

1. What can be done to make the operations and decisions of Councils and governing boards of universities more transparent and accountable?

At present, university councils operate with almost no accountability to any independent party but are instead only accountable to themselves. This is a deeply flawed model and in contrast to how other entities in Australia's civil society operate. There are several simple reforms that would improve transparency and accountability in Australia's public universities, including:

- Granting members of university governing bodies the right to represent the interests of their respective university communities, embodying the concept of universities as distinctive public institutions, including the right to consult with their communities and share information.
- Ensuring that university governing bodies do not unreasonably discriminate between governing body members, and all members have a right to serve on relevant committees and sub-committees
- Requiring the governing board to consult with the university community before taking any decisions to make major changes, including, job cuts, course and school closures
- Codifying an enhanced role for democratically elected Academic Senates and Boards or establishing distinct University Forums of elected university staff and students as accountability bodies. These bodies would improve accountability by monitoring the performance of Councils, much in the way shareholder meetings hold corporate boards to account.
- Mandating the full disclosure and publication of consultancy spending and use, marketing spending, and spending on executive travel
- Maintaining a public conflict of interest register for appointed council members
- Improved transparency in the process for appointment of council members, with preference for the appointment of members with public sector experience. Furthermore, that there is a restriction on the appointment of major financial donors to the institution's governing body for a period of at least 5 years. Private sector entities with interests in the institution, including consulting firms, should not be able to have representatives on that institution's governing body.

2. Insecure casualised work continues to be a massive issue on our campuses. How important is secure work for improving governance?

Systemic reliance on insecure employment has been a barrier to good governance in our universities because insecurely employed staff cannot speak out without fear of losing their job. This means staff cannot hold governing bodies and management to account. Insecurely employed staff are often systemically excluded from consultation at the university and local level and often do not have access to colleagues and decision makers. Without ongoing employment staff cannot genuinely engage in the collegial decision making of the university. Insecurely employed staff are usually systemically excluded from internal governance processes like Faculty and Academic boards.

High staff turnover (as a natural function of casualisation) also raises teaching quality issues, and raises issues related to meeting the TEQSA Threshold Standards on workforce composition and qualifications.

3. How is casualisation affecting academic freedom?

Casualisation has a chilling effect on academic freedom. Casual staff are constantly thinking about renewal of their employment and can be terminated with no notice with no reason explicitly provided. This means casual staff are extremely vulnerable to reprisal should their academic work speak truth to power or reveal uncomfortable truths (ideas which are at the very heart of academic inquiry and academic speech).

Staff who are insecurely employed are also largely excluded from the professional life of the institution and denied opportunities to attend university meetings and participate in governance processes, limiting their input into academic direction and institutional policy. The churn of insecure employment also results in the loss of knowledge and expertise, impacting the long-term health of both academic and research activities.

The NTEU defines Academic Freedom in terms of the rights of individuals, as members of the university community, as being free to enact the following without fear of retribution or administrative constraints:

- Discuss, teach, assess, develop curricula, and engage in community service;
- Research and publish;
- Publish and speak in public debate constrained by a responsibility to reflect scholarly standards;
- Express opinions about the institutions in which they work or are enrolled;
- Participate in representative bodies such as the NTEU; and
- Participate in decision-making structures and processes within the institution.

Staff who are employed insecurely are for the most part either specifically denied many of the rights noted above, or are unable to access the opportunities to exercise that right, or are fearful of retribution should they access that right.

In order for staff to truly enjoy the protection of academic freedom (which Universities must uphold under the Higher Education Support Act 2003) they must be in continuing employment.