as a model of good governance in higher education.

Many members of the ANU community have contributed to this project, but we are led by the ANU Governance Project Working Group.

The ANU Governance Project Working Group is comprised of (in alphabetical order):

Professor Andy Hogg, College of Science and Medicine
Dr Beck Pearce, College of Arts and Social Sciences & College of Systems and Society
Emeritus Professor Bruce Chapman, College of Business and Economics
Dr Burcu Cevik-Compiegne, College of Arts and Social Sciences
Professor Carolyn Hendriks, College of Law, Governance and Policy
Emeritus Professor Catherine Waldby, College of Arts and Social Sciences
Professor Colin Klein, College of Arts and Social Sciences
Professor Craig Moritz, College of Science and Medicine
Associate Professor Elise Klein, College of Law, Governance and Policy
Professor Frank Bongiorno, College of Arts and Social Sciences
Emeritus Professor Greg Fealy, College of Asia and the Pacific
Professor Greg Yaxley, College of Science and Medicine
Professor Ian McAllister, College of Arts and Social Sciences
Mr Ian Prager, College of Business and Economics
Professor Inger Mewburn, College of Asia and the Pacific
Dr Jessie Moritz, College of Arts and Social Sciences
Professor Keith Dowding, College of Arts and Social Sciences
Professor Katie Steele, College of Arts and Social Sciences
Dr Laura Davy, College of Law, Governance and Policy
Professor Lorana Bartels, College of Arts and Social Sciences

Dr Marija Taflaga, College of Arts and Social Sciences
Professor Meredith Rossner, College of Arts and Social Sciences
Professor Nick Biddle, College of Arts and Social Sciences
Associate Professor Nick Cheesman, College of Asia and the Pacific
Professor Quentin Grafton, College of Law, Governance and Policy
Mr Robin Vleiger, College of Science and Medicine
Professor Ron Levy, College of Law, Governance and Policy
Professor Sasha Mikhayev, College of Science and Medicine
Professor Sango Mahanty, College of Law, Governance and Policy
Professor Sharon Friel, College of Law, Governance and Policy
Dr V. Chitra, College of Arts and Social Sciences

Independence of the ANU Governance Project

The Governance Project is an independent, ANU staff-led project focused exclusively on long-term reform of broad governance principles and mechanisms 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, including ANU Council.

All project data is held only by the ANU Governance Project Working Group.

Being a member of the ANU Governance Project Working Group does not preclude members from having the freedom to express their individual views on issues related to ANU governance and the current state of the university.

If you are interested in joining the mailing list of the ANU Governance Project Working Group, please [contact us](#).



Executive summary

Draft report for community consultation.

The ANU Governance Project was formed amidst a growing crisis of confidence in governance at the Australian National University.

We are a diverse group of academic staff, professional staff, and students who started working together in mid 2025 with three main aims:

1. **To listen and capture** staff and student experiences of governance at ANU, including how management decisions affect teaching, research, 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 proposals that are both practical and credible.

We believe there is an opportunity to work constructively towards better governance of our national university and the higher education sector more broadly.

Our approach is innovative and runs counter to the way universities, including ANU, have attempted to solve financial and governance problems before. Often external consultants recommend restructures that fail to deliver on their efficiency promises. At ANU, this conventional approach has resulted in enormous reputational damage, high psychosocial stress, and failing legitimacy of governance.

We need to try something different. Our approach was to directly engage with, and harness, the expertise of the ANU community to address the current crisis. To this end, between August and September 2025 we:

- **Ran an open survey**, which gathered more than 590 responses.
- **Listened deeply to 75 staff and students**, as they engaged in small group discussions or 'kitchen table conversations' to explore the impact and lived experience of ANU's governance and financial decisions on everyday operations in the university. We challenged people to come up with creative suggestions for improvements.
- **Convened a governance workshop** which brought together over 40 participants from across Colleges, central portfolios, and student groups to review the findings from our survey and conversations. Every College was represented, alongside central service divisions and members of senior leadership.

This body of evidence is the most detailed community-led assessment of ANU governance to date. More than that, this document represents a good faith effort by the ANU 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. We want to thank our participants and everyone who filled out the survey.

This draft report summarises what we heard from the ANU community and their recommendations for the path to improve and uplift governance at the ANU. It reveals a strong appetite for reform and a clear set of priorities.

We invite the ANU community to offer feedback on this draft report over the next 48 hours (by midnight on Wednesday 10 September).

Headline findings:

- Over 96% of survey respondents and all discussion group participants believe current **ANU governance is not fit for purpose** and should be reformed, including 51.5% who said it required a complete overhaul.
- Over 92% of survey respondents and all discussion group participants expressed **dissatisfaction with current ANU governance**, including 49% who said they were 'completely unsatisfied'.
- Over 93% of survey respondents said they were **dissatisfied with current practices of transparency at the ANU**, including over 66% who said they were 'completely unsatisfied'.
- Over 93% of survey respondents said they were **dissatisfied with accountability frameworks at the ANU**, including over 62% who said they were 'completely unsatisfied'.

The appetite for change is clear.

The community is deeply dissatisfied with the way ANU is currently managed and run. Staff have lost trust in leadership due to a lack of transparency in operations and accountability from leaders. Our participants are specifically concerned about:

- **Executive power without checks:** opaque leadership appointments, rapid growth in senior executive roles, and excessive remuneration out of step with the community's expectations.
- **Secrecy and poor information flows:** Council and executive processes described as closed, with limited access to detailed financial and policy information; staff and students reported being kept in the dark or fed jargon rather than facts.

- **Weak accountability:** rules are applied inconsistently, conflicts of interest unmanaged and executives are insulated from the consequences of poor decisions.
- **Tokenistic consultation and poor dialogue:** staff and students said consultation was often perfunctory or retaliatory, creating an unsafe environment and excluding precarious staff and students from any influence on governance forums.
- **Incoherent decision-making leading to operational failure:** decisions are often reactive, short-term, and politically driven; bureaucracy is burdensome without accountability. There are repeated failures in systems and processes undermining teaching and research.
- **Symptoms of crisis:** high psychosocial stress, collapse of trust, low morale, feelings of unfairness, and reputational damage to ANU as Australia's national university.

A renewed emphasis on fairness, and integrity is the foundation for rebuilding legitimacy of our current leadership. The ANU community wants and needs:

- **Leaders to be chosen for their ability** to act with integrity, show stewardship, and demonstrate commitment to the values of the ANU national mission.
- **Decision making** that is informed by appropriate ANU expertise and shaped with community voice.
- **Rules and processes** that guarantee transparency, procedural fairness, and efficiency, to restore trust.
- **Accountability at every level:** this means rules that are well designed, shared openly across the ANU, and applied consistently to everyone.
- **Leaders to invite true collegial participation in change processes** at ANU. This includes centring principles of inclusion and respect so there can be safe and genuine dialogue.
- **Genuine effort by leaders to foster an inclusive culture**, including upholding values of academic freedom and diverse representation in decision making.

These findings mirror sector-wide concerns but also highlight specific weaknesses in ANU's governance arrangements under the *Australian National University Act 1991 (Cth)* (ANU Act) and our internal mechanisms of governance.

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.

A Pathway for Reforming Governance at ANU

We are delighted to report the community has generated hundreds of genuine and credible reform recommendations. The innovative design of this project means that our reform recommendations, outlined below, are drawn directly from the community and hold a level of internal legitimacy.

We recommend the following immediate actions to 'reset' and start rebuilding trust:

1. **Council should direct Finance to produce and publish a current budget breakdown**, to the level of Schools and Centres/Departments, with disaggregated information on revenue and expenses, including income from teaching, research, and grants;
2. **Commence senior leadership listening tours**: Senior University Leaders, including council members, should replicate our 'kitchen table conversation' method to meet with different parts of the university, in-person and with the agenda set by the community, to listen to student and staff views on governance issues. This method allows leadership to genuinely take the voices of the ANU community into account in their decision making. We see this approach as a useful method for, for example, appointed Council members to familiarise themselves with the ANU community.
3. **Council must revise and publish selection criteria for University Executive positions** including the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellors, and Deputy Vice-Chancellors to include clear thresholds, standards, key performance indicators, and alignment with community values outlined in this document.
4. **Council meetings should immediately be made fully accessible to the community**. This could be facilitated by livestreaming and/or recording of meetings. If Council wants to discuss confidential items away from public view, this must be agreed to by a two-thirds majority of Council members, and written justification must be published in the minutes.
5. **Academic Board should regularly review and assess the decisions of senior executives and Council**, specifically the effects of these decisions on research, teaching, and the strategic goals of the university. The Council should include this regular report as a standing, non-confidential item and publish it on their website.

We recommend the following internal reforms are enacted as soon as possible. These reforms do not require external legislative reform and can largely be implemented as acts of Council.

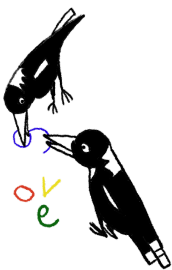
1. **Academic Board Charter Reform:** Council reforms the Charter of Academic Board as per [Appendix B](#) to immediately improve its capacity to serve as a conduit of information to Council, including assessments of the impact of Council decisions on quality of education and research and capacity to achieve the goals of the ANU Strategic Plan.
2. **Council Charter, ANU Governance Statute 2024, and Standing Orders Reform:** Council reforms the ANU Council Charter, Standing Orders, and the ANU (Governance) Statute 2024 as per [Appendix C](#) to make immediate improvements to information flows and Council processes.
3. **Reform Senior Leadership Selection and Remuneration:** Council reviews and publishes policy and procedures for senior leadership appointments to align leadership selection and remuneration with community expectations.
4. **Establish an internal audit and review office:** Council establishes an independent audit and review office that reports directly to Council and provides up-to-date and independent information in order to enable Council to perform its function.
5. **Additional community-recommended governance reforms:** Council considers the 17 recommendations put forward under [Appendix D](#), as reforms that fall within their remit and which would address specific governance failures.

While implementing these actions, Council should commit to pursuing legislative reform of the ANU Act through a co-design process with the community. Legislative reform is the only way to permanently uplift the quality of ANU governance and might provide a model for other universities to follow. The co-design process should focus on:

1. External legislative reform of *selection processes for our university leadership*;
2. *Amendments to the composition and responsibilities of Council*, including the nominations committee;
3. The *empowerment via legislation of Academic Board and transformation into a University Senate, or the establishment of a new University Senate* body to ensure open and meaningful dialogue between Council, the executive, staff, and students and to embed accountability into governance practice.
4. This dialogue would include a *commitment to a process led by First Nations* staff, students and community to determine in what ways their voice can be integrated into ANU governance and ANU's mission statement. Council must allow time and resources that are required for this essential work to occur.

Sincere engagement with the suggestions in this document is an opportunity for leaders to reset the relationship with the ANU community. In the full report below are many ideas and suggestions to improve and enhance our governing bodies, risk management, and compliance mechanisms.

By taking up the challenges in this document ANU leadership can ensure governance aligns with community expectations of accountability, transparency, integrity, and prioritisation of our national mission. Implementing community based reform at ANU can also inform reform of the higher education sector more generally, consistent with our national mission.



Introduction

Focusing on Solutions: The ANU Governance Project

The reputational and institutional risk entailed in failing to effectively address the current state of governance at the ANU is significant. This draft report summarises what we heard from the ANU community and their recommendations for the path to improve and uplift governance at the ANU. It is published in order to invite feedback from the community ahead of the release of our final report.

At the Australian National University, we have a unique mission to safeguard and produce knowledge and capabilities in areas of national importance to Australia and to serve as a national public policy resource to address the major issues of our time. We are well-positioned to demonstrate how strong academic governance can enhance institutional effectiveness, scholarly excellence, and public confidence.

As a group of staff passionate about the future of our national university, the ANU Governance Project has established a collaborative process to develop evidence-based governance reform proposals for the ANU. Our aim is to produce comprehensive, credible reform proposals to uplift internal ANU governance and inform amendments to the *Australian National University Act 1991* (Cth) 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.

Unique to our project is our engagement with the ANU community - current and former staff, students, alumni, and broader stakeholders - as collaborators in governance reform. As a result, the recommendations for reform forwarded through this project are likely to have internal legitimacy and offer an opportunity to reset the relationship with staff and students and rebuild a culture of trust.

The Project launched with a public survey on 5 August 2025. The number of responses we garnered in such a short period of time demonstrated an enormous appetite in the community to contribute constructively to solutions. By the time the survey closed on 23 August more than 590 staff, students, alumni, and other stakeholders had submitted feedback.

Simultaneously, a further 75 staff and students participated in 'kitchen table conversations' (one-hour small group discussions).

This body of evidence directly informed a workshop in early September where approximately 40 representatives from across the university community gathered to build and endorse specific recommendations arising from the feedback. Representatives were drawn from academic staff, professional staff, graduate and

undergraduate students, and fixed-term and sessional staff. The workshop was intended to bring views reflecting the diversity of our institution, with all Colleges represented and members attending from Central service portfolios and senior leadership circles.

We invite the ANU community to offer feedback on this draft report over the next 48 hours (by midnight on Wednesday 10 September).

Our timelines are limited due to the impending submission deadline we have obtained from the Senate Inquiry into Quality of Governance in Higher Education Providers. On Friday 12 September, we intend to submit our final report to the Senate Inquiry.

The report is separated into four sections:

- **In Section One**, we situate ANU's governance experience within the context of Australia's higher education sector.
- **In Section Two**, we summarise the experiences of current ANU governance as shared with us through the project survey and kitchen table conversations. These experiences evidence the gap between the values that should be enshrined in our governance processes, and the experiences of ANU staff and students on the ground.
- **In Section Three**, we outline the values of good university governance that the community expects to see at the ANU. This analysis draws on the public survey, kitchen table conversations, and the governance workshop.
- **In Section Four**, we offer the community generated solutions for better aligning ANU governance with the expectations of people who work and study at ANU. These are separated into three categories: urgent first steps; internal reforms; and legislative reforms.

We offer this report to leaders as an opportunity to reset the relationship between Council and the ANU community. The solutions in here are aimed at improving and enhancing our governing bodies, risk management, and compliance mechanisms. If taken up, these suggestions will help ensure ANU governance aligns with community expectations of accountability, transparency, integrity, and prioritisation of our national mission.

We look forward to receiving your feedback.



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

Universities are vital to Australia's future, yet we face a crisis of confidence in higher education governance that threatens institutional effectiveness and public confidence. Across Australia, international rankings are falling, funding is constrained, and reputational harm is significant.

Universities foster national intellectual growth, lead scientific and evidence-based public education, and underpin Australia's sovereign capacity for research and innovation. As our societies become increasingly disrupted by global and algorithmic technologies (Alnemr 2025) our universities need to be restored to prosperity and protected. Other advanced economies are rapidly escalating investments in research and development and Australia risks being outcompeted (Australian Government 2024). Yet higher education governance continues to incentivise perverse outcomes, such as cost-cutting over fulfillment of our national mission.

At the Australian National University (ANU), we have a unique mandate to maintain distinctive concentrations of excellence in research and education in areas of national importance to Australia. However, *there is no effective oversight mechanism, internally, or externally, holding the ANU accountable for maintaining these concentrations in areas of national significance*. We now face a crisis of governance at the ANU and significant reputational damage to our national university.

The problems are systemic and complex and cannot be solved without effective engagement with the university community. Our problems are the problems of the whole sector.

Limited voice of the community in decision-making

Like many other universities, ANU has a council which is dominated by externally appointed members. The prioritisation of corporate over specialist higher education expertise is enshrined in the governance legislation requirements for most higher education institutions across Australia. This includes the *Australian National University Act 1991* (Cth), which requires that the ANU Council be comprised of 15 members, of which 2 are the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, a further 7 are appointed by a committee appointed and led by the Chancellor, and only 6 may be drawn from current staff or students. There is no requirement that other members have experience in the higher education sector.¹

¹ Although there is a Council skills matrix requiring at least one appointed member have experience in the higher education sector at another institution, in practice this role has been unfilled at ANU since the resignation of Sarah Pearson.

Effectively, this legislates a minority voice for academic and higher education expertise in university governance. At ANU, a consistent failure to listen to the community has resulted in *insufficient internal accountability*. Staff and students have limited representation and impact on key decision-making bodies at the ANU and are not in practice able to provide critical input into executive decision-making. Corporate expertise on ANU Council and among Executive managers is useful, but must be appropriately balanced with higher education and academic expertise to ensure internal oversight of the ability of the ANU to continue to meet its national mission.

For example, Academic Board is tasked with maintaining the highest standards in teaching, scholarship and research and with ensuring that TEQSA threshold standards are met. However, Academic Board is not included in providing oversight on the impact of decisions on the ANU's academic mission during change management, budget strategies, or other transformational processes. While the Chair of Academic Board has an ex-officio, non-voting position on Council, they are typically present to answer questions rather than actively participate in Council processes other than an annual report.

Limited access to relevant or high quality information

Information at the ANU flows downwards. By contrast, pathways for upward flow of relevant information about the impact of high-level decisions on quality of teaching, research, and other university activities are limited or ineffective.

For example, ANU Council is not required to publish detailed meeting minutes. There are insufficient processes for connecting council members with academic and professional staff in transparent forums. *Council's ability to offer robust oversight may be degraded without access to regular, high quality information about the impact of their decisions.* ANU Council may also lack independent sources of information beyond that provided to them by the Vice-Chancellor and Chancellor, bringing into question their capacity to appropriately and meaningfully undertake their legislated oversight role.

Members of Academic Board and Council are flooded with hundreds of pages a week or so ahead of meetings. We question if anyone has the capacity to read and absorb this much information, particularly since it is often aggregated and extremely high-level. These documents are reported to lack detail about key processes and prior decisions taken before bringing the material to Council.

Staff and students have expressed significant frustration about the lack of transparency around executive decision-making, particularly in relation to change management and resourcing. The limited transparency of ANU's budget sits in stark contrast to best-practice at overseas public universities. For instance, at some institutions in the United States there is regular reporting of detailed financial information; livestreaming of meetings of governing bodies is common.

Improving the quality of information flowing to ANU's governing bodies will be a crucial step to improve quality of governance. Rebuilding trust with the ANU community (staff, students, and stakeholders) must entail increasing accessibility of disaggregated financial information. Council, in particular, should have visibility of resource allocation or staffing decisions across Colleges or Portfolios, in order to meaningfully assess and approve proposed annual budgets for the university and conduct oversight of the financial state of the university.

Rapid growth in executive remuneration

Vice-Chancellor salaries at Go8 universities reached nearly \$1.3 million in 2023 and are the highest in the world. In recent years, high remuneration has attracted growing public criticism at a time when student debts are rising rapidly. Student satisfaction is often disconnected from key performance indicators for VCs and other senior leaders, as are pay determination processes (Thrower 2025). Remuneration is out of step with community and public expectations.

The total remuneration for ANU's Vice-Chancellor was even higher than the G08 average at \$1.46 million in 2024. We note Vice-Chancellor Genevieve Bell has committed to reducing her salary by 10% as of October 2024 (ANU 2024), but the pay gap between the VC and most members of the ANU community remains huge.

Executive management and external consultants

Like many universities, ANU has seen a proliferation of non-academic executive management roles whilst core teaching and research academic positions remain precarious. While increased government regulation has required universities to undertake additional tasks, there are growing calls for a re-examination of the balance between the resource allocation between front-line services and back-office operations. The rapid growth in senior executive positions is also a growing source of criticism at a time when universities are increasingly drawing on the paid services of consultants.

Australian Universities spent over \$734 million on external consultants in 2023, often without transparent procurement processes and overlooking the world-class expertise of their own staff (NTEU 2024). There is growing evidence that higher education consultancy firms have made a business out of offering one-size-fits-all advice for university restructuring, contrary to the importance of maintaining a diverse higher education system. The ANU has sustained significant reputational damage in 2025 due to allegations it misled the Senate about the value of consultant contracts (Pocock 2025).

Systematic employment practice failures

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” (Guardian 2023).

In July 2024, the ANU admitted to underpaying over 2,000 staff by approximately \$2 million due to casual timesheet processing errors (Gore 2024). Extensive *reliance on insecure employment* further creates workforce instability and limits staff capacity to participate meaningfully in governance.

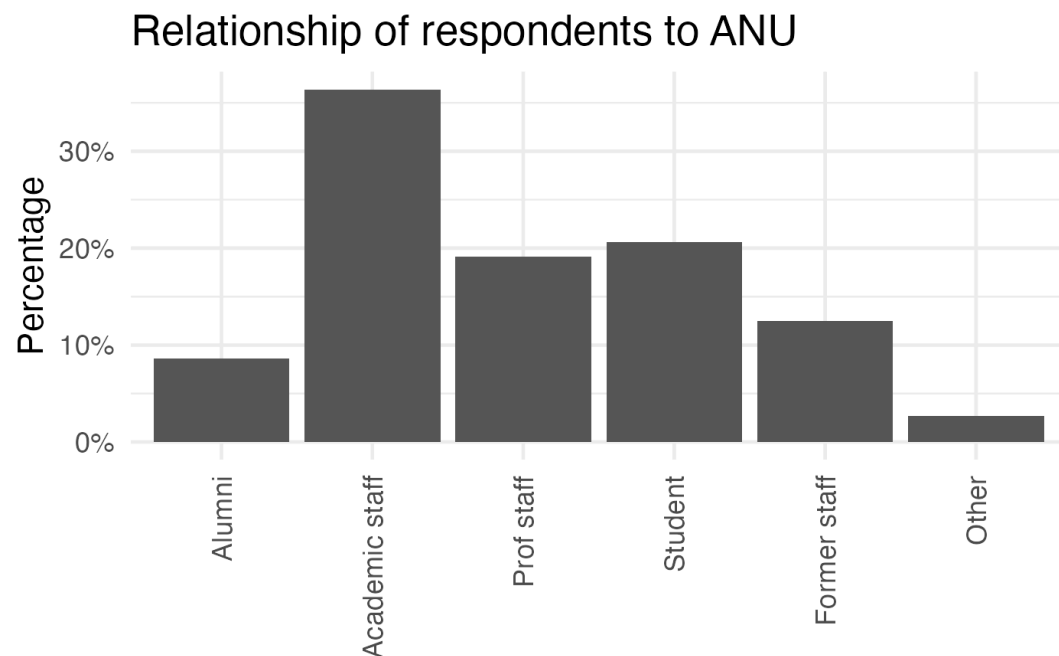
These issues have led to a significant breakdown in the legitimacy of governance at the ANU. Resolving them will take more than simply amending internal policies; the community must feel that their voices are being effectively heard and that they have a say in governance reform.

Bringing the Community Voice in: Overview of Data

Over 600 members of the ANU community have participated in this project. Most did so through our public survey, for which we collected quantitative as well as qualitative data. Qualitative data was drawn from the survey, kitchen table conversations, direct emailed feedback, and the project workshop.

The figure below lays out the relationship of survey respondents to the ANU.

Figure 1: Relationship of survey respondents to the ANU



Source: ANU governance project survey, August 2025

The ANU Governance Project Survey was in the field from 5 to 23 August 2025. The survey was completed by 590 members of the ANU community. Current ANU academic staff were the largest cohort (36.3%), followed by current ANU students (20.7%), current ANU professional staff (19.2%), former ANU staff (12.5%), ANU Alumni (8.6%) and other members of the ANU community, such as parents, donors or prospective students (2.7%).

ANU academic and professional staff and graduate and undergraduate students were also invited to attend kitchen table conversations and the project workshop.

The sections that follow outline what the community has shared with us regarding their experiences of current ANU governance, their perspectives on the values of good governance they would like to see practiced at ANU, and their ideas for how governance should be reformed to ensure ANU is a model for good governance in the higher education sector.



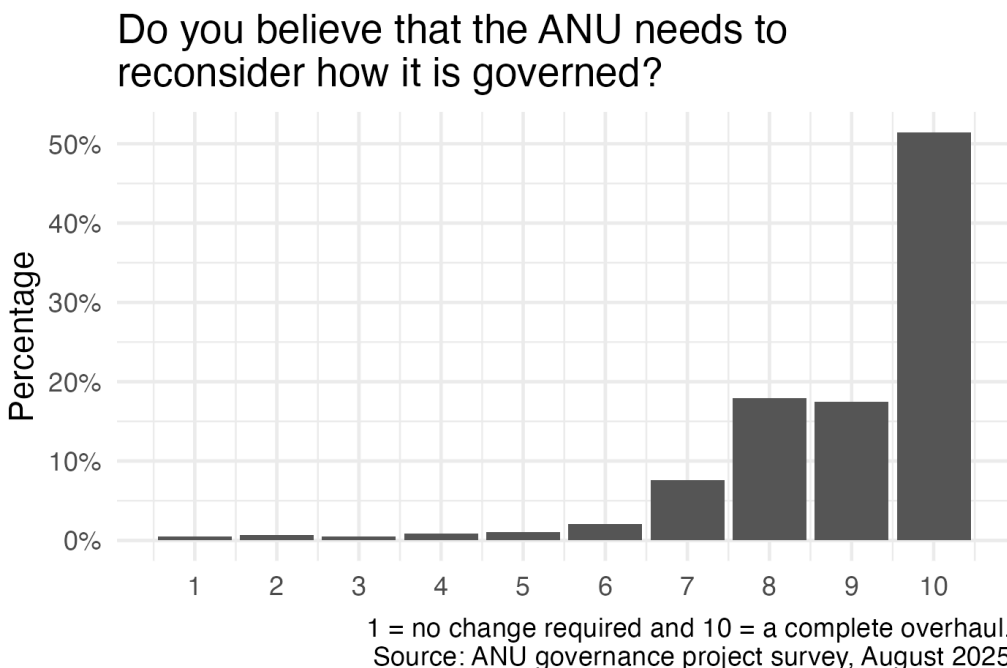
Section Two: Staff and Student Experiences of ANU Governance

This section outlines the governance problems most frequently identified by participants in the ANU Governance Project. Drawing on survey responses and kitchen table conversations, we use participants' own words to illustrate their concerns. Staff and students described structural problems: executive power without checks, secrecy in decision-making, weak accountability, tokenistic consultation, and incoherent strategy.

These problems reflect people's lived experience of governance, shaped by both recent developments and long-standing practices. While presented separately, many of these issues are interconnected, with failures at the top cascading into cultural, operational, and reputational damage. Taken together, they provide a clear picture of what participants believe must be fixed to restore trust and ensure ANU's future as a national university with a national mission.

The data is both critical and constructive. Staff and students did not only describe failures, they also pointed to the values they keep alive in their work and cooperation. These values are not abstract ideals but grounded practices of integrity, collegiality, accountability, and respect. These rich responses show what is needed to rebuild trust, and realign governance with ANU's public mission and scholarly purpose.

Figure 2: Perceptions of ANU governance



Over 96% percent of respondents agreed that they believed the ANU needed to reconsider how it is governed. More than 50% of respondents stated that they believed the ANU's governance required 'a complete overhaul'.

Figure 3: Satisfaction with current practices

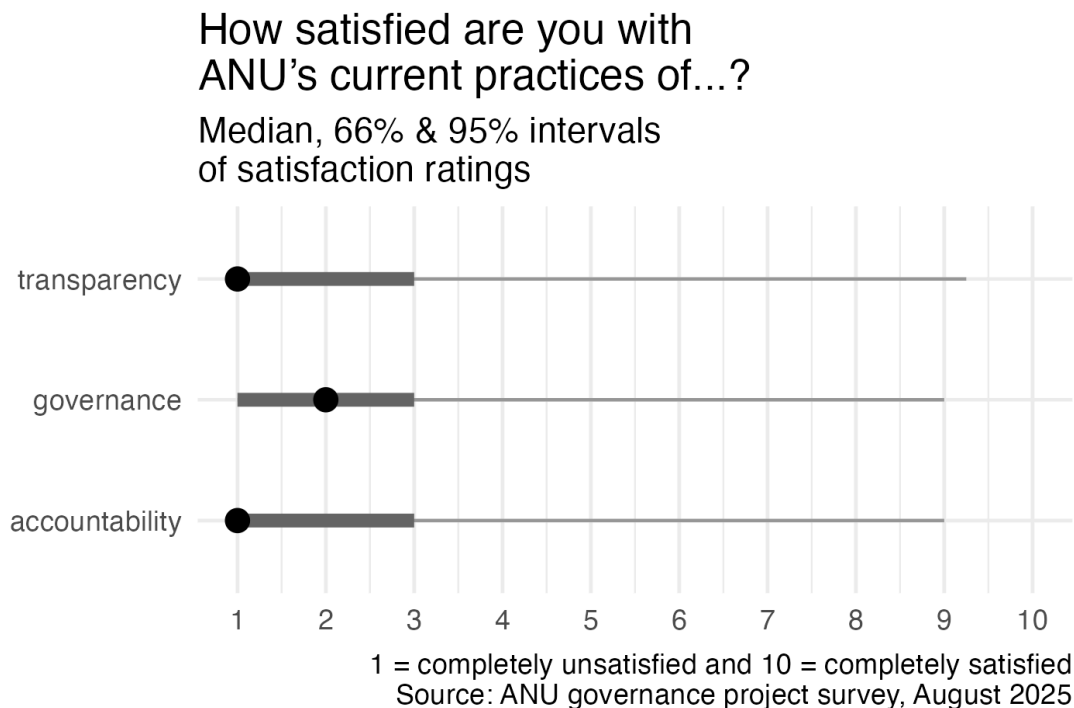


Figure 3 reveals how overwhelmingly dissatisfied the ANU community is with both practices of transparency and accountability. Views on overall governance are only marginally better.

1. Executive power problems: Recruitment, remuneration, powers, incentives

Participants described ANU governance as dominated by opaque appointments and networks of privilege rather than transparent, community-trusted processes. Leaders were often seen as lacking higher education experience, chosen instead from a class of corporate managers who move from institution to institution and may have limited investment in the future of ANU. Many spoke of nepotism; some of schools being run as personal fiefdoms. Executive pay was viewed as excessive while staff workloads increased. Overall, executive authority was seen as concentrated but lacking legitimacy.

Staff pointed instead to values such as integrity, stewardship, and commitment to the national mission as the foundation for reform (see Values section).

Poor selection of leaders was a central concern. Leadership appointments were widely seen as driven by personal networks and 'captain's picks', or external recruitment

priorities, rather than transparent, consultative processes. This was said to produce a culture marked by privilege and lack of accountability. *'Patronage, privilege and personal connections are everything at ANU. Not just at the upper echelons, but among the middle-management types.'* There are limited mechanisms for involving the ANU community in selecting or endorsing roles like the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, which reduces perceived legitimacy and community buy-in.

Respondents stressed that staff, students, and alumni deserve a role in selecting leaders: *'All members of the council should be elected ... Having minister-appointed council members in the majority is undemocratic!!'*

Lack of (the right) leadership experience compounded these problems. Participants saw a mismatch between the corporate skillsets sought in senior roles and the higher education experience required to steward a university. *'The skillset that they're looking for are corporate management skillsets, not the knowledge and commitment to higher education that they really need.'* As one participant put it, *'You have too many leaders, it is not clear who does what.'* Others called for leaders who celebrate academic work: *'The University needs a Chancellor who is genuinely interested in the work that academics do ... A lighter touch might make everything work better. And morale would be higher.'*

Misuse of power and influence was another theme. Participants described governance at ANU as distorted by entrenched patterns of nepotism, favouritism, and the dominance of "big personalities." Respondents described a culture where outcomes depended on *'the personality and agenda or cultural ideas of leaders'*, creating environments of entitlement and fear. *'Nepotism and cronyism is endemic'* and *'ANU is run like the mafia not an organisation of higher learning.'* Staff noted that some school directors treated their areas as *'family businesses'*, rewarding loyalty and sidelining critics.

Misaligned priorities and incentives deepened frustrations. Executive pay was described as *'excessive ... while those who carry out the mission suffer huge workload issues and job losses.'* Academic motivations like collegiality, scholarly reputation, and long-term commitment were seen as disregarded. For many, the incentive structures revealed a leadership culture hoarding power *'under the guise of fixing things'*.

These concerns show why reforms to recruitment, remuneration, and incentives cannot be left to internal discretion alone. They demand clearer rules, both within ANU's own governance practices and in the statutory framework that defines Council's powers.

2. Information problems: Outsourcing, secrecy, and opaque communication

Reliance on external consultants was widely regarded as wasteful and corrosive, with decisions shaped by frameworks disconnected from academic values. Council and

executive processes were described as secretive, with key deliberations hidden and important financial data withheld. Staff noted that communication often amounted to empty jargon, while students reported learning about critical changes through informal channels rather than official communication.

Staff pointed instead to values such as transparency, procedural fairness, and efficiency as essential to restoring confidence (see Values section).

Reliance on external advice was one of the most frequently raised concerns. Participants described consultants as expensive, disconnected from ANU's culture, and prone to shaping decisions around generic frameworks rather than the university's needs. Consultants without a strong understanding of the University's operating environment or culture were seen to wield excessive influence over major decisions, often at significant cost. This reliance was described as both wasteful and undermining internal expertise. As one respondent put it: *'Paying external consultants a lot of money to learn something you already know or do emotional work (firing) because you just don't want to is an egregious waste of money.'* Others questioned motives outright: *'Consultants are obviously trying to profit themselves when they plan for the ANU.'* Staff argued that this reliance displaced internal expertise and morale: *'Strategic decisions often appear disconnected from academic values and collegial processes, undermining trust and morale across the university community.'*

Lack of transparency was described as endemic. Council and senior executive processes were seen as secretive, with key deliberations closed and data withheld. One participant asked bluntly: *'The secrecy that cloaks ANU Council is particularly frustrating and harmful ... Why are the minutes and discussions so bare of meaningful detail?'* Another recalled being denied access to budget information: *'We had to push significantly to ask for financial deficit numbers ... when we requested the finance reports ... we were told they were too long and we wouldn't want to look at them.'* Staff described over-communication with no substance and questionable confidentiality claims: *'Treating a university as a corporation and hiding decision-making behind questionable confidentiality claims is destroying our once great reputation.'*

Poor communication compounded the frustration. Staff said they often learned about decisions from newspapers rather than internal channels: *'Staff shouldn't be learning about how our university works by reading the AFR.'* Many described official updates as meaningless: *'All we get is corporate waffle that carries no actual information.'* Communications were characterised as evasive and managerial: *'ANU leadership communications ... are couched in management-speak and impossible to decipher ... This causes frustration and distrust.'* Students also felt sidelined: *'As a student I have received next to nothing about current change processes even though changes directly affect students ... The day before comments were due on CASS change proposal ... I got the link off reddit.'*

Participants' frustrations underline the need for immediate changes to how information flows through ANU. Some fixes, like publishing financial data and decision rationales, can be made now. Others, such as statutory transparency obligations for Council and procurement, will require legislative and policy change.

3. Accountability problems: Mistakes, no consequences, and inconsistencies

Executives were perceived as insulated from consequences, while accountability pressures fell heavily on lower-level staff. Governance rules were described as existing on paper only, inconsistently applied, and overlaid by cultures of patronage. Many pointed to a lack of systems for managing conflicts of interest and little visible oversight of senior leaders. Integrity was seen as missing in practice, with rules applied selectively rather than consistently. *It was unclear to the community to whom the Council, the Chancellor, and other senior executives of the university answer in practice.*

Staff pointed instead to values of accountability and integrity, insisting these must be lived out consistently at every level of governance (see Values section).

Lack of accountability at the senior levels of the University was one of the strongest themes. Staff felt that executives were insulated from consequences while the costs of mistakes were borne by others. Leadership was perceived as insulated from consequences, with poor decisions and even misconduct going unaddressed, while accountability mechanisms could be turned against staff lower down the hierarchy. *'We are cutting all these jobs because of mismanagement at an executive level. The people who are losing their jobs are not the ones who made any mistakes.'* Another respondent described the imbalance sharply: *'All the liability/accountability falls on the little guys, NOT the people getting paid more than \$500k a year to deal with it.'*

Rules inconsistently applied reinforced this perception. Many described governance frameworks as existing only on paper, ignored or overridden when inconvenient. *'Formal governance structures as published do not reflect the informal/actual practices. A master/serv culture overlays the formal structure.'* Some staff admitted they could not tell *'if the frameworks are broken, or if they are just being ignored or abused.'* Conflicts of interest were a recurring example: *'There seems to be almost no system for managing conflicts of interest.'*

The result was a culture where integrity was seen as missing in practice. *'It is often unclear what level of oversight actually exists for senior leaders, and whether the rules apply to them at all.'*

The perception that rules apply only on paper makes accountability reform unavoidable. Internally, ANU must embed stronger oversight and conflict-of-interest systems. Externally, Council's duties and reporting obligations will need to be strengthened in law to prevent accountability being treated as performative.

4. Dialogue problems: Imposed market imperatives, poor consultation, presentation, high stress

Staff and students described governance as drifting toward poorly considered corporate-esque logics that undermined education quality and eroded the academic ethos. Consultation processes were perceived as tokenistic and designed to rubber-stamp decisions. Some reported being discouraged or penalised for raising critical feedback, contributing to an unsafe environment. Representation on governing bodies was seen as symbolic, with little real influence, and precarious staff often excluded entirely.

Staff pointed instead to values of collegial participation, inclusion, and respect as the basis for open, safe, and meaningful dialogue (see Values section).

Values misalignment was a recurring concern. Participants described a deep cultural divide between the corporate style of governance increasingly adopted at ANU and the academic values of scholarship, teaching, and service to the public good. They argued that managerial priorities (participants cited profit, rankings, and consultancy frameworks in particular) were displacing the collegial and scholarly ethos expected of a national university. The Renew ANU restructure left staff and students unclear about the basis of executive future planning: *'The only outcome I have found has been a reduction in the quality of education I am paying thousands of dollars for, and the loss of great professors and tutors.'* Others reflected that leadership appeared more focused on reputation management than on supporting teaching and research.

Poor consultation compounded this sense of alienation. Participants described processes that were rushed, tokenistic, or used to rubber-stamp decisions already made. *'The idea that we should be part of the conversation before decisions are made ... seems never to have occurred to those in authority.'* Another said plainly: *'The consultation for feedback before major decisions is performative at best.'* Some even reported retaliation for raising concerns: *'Each time I submitted constructive criticism ... I was warned my comments are inappropriate.'*

Lack of psychosocial safety was described as a pervasive issue. Staff spoke of an atmosphere of fear, insecurity, and unchecked bullying. Many described senior leaders as lacking empathy for the human impacts of change, with announcements often delivered in ways that seemed to worsen rather than ease distress (for example, via online forums with no opportunity for questions). *'People are being treated appallingly ... Psychosocial harms are being caused every single day and no one seems to be able to prevent it.'* A casual staff member compared their experience: *'I used to work at a fast*

food restaurant and was included in staff meetings, so to not be included in meetings at the ANU felt very demeaning. The overall atmosphere was characterised by participants as a kind of “academic hunger games,” where insecurity and competition undermined wellbeing and collegiality.

Representation was often experienced as tokenistic or symbolic. Staff and students in formal governance roles felt sidelined. *‘If we have staff and students on the council they need to have the ability to meaningfully contribute.’* Others stressed that representation needs to extend to sessional and fixed-term staff, not just continuing employees.

The alienation staff and students describe and the breakdown of governance legitimacy points to reforms that can't be delayed: safe and inclusive consultation processes, participatory forums, and genuine influence for staff and students. Over the longer term, governance structures like Academic Board or a Senate will need new statutory powers to guarantee this voice.

5. Decision-making problems: No vision, unclear processes and recurring risks

Decision-making was characterised as reactive, incoherent, and lacking long-term strategy. Participants described changes implemented too quickly, driven by short-term political or managerial agendas. Governance was viewed as overly bureaucratic yet ineffective, with rules that created burdens without accountability. Operational failures, including delays in contract approvals and reliance on external contractors, were seen as creating risks. Students reported overcrowded classes and declining quality in teaching and learning. Concerns about strategy, process, and operational failure go to the heart of ANU's capacity to function as a national university.

Staff pointed instead to values of academic freedom and representation to ensure decisions are informed by expertise and shaped with community voice (see Values section).

No clear strategy was one of the strongest complaints. Staff and students described governance as reactive, short-term, and lacking vision. *‘It's disappointing watching the current leadership dismantle the ANU with no strategy or plan for the pathway forward.’* Others expressed *‘little-to-no confidence in the current leadership team's ability ... it feels like they have not thought things through.’*

Poor decision making was repeatedly noted. Participants said decisions were often made too quickly, without evidence or consultation, and shaped by political or personal agendas. *‘The current leadership ... have made too many changes too quickly and are not about saving money as opposed to cleaning house.’* A student described the impact: *‘Fees were raised with no reasoning, while sexual assault rates went unaddressed.’* Many noted that cost-cutting in particular was rushed, poorly justified, and targeted at

successful programs, raising doubts about whether decisions were being made in the best interests of the University. Mistakes, once made, were rarely acknowledged or repaired, reinforcing perceptions of weak governance.

Too many and poorly designed rules and processes were also criticised. Bureaucracy was described as both excessive and ineffective: *'ANU is hopelessly bureaucratic and swamped by impenetrable regulations, yet there appears to be little actual accountability for failing to adhere to the regulations.'* Rules were said to prioritise compliance and self-protection over supporting teaching and research, with overly cautious or performative procedures wasting time and resources. At the same time, participants noted that these rules could be arbitrarily overridden by senior leaders, creating frustration and further undermining confidence in the system.

Recurring systems and operations failures reinforced perceptions of dysfunction. Staff noted basic services and approvals breaking down: *'The delay in getting contracts approved ... is damaging our capacity to produce research projects.'* Others pointed to reliance on contractors and inadequate oversight: *'We are more reliant on contractors and subcontractors than ever before.'* Basic functions such as course scheduling and risk management were reported as error-prone, with negative impacts on both staff and students. Workarounds introduced to resolve problems frequently generated new complications, and participants felt the University failed to learn from past errors, allowing the same issues to reappear over time.

Poor performance was the visible outcome of these failures. Participants described ANU's governance performance as consistently weak, with negative impacts evident across research, teaching, and administration. They viewed financial management as poorly executed, with resources misallocated so that some areas flourished while others were left to wither. Inefficient systems, such as delays in contract approvals, were said to damage research capacity and embarrass staff in front of international partners. In the classroom, staff shortages and larger class sizes were reported as reducing educational quality and undermining the student experience. Students described overcrowded tutorials: *'We used to have 25 students in tutorials, now we have 35 ... If everyone attends, class has to be cancelled.'* Staff compared ANU unfavourably to peers: *'I have experience with a number of universities and ANU is significantly worse at governance than the already poor performance I have seen elsewhere.'*

Some improvements, like service standards and evidence-based decision logs, can be introduced quickly. But deeper change will require rebalancing powers between Council, Academic Board, and possibly new representative bodies to secure academic freedom and representation in law.

6. Symptoms of the broader institutional crisis

The cumulative effect of these problems was described as a collapse of trust in leadership. Psychosocial stress was high and morale across staff and students was seen as at historic lows, with widespread disillusionment and feelings of powerlessness. Many saw the system as deeply unfair, with responsibility for mismanagement falling on those least able to absorb the costs. The university's reputation was perceived as damaged, with some alumni withdrawing support until major reforms occur.

Staff pointed instead to values of trust, fairness, and integrity as the foundation for any repair (see Values section).

A crisis of trust was the phrase many used to describe the cumulative effect of executive dominance, secrecy, weak accountability, exclusion, and poor decision-making. Restructures, job insecurity, and governance failures were said to create an environment of stress, disillusionment, and exhaustion. *'There is now a complete lack of trust and good faith in the way the senior executive engages with staff (let alone students).'* Others echoed: *'I no longer have any trust in the governance and their decisions due to their lack of transparency and their continued lies.'*

Low morale and high psychosocial stress follows directly. Staff reported exhaustion and disillusionment: *'Morale is at an all-time low and all the things that once made ANU great have been eroded.'* One respondent summed up the climate: *'Low consultation, lots of favouritism, people who are not competent for roles are rewarded. I'm feeling disillusioned, voiceless and powerless.'*

Feelings of unfairness were pervasive. Many noted that those most responsible for mismanagement were insulated from consequences while others carried the costs. *'Why hardworking people have to pay for the financial mismanagement of the executive is disgusting.'* Another added: *'Senior managers remain unaffected, while many operational roles have been cut ... removing those who keep the day-to-day functions running risks undermining effectiveness.'*

Reputational damage was another widely shared concern. Participants stressed that ANU's governance problems are not only internal but also damaging the University's public standing. Poor decision making, financial mismanagement, and the wide media coverage of restructures were seen as eroding confidence among students, staff, alumni, donors, and research partners. Staff and alumni described shame and embarrassment: *'I'm absolutely disgusted by the current governance of ANU ... It's a disgrace that these craven careerists are decimating ANU.'* Others made personal commitments: *'I have donated to the ANU in the past but will not do so until there are serious changes to governance and transparency.'*

The collapse of trust and morale and the incidence of high psychosocial stress is the cumulative outcome of failures in power, transparency, accountability, dialogue, and decision-making. Repairing this crisis requires not only better internal ways of working, but also legislative and policy reforms that hardwire values of trust, fairness, and integrity into ANU's governance.

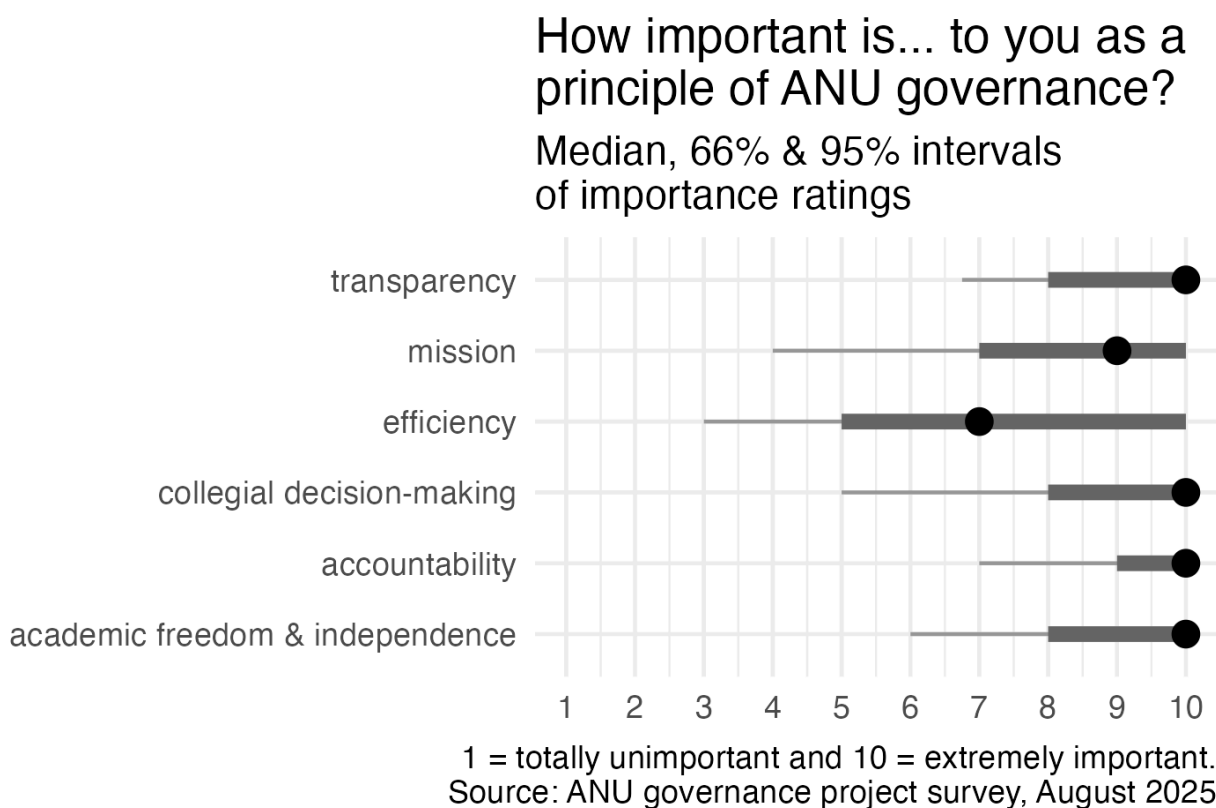


Section Three: Values held by the ANU community

The values reflect participants' experiences of governance at the University, informed by both recent developments and, for many, long-term affiliation with ANU. While each value has its own emphasis, they are deeply interconnected, collectively highlighting what participants believe is necessary to restore trust, strengthen integrity, and ensure that governance at ANU remains aligned with its public mission and scholarly purpose.

Honoring **First Nations sovereignty** and decolonising the university is central to any governance reform at the ANU, alongside the values outlined below. This is deep and critical work that must be self-determined by First Nations colleagues and community and given time and resourcing to reflect the importance of such a process. The ANU governance project is committed to supporting this essential work through advocating for this work to be implemented.

Figure 4: Importance of governance principles



The data reveals that the ANU community overwhelmingly values principles of accountability, transparency, collegial decision-making and academic freedom. ANU's adherence to the national mission closely follows. The ANU community values efficiency, but there is greater disagreement about its relative importance to other governance principles.

1. Executive power: Restoring the national mission, integrity, stewardship

The ANU community repeatedly emphasised ANU's unique role as Australia's national university, and that governance should be anchored in public purpose. **The national mission** was described as both obligation and privilege: to build national capability, foster equity and social mobility, support Indigenous leadership, and contribute to the global reputation of Australian scholarship. Decision-making at all levels should be guided by the founding mission to advance education and research excellence in service of the Australian public good. For many, this also means governance provides a clear vision and strategic direction so decisions align with mission and inspire confidence, unity, and long-term purpose.

The ANU community repeatedly emphasised ANU's unique role as Australia's national university, highlighting that governance should be anchored in the institution's public purpose.

Returning to the ANU's public purpose

'[The University] is not a business, it is a higher education institution that was importantly established with a mission that must be fulfilled.'

'Universities, unlike for-profit businesses, have important social roles... The gathering, development, and sharing of knowledge should always be a lodestar for governance.'

The national mission was described as both an obligation and a privilege: to build national capability, foster equity and social mobility, support Indigenous leadership, and contribute to the global reputation of Australian scholarship. Many respondents argued that decision-making at all levels of the university should be guided by its founding mission to advance education and research excellence in service of the Australian public good. For some, this also meant that governance should provide a clear vision and sense of strategic direction to ensure that decisions are not only aligned with national mission but also inspire confidence, unity, and long-term purpose.

At the same time, many expressed frustration that current governance has lost sight of this mission. Several noted a drift toward rankings, corporate-style restructuring, or short-term cost-cutting, which they felt detracted from ANU's distinctive purpose. Respondents stressed that governance should sustain disciplines and areas of national importance, such as Indigenous studies and human rights, even where these are not financially lucrative. Others felt that the absence of a unifying vision has left the university reactive rather than proactive, undermining its ability to embody its national responsibilities. For them, the principle of national mission means re-centring decisions

on the university's public role, ensuring that teaching and research continue to serve long-term societal needs rather than narrow financial or managerial priorities.

Serving the national mission for the long run

'Stewardship of public purpose: as a publicly funded national university, ANU has a responsibility to ensure that all decisions—academic, financial, or structural—advance the public interest, especially in areas such as health, equity, Indigenous leadership, and national capability.'

'Upmost preservation of educational facilities and student/research outcomes... ensure continuation of areas of national importance—e.g. not cutting human rights or Indigenous studies courses.'

Integrity was repeatedly emphasised as a cornerstone of good governance, described by respondents as the foundation upon which trust, credibility, and ethical leadership rest. While overlapping with procedural fairness, integrity refers to the ethical leadership and consistency of values in practice. Integrity was associated with acting in good faith, following established rules and procedures, and ensuring that governance practices are consistent with the values publicly espoused by the university. Respondents linked integrity to honesty, fairness, and merit-based decision making, and argued that leaders must embody these qualities if they are to represent and guide the academic community credibly. Several also connected integrity to the idea of an ethical culture, where leadership models openness, respect, and ethical behaviour at every level of the institution.

Leadership roles need to be embedded in ANU community

'Good governance is only possible where integrity is integral to all roles within an institution.'

'Integrity and ethical leadership, equity and inclusion... the current leadership appears increasingly disconnected from these principles in practice.'

At the same time, many expressed frustration that integrity is often lacking in current governance practices. Concerns were raised about conflicts of interest, nepotism, disregard for established policies, and the use of governance processes to legitimise predetermined outcomes. Some respondents pointed to examples where governance appeared to prioritise personal networks or self-interest over merit and fairness. Respondents argued that integrity in governance means not only adherence to ethical standards, but visible ethical leadership, where leaders demonstrate accountability, transparency, and respect in their everyday decisions. Without this, many warned, governance loses legitimacy and trust quickly breaks down.

Respectful and ethical leaders

'Respect and ethical behaviours; merit-based decision making instead of the usual nepotism...'

'Good governance combines skills-based governance roles with robust accountability to 'constituency'. When one or the other dominates, governance fails. Good governance is also fostering a culture of openness and robust discussion, not a culture of fear and dominance.'

Stewardship and sustainability were key responsibilities of good governance respondents raised, emphasising the need for long-term thinking, responsible management of resources, and commitment to the public good. Stewardship was framed as ensuring that ANU's financial, human, and physical resources are managed in ways that sustain the university's mission into the future. This included attention not only to fiscal responsibility but also to the stewardship of disciplines, knowledge areas, and educational programs that are of national and social importance, even when they are not immediately profitable. Sustainability was also interpreted broadly, encompassing social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Several highlighted the importance of aligning governance decisions with environmental sustainability and social responsibility, ensuring that ANU's role as a public institution is exercised with integrity and foresight.

Long term financial sustainability

Sustainability incorporates long-term thinking, responsible stewardship of resources, and resilience... considering holistic risks (not just short term financial outcomes).'

'ANU's choice to take a short-term fiscal-led strategy has undermined its value as an institution.'

At the same time, respondents expressed concerns about governance practices that prioritise short-term fixes or narrow financial imperatives at the expense of sustainability. Several pointed to restructures and funding cuts that they felt undermined academic capability and weakened the university's ability to meet its national mission. Others warned that governance structures can become too rigid, failing to adapt to change in ways that preserve the wellbeing of staff and students. For many, stewardship and sustainability were about balancing immediate operational needs with the university's enduring mission, ensuring that ANU remains resilient, values-driven, and capable of contributing to society over the long term.

Equitable resource sharing

'For long term business sustainability decisions should be made for the better of the uni as a business to deliver its mission. Not just for one college, portfolio or area. We shouldn't need to convince areas to share resources. They should want to collectively contribute to one goal and uni.'

'Ethical stewardship of resources, constructive participation across the University, and a commitment to environmental, social, and cultural

sustainability are also essential to maintaining ANU's role as a national and global leader in higher education.'

2. Information and transparency: Openness, fairness, efficiency

Transparency emerged as one of the most frequently cited principles of good governance. Respondents emphasised that effective governance requires open and honest communication, with decisions, rationales, and processes made visible to the university community. Closely connected to accountability, transparency highlights the visibility of decision-making as a precondition for trust and engagement. This was seen as essential for building trust, countering perceptions of secrecy or “gaslighting,” and ensuring that staff and students can meaningfully engage with governance structures. For many, it was not only about releasing information but about communicating it in ways that are clear, timely, and respectful, so that staff and students understand how and why decisions are made. Respondents also stressed that transparency includes a commitment to evidence-based, data-driven decision-making, with governance that is grounded in facts and open to scrutiny.

Open and honest communication

'Clear communications about processes behind decisions – instead of throwing it under a blanket 'for operational needs'.'

'Tough calls sometimes need to be made, but our leaders need to be prepared to be open & honest about what process was undertaken to arrive at that point. It might not always be popular but at least own it.'

Many highlighted frustrations with current levels of transparency. They pointed to decision-making processes that appear opaque, financial and budget information that is difficult to access, and consultation exercises that feel performative rather than genuine, with senior leaders avoiding the difficult questions. These frustrations contributed to feelings of alienation and mistrust, with many calling for greater openness about conflicts of interest, recruitment processes, and the reasoning behind major decisions. In contrast, some respondents pointed to examples where transparent communication in local areas had supported staff well-being and a sense of belonging. They called for governance processes that include open sharing of financial information, clear explanations of decision-making, disclosure of conflicts of interest, visible accountability for outcomes, and open reporting of the evidence on which decisions are based.

Evidence-based, data-driven decision-making

'Transparency, evidence-based decision making, and listening to the staff/union/people affected.'

'My College leadership has demonstrated ongoing and exceptional transparency and staff engagement both before and during Renew ANU. Our College executive meetings, newsletters, and regular town halls have been highly effective in supporting staff well-being and a sense of mission-focused belonging. It is sad this is not ANU-wide.'

'High levels of misinformation and lack of genuine consultation have made it difficult to have trust in any of the current ANU leadership team.'

Procedural fairness was identified by respondents as a critical value in governance, ensuring that decisions are made and applied in ways that are consistent, impartial, and transparent. Fair processes were seen as essential for protecting the rights and dignity of staff and students, reducing perceptions of arbitrariness, and fostering trust in governance structures. Respondents stressed that when procedures are applied fairly, individuals can accept even difficult decisions because they have confidence in the process by which they were reached.

Simplicity, impartiality, fairness

'We have so many procedures/policies and it is hard to be on top of them all. In some cases, these documents try to cover every single scenario resulting in a lack of clarity. Compliance to these procedures/policies is not followed up (and would be silly to attempt because there are so many) and so it renders governance challenging.'

'Governance processes must be applied equitably across the institution. Whether related to performance reviews, policy application, or funding allocations, consistency builds trust and reduces perceived arbitrariness.'

Concerns were raised that procedural fairness is often compromised at ANU, with policies applied inconsistently, consultation undertaken in a perfunctory way, or outcomes predetermined regardless of staff and student input. Some described a culture where governance processes are “watered down” or ignored, leaving staff uncertain about their rights and undermining morale. For many, procedural fairness was tied to accountability and respect: it required governance structures that treat people equitably, follow due process, and ensure that decision-making frameworks are clear, reliable, and adhered to across the institution.

Restoring trust

'High levels of misinformation and lack of genuine consultation have made it difficult to have trust...'

'In the absence of an external corruption body, we need to have some kind of mechanism for curbing corruption at the level of executive management. This

should extend to protection of whistleblowers and rules against hiring former associates, friends and relatives.'

'Transparency, evidence-based decision making, and listening to the staff/union/people affected.'

Efficiency was acknowledged by respondents as an important governance value, but one that requires careful definition and balance. At its best, efficiency was understood as ensuring that processes are clear, timely, and proportionate, enabling the university to function smoothly and use resources wisely in pursuit of its mission. Several respondents noted that good governance requires timely decision-making, streamlined procedures, and minimising unnecessary administrative burdens, so that staff and students can focus on teaching, research, and learning.

Efficiency as clear, timely, and effective processes

'Efficient governance is not always effective governance. Sometimes we need to move slowly to make sure we are doing the right thing, not just the expedient thing.'

'Efficiency has become such a loaded term. It is so often weaponised against staff who are overworked and set unreasonable goals. It is a very important principle if there is an agreement on what efficiency means.'

At the same time, many respondents expressed strong concern that efficiency is often invoked as a justification for cost-cutting, centralisation, or restructuring that undermines effectiveness and erodes trust. They stressed that efficient governance is not always effective governance, and that moving too quickly or with too few resources can damage quality and morale. Efficiency was therefore described as **a principle that must be held in balance** with other core governance values, particularly fairness, sustainability, and the national mission.

Getting the balance right

'Simplifying procedures and processes to enhance productivity. Central control is unresponsive to individual research and teaching requirements.'

'Rather than 'efficiency,' I think principles of equity and effectiveness better articulate what makes well-run institutions run well. Things should work well, not necessarily with the fewest amount of staff members.'

3. Accountability: Consequences and integrity put in practice

Respondents identified accountability as a cornerstone of good governance, describing it as both an internal obligation to staff and students and an external responsibility to

government and the wider public. Distinct from transparency, accountability emphasises not only openness or visibility, but the additional obligation to answer for actions and outcomes. At its core, accountability was seen as ensuring that those in positions of authority are answerable for their actions, decisions, and outcomes. It was associated with clear lines of responsibility, transparency in processes, and a culture of ethical leadership where individuals at all levels contribute actively to deliberation and oversight. Many highlighted that accountability is not just a matter of formal rules, but a principle that builds trust and legitimacy when leaders take responsibility, act with integrity, and model openness.

Accountability at all levels

'Need better accountability monitoring at all levels... not just 'accountability' employed as a tool by HR/leadership to keep staff from constructively challenging decisions and actions.'

'If university executives are going to be paid more than the Prime Minister, they should be at least as accountable.'

'In the Nixon report, it became clear that some supervisors were sleeping with their PhD students! This is unacceptable - we must have an accountable culture that prevents this type of abuse of power.'

However, many respondents expressed frustration that accountability at ANU is often applied unevenly or turned against staff rather than used to hold senior leadership to account. Concerns were raised about accountability being treated as a performative exercise or as a disciplinary tool, while those making major decisions were perceived as insulated from scrutiny. Many stressed that accountability must be substantive rather than performative: leaders should demonstrate this value in practice by reporting back on consultation outcomes, ensuring transparency in financial management, and showing that staff and student voices genuinely shape decisions. Many argued that without such practices accountability risks becoming merely a hollow slogan rather than a lived principle, undermining trust in governance and leaving staff and students feeling disempowered.

International and external accountability

'In terms of accountability, it is both external (vis-à-vis government, the nation and the region), and internal (vis-à-vis staff, students, ANU community).'

'Accountability is especially important in a large council like ANU's, where the passenger effect can occur where less experienced members can abdicate decision making or feel disempowered to contribute. Every member should take an active role in deliberations and decision-making, rather than relying on a small number of individuals to drive outcomes.'

4. Dialogue with staff and students: Participation, safety and inclusion

Collegial / Participatory decision-making was a recurrent focus. Almost all respondents argued that genuine participation in decision making should be the foundation of good governance at ANU. They called for processes that involve those most affected by decisions early and meaningfully, moving beyond symbolic consultation to practices of genuine listening and shared decision making across the university community. Broader participation in university decision making was described as vital for fostering collective ownership, strengthening collegiality, and reinforcing the idea of ANU as a community rather than a corporation. Respondents highlighted that collegial governance nurtures cooperation, mutual respect, and shared responsibility for the university's direction, as well as helping to ensure that decisions reflect the realities of teaching, research, and student life.

Fostering collegiality and collective ownership

'We need far more involvement of all parts of our academic community who understand what ANU is and does.'

'A principle like participatory decision making could lead to deliberative forums open to all members...'

'We need far more involvement of all parts of our academic community who understand what ANU is and does.'

At the same time, frustration was expressed at governance practices that present consultation as a "box-ticking exercise," where outcomes appear predetermined. Several responses pointed to town halls and surveys as examples of consultation that lacked genuine impact, feeding disillusionment and mistrust. There was strong concern that decisions are too often made by a small executive group or external consultants, with little accountability to the wider university. Many respondents stressed that participatory decision making should be embedded as a governance principle, ensuring that staff, students, and academic expertise shape strategic directions rather than being sidelined by managerial priorities. Without this collegiality and community-based governance, respondents feared that ANU risks eroding its sense of identity.

Academic freedom and independence is paramount. The ANU community highlighted the protection of academic freedom and independence as a non-negotiable principle of good governance. They described it as central to the university's identity and mission: enabling scholars and students to pursue knowledge, speak openly, and challenge prevailing ideas without fear of interference or retaliation. Academic freedom was linked not only to individual rights but also to the collective independence of the academic community, safeguarding research and teaching from undue influence by political, commercial, or managerial pressures.

Restore independence of the academic community

'Good governance should be guided by collegiality and respect for academic freedom.'

'University leaders can only be credible leaders if they have credibility as researchers and teachers.'

'I think principles of shared governance are incredibly important. I don't necessarily think academic staff need to make every decision or run every aspect of the university, but staff (academic and professional) should have a say in crafting the policies that impact us and in appointing the people who make those decisions.'

Many expressed concern that this principle is under strain, with governance practices prioritising rankings, financial imperatives, or corporate logics over the intellectual and educational purpose of the university. Several noted that academic independence requires recognition of the expertise of researchers and teachers as the foundation of credible decision making. Others stressed that governance must balance freedom with responsibility, ensuring that academic work is carried out with integrity, rigor, and respect for professional standards. At its heart, this principle was seen as essential for maintaining ANU's credibility, integrity, and role as a national leader in higher education and scholarly research.

The case for democracy

'Democratic processes of decision making that allow genuine involvement of those who have direct experience and those who are most impacted by decisions.'

'I'd like to see the university engage in genuine democratic conversation with staff and students and the broader community so we all get to shape the future of the place; I'd also like to see some form of community building to help everyone re-establish a sense of identity and belonging after Renew ANU has left us reeling and utterly disillusioned.'

'A principle like participatory decision making could lead to more innovative ways to conduct university business, like deliberative forums open to all members of the university community.'

Safety and respect were described as foundational to good governance, encompassing not only physical safety but also **psychological, cultural, and social wellbeing**.

Respondents emphasised that governance must ensure an environment where staff and students feel secure, valued, and able to speak up without fear of bullying, retaliation, or humiliation. Respect was articulated as a principle that should guide all

relationships across the university, from leadership behaviour to everyday interactions, and was linked closely to fairness, dignity, and recognition of people as more than “numbers” in a system. Many also connected this principle to kindness, compassion, and care for the wellbeing of staff and students, describing these as vital qualities of a respectful and safe university culture.

Respect creates psychological and cultural well-being

‘Psychological and cultural safety, reflective processes.’

‘I think that respect for people is an important principle of good governance. At present senior leadership doesn’t seem to have any qualms about bullying staff, or lying about them or humiliating them or stealing their wages. Staff are currently treated as just a means to an end, not as real humans with lives and loved ones.’

‘Respect, equitable access to leadership and to influence, non-hierarchical forms of leadership, ability to speak up and critique without fear of retaliation.’

Many respondents expressed concern that governance failures had eroded this principle, pointing to experiences of intimidation, disrespect, and a culture of fear. For them, safety and respect are not abstract values but everyday conditions that enable people to participate fully in academic life. Respondents noted that where wellbeing is overlooked, or where compassion and dignity are absent, governance creates environments of harm rather than support. Respectful governance was associated with ethical leadership, valuing the contributions of staff and students, and creating a culture where robust discussion and critique are possible without personal or professional risk. At its core, this principle was seen as essential for maintaining trust, morale, and the integrity of ANU as a scholarly community.

Care, everyday, is an essential condition for participation

‘Humaneness to begin with. Whatever governance that has to be undertaken, the decision makers have to understand that they are dealing with people, not numbers.’

‘Appreciation and proper care of staff, including casual staff, is necessary. Workers who do student-facing work should be valued much, much more. They ultimately provide the product that the students pay tuition for.’

‘More than anything, I want to see ANU rebuild a culture where people feel safe to contribute. Right now, many do not. That needs to be acknowledged before anything can change.’

Inclusion, diversity, equity and access were consistently highlighted as essential principles of good governance. IDEA focuses on the structural inclusion of diverse

groups and removing barriers to equitable participation. Respondents stressed that governance should actively foster diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences, and ensure equitable access to opportunities, leadership, and decision-making processes. This was described as not only a matter of fairness, but also as critical to the university's excellence and legitimacy: a diverse and inclusive governance system was seen as better able to reflect and serve the ANU community, as well as the broader Australian public.

Active fostering of diversity

'Equity and diversity are actively fostered. Good governance must involve a range of people.'

'Equity, diversity and inclusion should also be core to governance principles. The current ANU restructures have not taken into consideration or reported on impacts on women, first nations staff, people with disability, or other historically marginalised/disadvantaged groups.'

'Governance must explicitly support the inclusion and safety of First Nations staff and students, as well as those from diverse backgrounds.'

Concerns were raised that IDEA commitments are often expressed in principle but not embedded in practice, with marginalised groups left out of key discussions or adversely affected by restructuring processes. Respondents argued that governance must go beyond rhetoric by ensuring meaningful participation of historically disadvantaged groups, incorporating Indigenous knowledges and leadership, and embedding equity considerations into all major decisions. Access was also identified as a key element – recognising that participation requires the removal of barriers so that all members of the community, including people with disability and others who face structural exclusion, can contribute fully to the life and governance of the university.

5. Decision-making: Academic freedom and diverse representation

Academic freedom and independence as a non-negotiable principle of good governance for the ANU community. They described it as central to the university's identity and mission: enabling scholars and students to pursue knowledge, speak openly, and challenge prevailing ideas without fear of interference or retaliation. Academic freedom was linked not only to individual rights but also to the collective independence of the academic community, safeguarding research and teaching from undue influence by political, commercial, or managerial pressures.

Academic freedom is a national priority

'I believe good governance should be guided by collegiality and respect for academic freedom, ensuring decisions are informed by the expertise of our academic community.'

'Protecting continuity of academic freedom and core disciplines (as enduring values), while responding to national priorities, (which can be partisan and fleeting).'

Many expressed concern that this principle is under strain, with governance practices prioritising rankings, financial imperatives, or corporate logics over the intellectual and educational purpose of the university. Several noted that academic independence requires recognition of the expertise of researchers and teachers as the foundation of credible decision making. Others stressed that governance must balance freedom with responsibility, ensuring that academic work is carried out with integrity, rigor, and respect for professional standards. At its heart, this principle was seen as essential for maintaining ANU's credibility, integrity, and role as a national leader in higher education and scholarly research.

The case for in-sourcing

'A university is not a business, it's an institution for education and research. It's packed full of clever people who care very much that it works well - we are not just employees, we are members of the institution. Why do you pay corporate outsiders who know nothing about education or research to decide our fate, instead of asking the people who actually understand and deeply care about education and research?'

Representation was frequently emphasised as a principle of good governance, with many respondents arguing that those who are most affected by decisions should have a meaningful voice in making them. Distinct from collegial or participatory decision making, which focuses more on *how* decisions are made, representation as a governance value centres on *whose* voices and perspectives are considered. This value was framed as essential to ensuring legitimacy, fairness, and inclusivity in governance processes. Respondents highlighted the importance of staff and student perspectives being heard, respected, and acted upon, recognising that these groups bring unique expertise and lived experience that should inform strategic directions.

Concerns were raised that current governance structures do not adequately reflect the diversity of the ANU community, leaving important voices marginalised or tokenised. Respondents stressed that representation should be more than symbolic: it should involve genuine engagement with the views of academic, professional, and student communities, and ensure that their perspectives carry weight in decision-making processes. Representation was also linked to building trust, fostering belonging, and reinforcing the idea of ANU as a community rather than just a workplace.

Broad and deep staff and student representation

'Representation of staff and student views in a governing body.'

'Stronger student participation – requires ANU leadership to better support student associations.'

'Inclusivity means encouraging a diversity of views and ensuring all members, regardless of background or role, contribute meaningfully. If we have staff and students on the council they need to have the ability to meaningfully contribute. Elected members should be open to feedback from the communities they represent. Meaningful Engagement calls for all council members to prepare thoroughly, participate actively, and connect with the wider ANU community to inform their decisions.'

Taken together, these values are not abstract aspirations but the conditions staff and students see as essential for ANU to recover trust and legitimacy. They point directly to the kinds of reforms that are now required. Some changes can be made immediately through new ways of working. Greater transparency, fairer processes, stronger accountability, and genuine participation. Others will need to be secured in legislation and policy so that they are not dependent on the goodwill of individuals. The next section sets out recommendations to embed these values into the daily practices and institutional architecture of ANU's governance.



Section Four: A Pathway for Reforming Governance at ANU

The governance problems identified through this project are structural. At the sector level, higher education is shaped by market logics and consultant playbooks that push universities away from their national mission. In law, the *ANU Act* and Council settings lack mechanisms to enforce transparency, accountability, or alignment with ANU's national mission. Within the institution, executive pay, consultancy dependence, and opaque financial strategy formation and budgeting reward short-termism and secrecy. Day to day, administrative systems are heavy, inconsistent, and easily overridden by senior leaders. In culture, governance drifts from academic values of collegiality, integrity, and public service. Together, these forces have produced a trust crisis.

Addressing this takes more than procedural fixes. It means embedding reliable, statutory channels for ANU 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 ANU'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 national mission ANU was created to serve.

Through this project, the ANU community has offered hundreds of credible recommendations for reform. These reforms emerged from the survey and kitchen table conversations, then were developed further through the project workshop.

In this section, we summarise community-recommended reforms to offer a pathway forward for governance reform at the ANU. This includes immediate, implementable actions to generate trust, as well as steps towards more systemic reform.

The ANU Governance Project recommends the following pathway to reform governance at the ANU:

1. **Immediate Actions and Community Relations Reset:** We recommend that Council implement the below immediate actions to signal a reset in the relationship with the community, improve information flows and address urgent governance risks:
 1. Council should direct Finance to produce and publish a current budget breakdown, to the level of Schools and Centres/Departments, with disaggregated information on revenue and expenses, including income from teaching, research, grants, and the National Institutes Grant (NIG).

2. Senior University Leaders including elected and appointed Council members, the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellors, and Deans commit to attending a *university leadership listening tour*, where they visit each College to hear from staff and students on issues related to governance. The agenda for these meetings should be set by the community.
 3. Council must revise and publish selection criteria for University Executive positions including the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellors, and Deputy Vice-Chancellors to include clear thresholds, standards and alignment with community values outlined in this document.
 4. Council meetings should be made accessible by all means including livestreaming and recording of meetings, with the exception of confidential items, which should only be the case when well justified.
 5. Council must have as a standing, non-confidential item, a report from Academic Board that provides an assessment of decisions of senior executives on research, teaching, and ANU's strategic goals.
2. **Internal reform recommendations:** Internal reforms do not require external legislative reform and can be implemented by Council.
1. **Academic Board Charter Reform:** Council reforms the Charter of Academic Board as per [Appendix B](#) to immediately improve its capacity to serve as a conduit of information to Council, including assessments of the impact of Council decisions on quality of education and research and capacity to achieve the goals of the ANU Strategic Plan.
 2. **Council Charter, Standing Orders, and ANU (Governance) Statute Reform:** Council reforms the ANU Council Charter, Standing Orders, and ANU (Governance) Statute as per [Appendix C](#) to make immediate improvements to information flows and Council processes.
 3. **Reform Senior Leadership Selection and Remuneration:** Council reviews senior leadership appointment policy and procedures within its remit in order to align leadership selection and remuneration with community expectations.
 4. **Internal audit and review office:** Council establishes an independent audit and review office that reports directly to Council and provides up-to-date and independent information in order to enable Council to perform its function.

5. **Additional recommendations on operational matters and internal processes:** Council considers the 17 recommendations put forward under [Appendix D](#), as reforms that fall within their remit and which would address specific governance failures.
3. **Co-design of legislative reform:** Council should commit to a dialogue process with the ANU community and relevant external stakeholders to pursue legislative reform and permanently uplift the quality of ANU governance. This dialogue would support co-design of reforms to the *Australian National University Act 1991*, with a focus on:
 1. External legislative reform of *selection processes for our university leadership*;
 2. *Amendments to the composition and responsibilities of Council*, including the nominations committee;
 3. The *empowerment via legislation of Academic Board and transformation into a University Senate, or the establishment of a new University Senate* body to ensure open and meaningful dialogue between Council, the executive, staff, and students and to embed accountability into governance practice.
 4. This dialogue would include a *commitment to a process led by First Nations* staff, students and community to determine how ANU governance and ANU's mission statement can honour Indigenous sovereignty and work towards decolonisation. Council must allow time and resources that are required for this essential work to occur.

Following this path places ANU on a trajectory to restore trust between the community and executives, reduce risk, and rebuild legitimacy of its governance framework.

Immediate Actions and Community Relations Reset

We recommend that Council implement the five immediate actions below to signal a reset in the relationship with the community and address urgent governance risks.

1- Council should direct Finance to produce and publish a current budget breakdown to the level of Schools and Centres/Departments, with disaggregated information on revenue and expenses, including income from teaching, research, grants, and the National Institutes Grant (NIG).

This recommendation reflects widespread concerns about opaque and unreliable financial reporting, which has undermined trust in major decisions and created barriers to effective planning at every level. Clear, accurate, and accessible information –

developed through genuine co-design with staff – would enable staff to understand the University's financial position, safeguard against mismanagement, and ensure accountability in decision-making. Publishing detailed, disaggregated budgets would make income and expenditure clearer to staff, strengthen trust, and enable fairer decision-making at the local level. Revenue line items should include undergraduate and postgraduate teaching income, Research Training Program, Research Support Program, National Institutes Grant, endowments, research income, and other relevant sources.

2- Senior University Leaders including elected and appointed Council members, the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor, and Deans commit to attending a *university leadership listening tour*, where they visit each College to hear from staff and students on issues related to governance.

This recommendation responds to widespread concerns that senior leaders are too distant from staff. An immediate leadership listening tour would be designed to make leaders more visible and accountable to navigate the ANU out of a period of crisis. To ensure the tour is effective in building legitimacy, the agenda for these meetings should be set by the community and the majority of time should be reserved for the community to speak.

Additionally, committing to regular leadership participation in staff-directed forums at the College or School level would ensure the goodwill earned through the immediate listening tour is leveraged into longer term governance legitimacy. It would create opportunities for genuine two-way dialogue, and help to ensure that decisions are better informed by the experiences of those who teach and conduct research.

3- Council must *revise and publish* selection criteria for University Executive positions including the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor, and Deputy Vice-Chancellors to include clear thresholds, KPIs, standards and alignment with community values outlined in this document.

This recommendation proposes a first step towards re-establishing trust in the leadership selection processes and procedures.

4- Council meetings should be made more accessible to staff and students, including easier in-person observation and livestreaming of all proceedings except confidential items, which should only be the case when well justified.

This recommendation reflects strong support for greater transparency in Council decision-making. Opening meetings through livestreaming and improved access, along with publishing more detailed minutes, would strengthen accountability, build trust, and allow staff and students to better understand and engage with governance processes.

5- Council must have as a standing, non-confidential agenda item, a report from Academic Board that provides an assessment of decisions of senior executives on research, teaching, and ANU's strategic goals.

This recommendation responds to the need to improve the quality of information provided to Council to ensure informed decision-making on key strategic and operational matters.

Internal Reform Recommendations

These internal reforms do not require external legislative reform and can largely be implemented as acts of Council. They would significantly uplift the quality of governance and go some way towards addressing community concerns, although external/legislative reform will be necessary to embed systemic reform into law.

1. Academic Board Charter Reform

Academic Board currently serves as the primary body to represent the academic interests of the university. It is significantly more representative of the diversity of ANU than Council, and its processes, including its unique capacity to identify and discuss 'hot topics', allow it to bring cross-College and whole-of-university viewpoints to bear.

However currently Academic Board has no formal role in change management processes or other significant reforms that are likely to impact the nature and extent of ANU's capacity to achieve its national mission and its public educational and research offerings. Also identified by the community were issues related to information flow into and out of Academic Board, including elected members being overwhelmed with high volumes of paperwork ahead of meetings, most of which were related to curriculum reform, while scope for strategic discussions remains minimal and in some instances the Board has declined to take steps to review the actions of university executives when it might have done so.

As a step towards imbuing Academic Board (or a University Senate) with greater powers of oversight over the academic mission of the university and to address serious governance issues, the Governance Project recommends an immediate strengthening of Academic Board and refocusing on strategic tasks. Council can undertake this work immediately via reform of the Academic Board Charter.

The changes we recommend are intended to:

- Strengthen the Academic Board's focus on the academic mission
- Provide for election of the Chair of Academic Board and adjust Voting Rights of non-elected Executive members

- Require that the Vice-Chancellor should be required to engage with, and take the views of Academic Board, on proposals for institutional change and resource allocation
- Improve Board transparency
- Improve the quality of information provided to Academic Board members
- Improve the quality of information that Academic Board can provide to Council

Full details of our recommended changes to the Academic Board Charter are available in [Appendix B](#).

2. ANU Council Charter, ANU (Governance) Statute 2024, and Standing Orders Reform

Under the *ANU Act*, Council is responsible for the entire control and management of the University. Key Council powers include strategic oversight of the University, including setting the mission, values and strategic direction of the University. The Council is also responsible for ensuring effective overall governance of the university and ensuring responsible financial and risk management.

There were clear calls from the community to reform the composition, powers, and practices of ANU Council. Some of these, such as increasing the proportion of elected members of Council or changing the composition of the Council nominations committee, entail reform of the *ANU Act* and are described in the section on 'Co-design of Legislative Reform'.

In the meantime, much can be done internally to improve Council's capacity to offer oversight of the national mission of the university, the impact of management decisions on quality of education and research, and addressing the quality of information flows between Council and the ANU community. Council can undertake this work immediately via reform of the Council Charter, ANU Governance Statute, and Standing Orders.

The changes we recommend are intended to:

1. Allow for election rather than appointment of Chair of Academic Board
2. Improving accessibility and transparency of Council
3. Improving quality of information provided to Council
4. Improving connections between Council and the university community

Full details of our recommended changes to the ANU Council Charter, ANU Governance Project, and Standing Orders are available in [Appendix C](#).

3. Reform Senior Leadership Selection and Remuneration

Proliferation of executive leadership positions, opaque appointment procedures, a misalignment between priorities and incentives have been identified as great sources of concern and frustration in the community.

In addition to the immediate action item no.3, listed above, the following recommendations emerged from this project. Recommendations 1-3 are actionable through internal policy amendments, while recommendation 4 requires legislative change.

1- Senior executive salaries must be rationalised and fixed as a transparent percentage loading on professor salaries, rather than individually negotiated.

2- The number of senior executive positions should be reviewed and rationalised by the senior executive team and Council to ensure it remains proportionate to the size and mission of the university.

These recommendations reflect strong community concerns about the scale and cost of senior leadership. Many argued that excessive executive salaries and the expanding size of the leadership group risk attracting the wrong type of leadership, misaligned with the values of service and collegiality that should define the University. At a minimum, The Remuneration Committee should include the (elected) Chair of Academic Board as well as elected Council members, should publish its value-for-money reasoning for all senior executive remuneration decisions, and should tie senior executive compensation to reasonable percentage loading on senior academic and professional compensation as specified in the Enterprise Agreement.

3- Deans and Vice-Chancellor should be elected or endorsed by staff.

4- Chancellor should be elected.

The ANU community expressed overwhelming support for the principle of electing leaders within the university. The strongest levels of support were in place for the election of Chancellor, while the preference was given for a mechanism of endorsement for the positions of the Vice-Chancellor and Deans. Candidate statements were not considered to be a sufficient level of information. A detailed program in case of endorsement, and a debate between candidates in case of an election were suggested as appropriate forms of communication. An all staff vote is the preferred model. Staff are open to a broader electorate including students, alumni etc. Election or endorsement of Deans can be pursued via reform of Australian National University (Governance) Statute 2024 and the "Procedure: Appointments - Senior Management Contracts for University Executive and Deans". Election of Chancellor or endorsement of Vice-Chancellor would require changes to the *ANU Act* (this is discussed separately in the section on 'Co-design of Legislative Reform'), but a staff endorsement vote could be approved as an act of Council.

4. Internal audit and review office

The University Council is the governing authority of the ANU. Its key functions include strategic oversight, monitoring of performance of the strategic goals of the university and ensuring responsible financial and risk management. Much of the information provided to and used by University Council is delivered via the Executive. To fulfill its duties, it needs a diverse and independent evidence to allow it to act as an effective 'check and balance' on executive performance. The recommendation is that an independent audit and review office be established in 2026 to report directly (not to the Executive) to University Council.

The audit and review office would perform a critical role akin to the Australia National Audit Office for the public service with information gathering powers and would be tasked by University Council to provide it up-to-date and independent information. The information collected by the audit and review office should include regular financial updates and advice on the ANU's current and projected budget, staff surveys and 'kitchen table' conversations around processes and procedures and job satisfaction, performance reviews of parts of the ANU, and any matter that University Council considers appropriate to effectively deliver on its key functions.

The audit and review office would allow the ANU's supreme governing authority to be fully informed and in ways that are not filtered via the Executive. The audit and review office would complement, not replace, the existing Audit and Risk Management Committee of University Council. In addition, the composition of the existing Audit and Risk Management Committee of University Council should be amended to ensure elected staff and student Council member representation.

5. Additional recommendations on operational matters and internal processes

This section sets out recommendations for reforms to ANU's ways of working. These are specific mechanisms and proposals to improve practices, processes, and policies so that the University's day-to-day operations more closely align with the ANU community's values of good governance. These measures could be implemented directly by Council or the senior executive team, without the need for broader institutional or legislative reform. Further detail on these recommendations is available in [Appendix D](#).

- This section reiterates the need for the Council to allow self-determination of the First Nation voice in the ANU's governance structure. This can only be achieved by resourcing the process of self-determination, led by First Nations communities.

Regular review of administrative and governance policies

1. Council should task Academic Board to conduct an annual or biennial review of governance arrangements and their impact on education, research, and the academic mission of the university.
2. Administrative policies, including the roll-out of new systems, must be developed in genuine dialogue with staff and students, and should reduce – not add to – the overall administrative burden on staff.
3. The ANU should conduct a comprehensive audit of administrative systems and policies at least every five years, explicitly assessing administrative burden with the goal of freeing staff time for the University's core mission.

Procurement policy and procedure

4. The university should have a policy and practice of 'insourcing,' drawing on expertise within the university community first before engaging external consultants.
5. ANU must review and strengthen its consultancy procurement and reporting requirements.

Workload policies

6. ANU should publish workload policies across the University and ensure transparent and equitable workload models developed together with staff.
7. The Enterprise Agreement should specify that fixed-term and sessional staff hours are to be calculated with reference to local workload policies.

Performance reviews

8. ANU must introduce annual 360-degree performance reviews for managers at all levels.

Equity, diversity and inclusion data and policy

9. ANU must regularly and systematically collect, publish, and update disaggregated demographic data of staff and students.
10. ANU must ensure that diversity is actively considered in the composition of governing bodies including Council and university committees.
11. Where possible, ANU should ensure that casual sessional staff, staff on fixed-term contracts, and students are included in staff meetings, governing bodies, and other decision-making forums.

Staff satisfaction and wellbeing

12. ANU must consistently publish Pulse survey results in a timely manner. The methodology must be amended to ensure non-identifiable data.
13. ANU must establish clear follow-up mechanisms so that issues raised in Pulse surveys are addressed and reported back to staff.

14. ANU must regularly publish disaggregated data on complaints related to bullying, sexual harassment, and other forms of misconduct.
15. ANU must establish a safe and effective mechanism for staff to report misconduct, with investigations carried out by an independent authority.
16. ANU must cease the routine use of non-disparagement and non-disclosure agreements in employment and settlement arrangements.

Academic titles and qualifications

17. ANU should undertake a review of “in practice of” positions (e.g. professors of practice) to establish clear criteria and benchmarks for their use.

Co-design of legislative reform

While internal reforms can reset relationships and improve governance processes in the short term, many of the problems identified by the ANU community are structural. The *ANU Act* and associated statutes currently entrench executive dominance, limit staff and student voice, and fail to provide effective checks and balances. These arrangements are not unique to ANU but are particularly stark given the University’s distinctive national mission. Without legislative change, reforms to leadership, representation, and accountability will remain vulnerable to reversal or neglect. The ANU community has called for legislative reform that ensures governance is democratic, representative, transparent, and aligned with the University’s national mission.

We recommend that Council commit to a **co-design process with the ANU community** to shape these reforms, ensuring the voices of staff, students, alumni, and other stakeholders are central. This process must draw on **best-practice deliberative co-design principles**. At minimum the ANU should adhere to the engagement principles and standards laid out in the Australian Public Service (APS) Framework for Engagement and Participation. International best practice standards on deliberative forms of engagement from the OECD should guide the co-design process with the ANU community. In addition to the co-design process, ANU should commit to a **First Nations-led dialogue**, where First Nations staff, students, and community determine how their voices should be integrated into ANU governance and embedded within ANU’s mission statement. Council must provide the time and resources required for this essential work and commit to genuine dialogue, allowing time and capacity for staff and students to shape reforms, and working closely with government to translate these proposals into legislation.

Through our deep listening and engagement with staff and students, three areas of reform have emerged as central priorities.

Reform Priority 1: Change Leadership Selection Processes

Concerns about the way ANU's leaders are chosen came through powerfully across survey responses, kitchen table conversations, and the deliberative workshop. Many staff and students felt that current practices concentrate power in the hands of Council and the Vice-Chancellor, producing opaque "captain's picks" that undermine legitimacy and weaken accountability. Participants argued that leadership selection should be transparent, democratic, and grounded in academic values — not networks of privilege or external corporate logics. A reformed process should reflect the University's national mission and ensure its leaders are respected by, and accountable to, the community they serve.

Chancellor. The most widely supported reform was for the Chancellor to be directly elected. Participants unanimously agreed that Chancellor candidates should run on their vision for the University, allowing the community to weigh their capacity to be a champion for ANU. An election would strengthen legitimacy, visibility, and accountability, while providing a forum for debate about ANU's mission and future. Most supported a vote of all staff as the core electorate, though including students, alumni (convocation), or a future Senate were also canvassed as viable options. Participants saw little downside: an election would demonstrate democratic values, inspire community engagement, and ensure the Chancellor is genuinely representative of the University.

Vice-Chancellor, Deans, and Directors. For other senior roles, the community wanted stronger endorsement mechanisms that avoid reducing appointments to popularity contests. Scholarly excellence, reputation, and demonstrated university leadership experience were seen as essential criteria, particularly for the Vice-Chancellor. Participants stressed the importance of community endorsement: staff and students should be meaningfully involved in recruitment, through representative committees, open presentations from shortlisted candidates, and structured opportunities for staff and student feedback (for example, through seminars, townhalls, informal sessions and voting). Options canvassed included a staff-wide veto power for the appointment of the Vice-Chancellor, college-based elections for Deans, or term limits to prevent power entrenchment. While views differed on whether elections beyond the Chancellor should be immediately introduced, there was broad agreement that **leaders must have legitimacy grounded in staff and student confidence, not just Council appointment.**

Together, these reforms would reshape leadership selection around principles of transparency, accountability, and academic integrity. They would ensure that ANU's leaders are not only competent administrators but also scholars and advocates with the community's trust. In the words of one participant, *"Deans and Directors should be elected by their staff ... this will allow them to serve as more effective academic leaders and provide better information to senior university executives."* The consensus was clear that ANU must embed democratic processes and community endorsement in its leadership appointments if it is to rebuild trust and align governance with its national mission.

Reform Priority 2: Altering Council Composition

The current composition of the ANU Council legislates a minority voice for those who work and study at the University. Under the *ANU Act*, a majority of Council members are appointed through external processes, with only a small number of elected staff and student representatives. This imbalance has fostered widespread concern that Council lacks legitimacy, under-represents the expertise of the ANU community, and is too heavily weighted toward ministerial or corporate appointments. Staff and students repeatedly expressed frustration that decisions affecting the University's mission are being made without sufficient input from those directly engaged in teaching, research, and student life.

Legislative reform is needed to reset this balance. The *ANU Act* should be amended so that **at least half of Council members are elected staff and student representatives**, and so that a **majority of Council members have higher education experience**. This would ensure that Council decisions are informed by those with direct knowledge of the University's academic and professional context, while still retaining space for external perspectives. Project participants offered various proposals including reducing appointed roles to three; replacing some appointed positions with elections by Academic Board or ANU alumni (convocation); or introducing novel democratic mechanisms such as rotating membership or lotteries. The common message was clear — the ANU community wants a Council that is representative, accountable, and grounded in higher education expertise.

By legislating a greater role for elected members, and by requiring that Council as a whole demonstrates higher education expertise, ANU would bring its governance into line with community expectations of fairness and legitimacy. Reforming Council's composition would not only improve decision-making but also rebuild trust by ensuring that governance is shaped by those with the most at stake in the University's future.

Reform Priority 3: University Senate

The ANU community made clear that governance reform must go beyond consultation exercises and establish a **representative body with real authority**. Current arrangements have left staff and students feeling sidelined, with consultation perceived as tokenistic and decisions imposed from above. The existing Academic Board, while tasked with safeguarding standards including TEQSA Threshold Standards, lacks the statutory powers to influence or review Council and executive decisions. To restore legitimacy and embed meaningful participation, legislative reform must create a body that guarantees structured opportunities for meaningful engagement with staff and students, transparency, and accountability.

The preferred solution forwarded by the community is the establishment of a **University Senate**, either by transforming the existing Academic Board or creating a new body

alongside it. A Senate would serve as the peak deliberative body of the University, composed primarily of elected staff (continuing, fixed-term, and sessional, including both academic and professional staff) and elected students, with space for external expertise in a strictly advisory capacity. Its meetings would be open by default, and its role would be to ensure governance decisions are grounded in academic freedom, teaching and research quality, and the University's national mission. Council and the executive would be required to table Senate reports and respond formally to its recommendations, embedding an accountability loop that is currently missing. This could be expanded to support a *Code of Governance* developed and agreed upon between the University Senate and Council.

Two models for such a Senate have been developed through the Governance Project:

- **Model 1: University Senate replaces Academic Board.** This would simplify governance to two peak bodies – the Senate and Council. The Senate would directly oversee academic integrity and intellectual freedom while providing strategic scrutiny of Council decisions. This model strongly embeds staff and student voice, but risks Senate overload if responsibilities are not clearly delineated.
- **Model 2: University Senate alongside Academic Board and Council.** This would create a tripartite structure where the Senate sets broad strategy and requirements for staff and student engagement, the Academic Board safeguards disciplinary and academic standards, and Council retains fiduciary and administrative duties. This model preserves the historic role of the Academic Board but introduces greater complexity and potential overlap.

In both models, the key principle is **accountability of Council to the broader university community**. The Senate would not duplicate bureaucratic processes, but instead provide a structural guarantee that governance decisions reflect the expertise and lived experiences of staff and students. As many participants stressed, a Senate would mark a decisive shift toward ethical listening, participatory decision-making, and transparent governance, ensuring ANU's legitimacy as Australia's national university is rebuilt on a foundation of trust and integrity.

Further details on our recommended models for a university senate or shared governance system, including examples of successful international models, are available in [Appendix E](#).



Conclusion

The release of this draft report marks a unique moment in the history of Australian higher education governance. A community-led listening and engagement process of this scale and depth has never been undertaken before. Through participation in the survey, kitchen table conversations, and the deliberative workshop, ANU staff, students, alumni, donors and other stakeholders have worked together to identify key problems, values and solutions. This process has built internal legitimacy for reform, and generated practical and credible proposals that stem from the experience, expertise and priorities of the ANU community.

The ANU Governance Project Working Group warmly encourages both internal and external stakeholders to engage with us and the proposals presented in this report. The reforms outlined here have been developed in good faith, through extensive dialogue and deliberation, with a central commitment to forwarding constructive solutions. They represent a collective voice of the ANU community, who know this institution best and care deeply for its future.

The ANU now has an opportunity to lead the sector in governance reform. By embracing the pathway to reform outlined here, ANU can lead by demonstrating what good governance in higher education really looks like - governance that is transparent, accountable, participatory and tailored to our national mission to serve the public good. ANU can both restore trust with its own community and set a new benchmark for other higher education institutions across Australia.

Making this pathway to reform happen will require both courage and collaboration. It requires the Council, policymakers, and the wider sector to recognise the important opportunity before us to reset ANU governance on a foundation of trust, integrity, and democratic participation. We invite all those with a stake in ANU's future to join us in this work.



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