ANU Governance Project
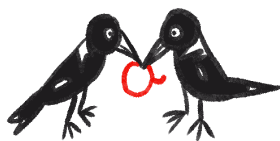# Final Report

20 November 2025

Authored by:

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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 Pearse, 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
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Professor Quentin Grafton, College of Law, Governance and Policy
Professor Ron Levy, College of Law, Governance and Policy
Professor Sasha Mikhayev, College of Science and Medicine
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 at ANUGovernance@gmail.com or at our website (anugovernance.org).

Executive Summary

The ANU Governance Project was formed amidst a growing crisis of confidence in governance at the Australian National University and the higher education sector more generally.

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 and governing body decisions affect the quality of research and education at the university.
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 the ANU, have attempted to solve financial and governance problems before. Status quo approaches have often relied on external consultants that recommend restructures that fail to deliver on their efficiency promises and rely on opaque and questionable data, while staff and students with crucial knowledge on how high-level governance decisions are playing out at the ground level are sidelined. There is a fundamental disconnect between the university leadership and its community. Upwards information flows are poor, and academic risk (referring to both the risk that teaching and research regulatory requirements are not consistently followed as well as the broader risk that the university strays from its mission of producing crucial education and knowledge as public good) is not effectively measured or managed.

At ANU, this conventional approach has resulted in enormous reputational damage, high psychosocial stress for staff and students, and failing legitimacy of governance. In an environment where financial austerity is likely to continue across the sector, and with [public confidence in higher education in decline](#), **Australian universities need resilient governance frameworks that navigate through this difficult terrain in partnership with, rather than in opposition to, their communities**.

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 from ANU staff, students, alumni, former staff, and other stakeholders in the community.
- **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 the community 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 bodies to review the findings from our survey and conversations. Every College was represented, alongside central service divisions and members of senior leadership.

In September and October 2025, we opened our draft report for public consultation, requesting feedback to catch any errors or omissions. We are pleased to report that feedback on the draft report was strongly positive and reaffirmed the core report findings; we have included further recommendations from the community where possible in this final report. We also met with university leaders (Deans, executives, and Council members including Interim Vice-Chancellor Rebekah Brown and Chancellor Julie Bishop) to share community-recommended reforms and identify areas of agreement between the university leadership, external stakeholders, and the community on governance reforms; this work is ongoing.

The body of evidence documented in this report is the most detailed community-led assessment of ANU governance to date, and to the best of our knowledge the first time such an in-depth study of experiences and community-led solutions for university governance has been conducted in Australia.

More than that, this project represents a good faith effort by the ANU community to be part of the solution. ANU staff, former staff, students, alumni, and other members of the community have 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, attended our events, or made time to seriously consider these community-led reforms.

This 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.

The ANU has a groundbreaking opportunity for change that should not be missed: there are practical, concrete solutions offered here by the community that could move us from a position of crisis into a nation-leading model of good university governance.

Why governance reform at the ANU is urgent:

- 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'.

Legislative reform is needed to reset this balance. Participants in our project called for the *ANU Act* to be amended so that **at least half of Council members are elected staff and student representatives. This should include the Chair of Academic Board as a voting, ex-officio member**.

- 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 governance is currently organised. Staff have lost trust in leadership due to a lack of systems for 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 in governance forums.

- **Incoherent decision-making exacerbating academic risk and 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 and poor staff and student wellbeing:** high psychosocial stress, collapse of trust, low morale, feelings of unfairness, and reputational damage to ANU as Australia's national university.

These issues remain despite a series of major investigations into both ANU governance and that of the broader higher education sector. While some investigations are ongoing – including a live compliance assessment of ANU by TEQSA Investigator Lynelle Briggs AO, and the Australian Government's consideration of amendments to the TEQSA Act – a series of recommendations to address the governance crisis were announced in September and October 2025, including:

- the Interim Report of the Senate Inquiry into the Quality of Governance at Australian Higher Education Providers;

- a set of eight governance principles developed by the Expert Council on University Governance, established by the Education Minister and chaired by Melinda Cilento, which examined governance practices across the sector and developed national governance principles for proactive adoption by universities; and

- the recommendations presented on 17 October by ANU's internal Nixon Review Working Groups, stemming from the May 2025 Nixon Review, which had identified failures in ANU-wide systems and practices, particularly in relation to gender and culture.

The ANU Governance Project welcomes these recommendations and the signal that governance culture and performance in Australian universities is a national priority.

However, **the recommendations released thus far are insufficient to ensure good governance at the ANU (and the sector more generally)**. In particular, there remain specific weaknesses in ANU's governance arrangements under the *Australian National University Act 1991 (Cth)* (ANU Act) and our internal mechanisms of governance that have not yet been addressed. Addressing these gaps is the focus of this report.

What Does Good University Governance Look Like?

The disconnect between university leadership and the community has exacerbated academic risk and caused enormous reputational damage to our national university. Addressing it will require rapid improvement of information flows, accountability frameworks, and enhanced transparency between the university community, its executive managers, and its governing bodies.

We start from the principle that collaborative co-design of governance is an effective method to improve ground level governance outcomes, reduce the likelihood of producing perverse incentives (that are often difficult to predict at higher levels but visible to those at lower levels of the institution), build community confidence in and legitimacy of governance frameworks, and ultimately uplift governance outcomes.

Through our project, the ANU community has identified the values of good university governance they expect to see at their institution, including:

- **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.

A Pathway for Reforming Governance at ANU

The ANU community has generated hundreds of credible reform recommendations that, if implemented, could move our university from out of a period of crisis into a nation-leading model of community-led, good university governance. These recommendations emerged from the survey and kitchen table conversations, and then were refined and developed further through the deliberative project workshop and the community consultation period for the draft version of this report.

We recommend the following immediate actions to 'reset' relations with the ANU community and start rebuilding trust:

1. The ANU Finance Office should produce and publish a current budget breakdown to the level of Schools and Centres/Departments, with disaggregated information on revenue and expenses (Recommendation 14)
2. Senior University Leaders should commit to attending listening tours, where they visit each College to hear from staff and students on issues related to governance (Recommendation 11). The agenda for these meetings should be set by the community (Recommendation 11.1), and the majority of time should be reserved for the community to speak or ask questions (Recommendation 11.2).
3. The selection criteria and KPIs for University executive positions should be revised and published, and include clear thresholds, KPIs, standards and alignment with community values outlined in this document (Recommendation 8). Crucially, this should happen before the appointment of a new ANU Vice-Chancellor.
4. Meetings of ANU Council should immediately be made more accessible to the university community through livestreaming and recording for all non-confidential items (Recommendation 2.7).
5. A regular Academic Board report to Council should be introduced as a standing meeting agenda item, that provides an assessment of the impact of executive decisions on research, teaching, academic risk, and ANU's strategic goals (Recommendation 3.8). This is intended to create an immediate and direct reporting line to Council from Academic Board on core issues of academic risk and major strategic issues likely to impact the quality of research and education at the ANU. This agenda item should be standing and non-confidential, with the report published on the Academic Board's website.

The full list of 30 recommendations responds directly to the core governance problems identified by the ANU community. Recommendations 1 to 3 address accountability concerns by strengthening the University's primary governance architecture. They propose the creation of a University Senate as a representative accountability body (Recommendation 1), alongside comprehensive reforms to Council's composition, information access, transparency, deliberative practices, and engagement with the community (Recommendation 2). They also propose strengthening the role of Academic Board in safeguarding the academic mission and providing independent scrutiny of executive decisions (Recommendation 3). These recommendations aim to shape an ANU governance system in which power is more balanced, senior leaders are genuinely answerable to representative bodies, and key decisions are informed by clear and independent information.

The remaining recommendations set out a suite of systemic governance reforms that address broader issues across the University. Many of these reforms can be implemented under existing Council and executive authority, enabling immediate improvements to transparency, trust, and everyday governance practice. These include measures to:

- improve leadership culture and practices
- embed First Nations voice in governance
- promote financial and budget transparency
- introduce regular review of administrative and governance policies
- update policies and practices regarding consultancies, staff workloads, and performance reviews
- enhance equity, diversity, and inclusion data and policy, and
- improve staff psychosocial safety, satisfaction, and wellbeing.

Sincere engagement with the suggestions in this document is an opportunity for leaders to reset the relationship with the ANU community and demonstrate a commitment to best-practice governance. Many of the recommendations speak directly to the principles and recommendations included in the recent release of the Expert Council on University Governance Final Report, the Senate Inquiry Interim Report, and the internal Nixon Review.

By taking up the challenges laid out 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.

List of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Establish a University Senate

- ***Recommendation 1.1:*** *The ANU and its stakeholders commit to a co-design process with the community to shape a new University Senate.*
- ***Recommendation 1.2:*** *The ANU Act be amended to establish a University Senate as a representative accountability body.*

Recommendation 2: Reform Council to improve transparency, incentivise connection to the community, and enhance its deliberative functions

- ***Recommendation 2.1:*** *The ANU Act should be amended to require that at least half of Council members are elected staff and student representatives.*
- ***Recommendation 2.2:*** *The Council skills matrix should be updated to require that a majority of Council members have significant expertise in higher education and/or public administration.*
- ***Recommendation 2.3:*** *The Chancellor should appoint half the Nominations Committee from amongst the elected staff and student members of Council.*
- ***Recommendation 2.4:*** *Council's Remuneration Committee should include elected staff and student Council members, the elected Chair of Academic Board, and publish how its remuneration decisions are linked to clear performance metrics.*
- ***Recommendation 2.5:*** *Staff and student representatives on Council should be compensated and incentivised adequately for their time and contribution.*
- ***Recommendation 2.6:*** *Terms for elected Council members should be staggered to enable handover and mentorship opportunities.*
- ***Recommendation 2.7:*** *Meetings of the Council should be livestreamed and recorded for dissemination to staff, students, alumni, and the general public, for non-confidential items.*
- ***Recommendation 2.8:*** *Detailed minutes of Council should be made available within a week following meetings.*
- ***Recommendation 2.9:*** *ANU Council should establish a clear and transparent framework through which agenda items at Council are made confidential.*
- ***Recommendation 2.10:*** *Council members should have access to sources of information that are independent of the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor.*
- ***Recommendation 2.11:*** *The Council Agenda should include, as a standing, non-confidential item, a report from Academic Board that provides an assessment of the impact of decisions of senior executives on research, teaching, and ANU's strategic goals. This agenda item should always be open for debate.*
- ***Recommendation 2.12:*** *Council should develop a practice of regular engagement sessions between Council members and members of the community.*

- *Recommendation 2.13:* New, bespoke training material should be developed, relevant to the ANU's unique status as Australia's sole national university, to improve the training and professional development offered to Council members.
- *Recommendation 2.14:* Update Council Standing Orders to improve the quality of deliberation during Council meetings.

  - **Recommendation 2.14.1**: Council members should be able to speak more than once on a matter so that questions, clarifications and responses can occur naturally, promoting more effective oversight of decisions.
  - **Recommendation 2.14.2**: The Chair can propose a motion to close debate on an issue, but this should only occur with a majority vote of Council members.

- *Recommendation 2.15:* Council should meet more frequently - at least 12 times per year.

Recommendation 3: Reform Academic Board to strengthen oversight of academic mission, transparency, and quality of information flows.

- *Recommendation 3.1:* Strengthen the Academic Board's focus on strategic issues, including alignment with academic mission and academic risk, by updating its objectives and formal responsibilities.

  - **Recommendation 3.1.1** Academic Board should have as part of its objective and mission a focus on the academic mission of the University, in addition to its current focus on maintaining the highest standards in teaching, scholarship and research.
  - **Recommendation 3.1.2** The formal responsibilities of Academic Board should include:
    - advising on the impact of change management or major institutional reforms on the University's academic mission and the quality of teaching, scholarship and research.
    - reviewing the annual budget and reporting to Council on the impact of proposed resourcing on the national mission and quality of teaching, scholarship and research.
    - reporting to the Council on the impact of governance on the quality of teaching, scholarship, and research, and the University's academic mission.
    - providing strategic advice to Council on any matter related to the core mission of the University.

- *Recommendation 3.2:* Conduct a rapid investigation to investigate how Academic Board can more effectively discharge its existing responsibility to provide a forum to facilitate information flow and debate between the academic community and the senior Executive.
- *Recommendation 3.3:* The Chair of Academic Board should be elected.

- ***Recommendation 3.4:*** *Recommendation 3.4: Academic Board should review the annual budget before it is taken to the Council for approval. The Vice-Chancellor should be required to engage with, and take the views of Academic Board into account, regarding proposals for institutional change and resource allocation.*
- ***Recommendation 3.5:*** *Meetings of Academic Board should be livestreamed and recorded for dissemination to staff, students, alumni, and the general public, for non-confidential items.*
- ***Recommendation 3.6:*** *Improve the quality of information to Board members by providing a one-page summary of the strategic choice being put forward for the Board's consideration for each agenda item, allowing members to recommend changes in the format of reports, and to require members of Executive portfolios be available to answer questions upon request ahead of meetings.*
- ***Recommendation 3.7:*** *Establish a standing committee of Academic Board on academic risk and strategic initiatives.*
- ***Recommendation 3.8:*** *The Academic Board agenda should include, as a standing, non-confidential item, a report to Council that provides an assessment of the impact of Executive decisions on research, teaching, academic risk, and ANU's strategic goals.*
- ***Recommendation 3.9:*** *Review and reform the Academic Quality Assurance Committee and other committees underneath Academic Board as necessary to ensure high quality information reaches Academic Board and to address Academic Board overload.*
- ***Recommendation 3.10:*** *Academic Board membership should be expanded to include two representatives of casual and fixed-term staff.*
- ***Recommendation 3.11:*** *Academic Board membership should be expanded to include both Masters and doctoral student representatives.*
- ***Recommendation 3.12:*** *Staff and student representatives on the Academic Board should be compensated and incentivised adequately for their time and contribution.*

Recommendation 4: *ANU should establish and resource an internal audit and review office.*

Recommendation 5: *The Chancellor should be elected.*

Recommendation 6: *Deans and the Vice-Chancellor should be appointed through a transparent process, including staff and student feedback and endorsement.*

Recommendation 7: *Research School Directors should be appointed through a transparent process, including staff and student feedback and endorsement.*

Recommendation 8: *The selection criteria and KPIs for University Executive positions, including the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellors and Pro Vice-Chancellor, should be revised and published, and include clear thresholds, KPIs, standards and alignment with community values outlined in this document.*

Recommendation 9: *Senior Executive salaries should be rationalised and fixed as a transparent percentage loading on professor salaries.*

Recommendation 10: *The number of senior Executive positions should be reviewed and rationalised to ensure the Executive team remains proportionate and connected to the University's mission.*

Recommendation 11: *Senior University Leaders, including elected and appointed Council members, the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor, and Deans, should commit to attending university leadership listening tours, where they visit each College to hear from staff and students on issues related to governance.*

- **Recommendation 11.1:** *The agenda for listening tour forums should be set by the community.*
- **Recommendation 11.2:** *The majority of time should be reserved for the community to speak or ask questions.*
- **Recommendation 11.3:** *College Deans should hold regular town halls or staff-directed forums.*

Recommendation 12: *ANU should introduce annual 360-degree performance reviews for managers at all levels, incorporating feedback from the staff they manage as well as from peers and supervisors.*

Recommendation 13: *ANU should initiate a process, led by First Nations staff, students and community, to determine how ANU and the University mission can honour Indigenous sovereignty and support decolonisation.*

Recommendation 14: *The ANU Finance Office should 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).*

Recommendation 15: *ANU staff and students should be included in co-design of the next University budget model.*

Recommendation 16: *ANU should conduct an annual or biennial review of governance arrangements and their impact on education, research, and the academic mission of the University.*

Recommendation 17: *Administrative policies, including the roll-out of new systems, must be developed in genuine dialogue with staff and students, and should measurably reduce — not add to — the overall administrative burden on staff.*

Recommendation 18: ANU should conduct a comprehensive audit of administrative systems and policies at least every five years, explicitly assessing administrative burden, with the goal of protecting staff time for the University's core mission.

Recommendation 19: ANU should have a policy and practice of 'insourcing,' drawing on expertise within the university community first before engaging external consultants.

- *Recommendation 19.1: Academic and professional staff should be appropriately incentivised and compensated for their contributions, either through direct compensation or through research, education, or service time loadings.*
- *Recommendation 19.2: Insourcing opportunities should be allocated through transparent, inclusive processes including open calls for expressions of interest, and avoid reinforcing existing service burdens for groups with already disproportionate loads.*

Recommendation 20: ANU should review and strengthen its consultancy procurement and reporting requirements to ensure they are followed in practice, and that all consultancies are publicly listed in real time, with meaningful, detailed information about the services provided

- *Recommendation 20.1: ANU's procurement and consultancy policies and procedures should be updated to include a positive duty to demonstrate that the procured advice could not have been delivered in-house.*

Recommendation 21: ANU should publish workload policies across the University and ensure that Clause 52 of the [Enterprise Agreement](#) is implemented in practice, with transparent and equitable workload models developed in consultation with staff.

Recommendation 22: ANU should regularly and systematically collect, publish, and update disaggregated demographic data of staff and students, in a way that does not risk identifying individuals, in order to reveal progress towards inclusion throughout the university and inform improvements to Equal Opportunity and other relevant policies.

Recommendation 23: ANU should ensure that diversity is actively considered in the composition of governing bodies, including Council and university committees, with meaningful representation of groups such as Indigenous peoples, people with disability, and students.

Recommendation 24: 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.

 Recommendation 25: ANU should consistently publish Pulse survey results in a timely manner. The methodology must be amended to remove the requirement to specify work unit, to ensure staff can provide honest feedback.

Recommendation 26: ANU should establish clear follow-up mechanisms, so that issues raised in Pulse surveys are addressed and reported back to staff. Staff must also be involved in genuine co-design of survey design and process.

Recommendation 27: ANU should regularly publish trend data on complaints related to bullying, sexual harassment, and other forms of misconduct. Reporting should also include evaluation by staff and students of their satisfaction with the processes (not outcomes) of misconduct and complaint investigations.

Recommendation 28: ANU should establish safe and effective mechanisms for staff to report misconduct (including bullying and harassment), with investigations carried out by an independent authority — either external to ANU or an empowered internal Ombudsman.

- *Recommendation 28.1: As an effective mechanism, we support establishing a Staff Ombudsman, as recommended in the Nixon Review and a pathway for the Staff Ombudsman to request investigation by external regulatory bodies.*

Recommendation 29: ANU should cease the use of non-disparagement and non-disclosure clauses in release, separation, and settlement arrangements.

Recommendation 30: ANU should undertake a review of "in practice of" positions (e.g. professors of practice) to establish clear criteria and benchmarks for their use.

Introduction

Focusing on Solutions: The ANU Governance Project

At the Australian National University (ANU), 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 university governance can enhance institutional effectiveness, scholarly excellence, and public confidence.

As a group of staff and students 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. By 'governance', we mean how universities make decisions and are held accountable for those decisions.

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 reputational and institutional risk entailed in failing to effectively address the current state of governance at the ANU is significant. This report summarises what we heard from the ANU community and their recommendations for the path to improve and uplift governance at the ANU.

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.

In September and October 2025, we circulated a draft version of this report, requesting feedback to catch any errors or omissions. We are pleased to report that feedback on the report was uniformly positive and reaffirmed the core findings; we have implemented all the further recommendations from the community that we could in this final report, noting that most focused on suggestions to improve clarity of communication.

We have also met with university leaders (Deans, Executives, and Council members including Acting Vice-Chancellor Rebekah Brown and Chancellor Julie Bishop) to share community-recommended reforms and search for areas of agreement between the university leadership and the community on governance reforms; this work is ongoing.

Additionally, given the release in October of two external (Senate Inquiry Interim Report and Minister Jason Clare's Expert Council) and one internal (ANU's Nixon Review Working Group) sets of recommendations for university governance reform, **our recommendations build on this existing work to close the remaining gaps to secure good university governance at the ANU**. Additionally, we map how many of our recommendations should be extended to apply across our sector (see Appendix B).

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 outline community generated solutions for better aligning ANU governance with the expectations of people who work and study at ANU.

We offer this report to leaders as an opportunity to reset the relationship with the ANU community and set ANU on a trajectory towards best-practice governance. The solutions here are aimed at improving and enhancing our governing bodies, risk management, and compliance mechanisms. If taken up, these recommendations will help ensure ANU governance aligns with community expectations of accountability, transparency, integrity, and prioritisation of our national mission.

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, our universities need to be restored to prosperity and protected. Other advanced economies are rapidly escalating investments in research and development and, with Australian public investment in tertiary education significantly lower than the OECD average of 1% of GDP, we risk being outcompeted. Reductions in Commonwealth funding per student coupled with the expansion of access to higher education have pushed university governance towards models that focus on financial risk while neglecting academic risk. 'Academic risk' encompasses the risk that teaching and research regulatory requirements are not consistently followed, and the risk of universities straying from their core mission of delivering education and research for the public good. **The future of the sector is turbulent: we urgently need governance frameworks that make our universities more resilient to crises, create effective internal mechanisms to measure and address academic risk, and incentivise university leaderships to be responsive, transparent, and accountable to their communities**.

Australia's university sector is experiencing a moment of significant scrutiny and reform. In the wake of the Australian Universities Accord, multiple national reviews and regulatory processes have focused attention on how universities are governed, how decisions are made, and how effectively universities remain accountable to their communities and public purpose.

Three processes have been particularly shaping the national higher education governance reform agenda during 2025:

- The Expert Council on University Governance, established by Education Minister Jason Clare and chaired by Melinda Cilento, which examined governance practices across the sector and developed national governance principles;
- The ongoing Senate Inquiry into the Quality of Governance at Australian Higher Education Providers, which has been hearing extensive evidence from university staff, students, leadership, unions and regulatory bodies; and
- The Australian Government's consideration of amendments to the TEQSA Act to modernise and strengthen the regulator's enforcement capacity.

Together, these developments signal a major shift: governance culture and performance in Australian universities is now a national priority, and expectations for transparency, integrity, accountability, and meaningful consultation are rising.

Alongside these sector-wide processes, governance at the ANU is facing specific and heightened scrutiny. TEQSA is conducting a [live compliance assessment](#) of governance at ANU, overseen by Lynelle Briggs AO, with a final report expected in April 2026. From its inception in October 2024, the drastic restructuring program initiated by former ANU Vice Chancellor Distinguished Professor Genevieve Bell drew extensive news media coverage and sparked widespread staff, student and community protest. The [Nixon Review](#) into gender and culture at the former ANU College of Health and Medicine, released in May 2025, identified failures in ANU-wide systems and practices. In mid-2025, serious allegations were raised under parliamentary privilege related to bullying and poor governance practices within ANU Council.

This convergence of sector-wide reform and ANU-specific challenges created the conditions for the ANU Governance Project, as well as the Project's commitment to turn a moment of profound institutional crisis into an opportunity for constructive reform.

An Emerging Consensus on Governance Problems in the Sector

A consistent diagnosis of the governance challenges facing the sector is now evident across the two major national processes that have reported to date. The Senate Inquiry released its interim report in September 2025, and the Expert Council published its report and principles in October 2025. Both processes heard substantial evidence from staff, students, unions, university leaders, and regulators and identified systemic issues including limited transparency, erosion of trust, perceived corporatisation, constrained staff and student voice, weaknesses in accountability mechanisms, and concerns about decision-making culture and integrity. These themes closely mirror the experiences shared by the ANU community through the ANU Governance Project.

The Senate Inquiry Interim Report made targeted recommendations to strengthen transparency, accountability, and representation, including:

- Publishing full Council minutes
- Public disclosure of consultant spending, conflict-of-interest registers, and Executive remuneration
- Minimum levels of staff and student representation, and minimum levels of public administration and higher education expertise on governing bodies
- Best-practice consultation with staff and students before decisions are made
- Governance training for all Council members
- Strengthening TEQSA's powers to investigate and enforce governance rules
- Improving complaints processes

Taken together, these recommendations would mark a shift toward transparency and accountability for some universities. However, they remain **minimum thresholds** and do not fully address the dynamics observed at ANU, which already formally meets several of these requirements. Critically, **formal compliance does not automatically translate into meaningful participation or trust in governance**. For example: staff and student representatives can hold seats on governance bodies but still be marginalised from substantive deliberation; training for council members that reinforces corporate governance logics rather than collegial norms will not transform council cultures; and requirements for 'consultation' do not guarantee genuine deliberation or shared ownership of decisions. Without deeper cultural and structural reform, these recommendations alone are unlikely to remedy the governance failures experienced at ANU.

The Expert Council on University Governance also highlighted significant "misalignment between current governance practices and community expectations" and the need for a significant cultural shift within governing bodies. Its Principles focus on transparency, accountability, integrity, capability, diversity, and culture, and call for:

- Openness in governance processes and communication
- Respectful and inclusive decision-making
- Ethical leadership and clear accountability
- Professional induction and development for governors
- Regular performance evaluation of councils.

These principles provide a valuable signal of reform direction. However, even once enshrined in Commonwealth regulation, compliance action is only likely where universities "repeatedly fail to meet the Principles" – that is, when failures of governance have already emerged.

The focus of legislative reform thus far remains on strengthening external regulation, via amendment to TEQSA's powers. **More effective external enforcement while protecting academic freedom is welcome, but is better at responding once crises have emerged, not at ensuring good internal governance that prevents the formation of crises**.

Implications of the Broader Reform Environment for ANU

The ANU Governance Project welcomes the increased policy attention to governance quality in higher education sector-wide developments and the reform developments outlined above. They validate many of the issues identified through our engagements with the ANU community, and reinforce a national mandate for change. However, the university's experience through the Renew ANU restructure – marked by limited transparency, constrained participation, and high levels of community concern – underscores that the emphasis on external regulation and incremental reforms of

internal governance, while necessary, **will not be sufficient** to rebuild trust or ensure robust democratic governance at ANU.

For the ANU, key limitations of the emerging national reform measures include:

- A focus on **minimum standards** rather than best-practice leadership
- A reliance on **self-assessment and reporting**, which may not shift cultures where trust is low
- Absence of structural changes to **Council composition, authority, and information-sharing obligations**
- Limited mechanisms for **meaningful participation of staff and students in University decision making**
- Insufficient emphasis on **public mission, academic values, and collegial governance traditions.**

As Australia's national university, established by statute to serve the public interest, ANU has a responsibility to lead the sector in governance innovation. The Australian Governance Project's recommendations are aligned with national reform trajectories, but they are also more ambitious where necessary, providing concrete pathways for ANU to:

- Rebuild trust through genuine transparency and shared understanding of decision-making
- Strengthen representation and deliberation in governance structures
- Support and resource meaningful staff and student voice
- Embed academic values and public purpose at the core of institutional leadership
- Foster a culture of openness, shared responsibility, and respectful engagement.

Adopting the ANU Governance Project's recommendations will ensure that ANU not only meets emerging minimum standards but can set a new benchmark for participatory, accountable, and future-ready governance in Australian higher education.

Governance Challenges at the ANU

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's governing body consists of 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 elected by current staff or students. There is no requirement that other members have experience in the higher education sector.[1]

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*. **ANU has a higher proportion of elected representatives on Council than at many other universities across Australia – but they remain a minority.** Staff and students have limited representation and impact on key decision-making bodies at the ANU and are not in practice able to provide decisive 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.

While ANU Council remains the only governing body embedded in legislation, it can create subsidiary bodies to which it can delegate certain matters. Academic Board, for example, was created by Council and tasked with maintaining the highest standards in teaching, scholarship and research which form the basis of ANU's capacity to meet the TEQSA threshold standards. However, the 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. Currently, the Chair of Academic Board is appointed by the Vice-Chancellor, not elected, and thus faces a structural conflict in offering an independent voice of staff and students to the university Executive and Council. **As of October 2025 this places ANU firmly out of alignment with the Expert Council on University Governance Principle 3.1b, which requires that the chair of such a body be elected or appointed independently of senior management.**

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[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.

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 and has often failed to publish even non-detailed minutes in a timely manner. There are insufficient processes for connecting Council members with academic and professional staff in regular, transparent forums. **Council's ability to offer robust oversight is 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. Members of Academic Board have specifically reported that due to the Board's focus on approving curriculum and program reforms, they do not have the capacity to focus in-depth on broader strategic issues such as academic risk. **We lack a strategic, staff and student-led voice carrying assessments and information about academic risk and the on-the-ground realities of the university up to Council.** This is also a major theme across the sector, as documented in **the Expert Council on University Governance's emphasis on the lack of effective academic risk oversight in governing bodies**.

Staff and students have expressed significant frustration about the lack of transparency around Executive and Council 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 public institutions in the United States there is regular reporting of detailed financial information; livestreaming of meetings of governing bodies is common. **If you want to know what was discussed at the latest meeting of the University of Nebraska's Board of Regents, it is livestreamed and available the same day on YouTube; if you want to see detailed current and future budget figures disaggregated by College and work area for the University of Massachusetts, these details are publicly accessible** (University of Nebraska System 2025; University of Massachusetts Amherst 2025). These standards meet a community expectation that taxpayer-funded universities are transparent and accountable to the public.

Improving the quality of upwards 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 members, 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 (VC) 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. VC and university Executive salaries have grown even as student satisfaction has fallen, raising questions about how key performance indicators for university leaders are determined (Thrower 2025).

The total remuneration for ANU's Vice-Chancellor was even higher than the G08 average at $1.46 million in 2024. In response to community outcry, in October 2024, Vice-Chancellor Genevieve Bell committed to reducing her salary by 10%, and in September 2025 resigned. In October 2025, the Interim Recommendations from the Senate Inquiry into Quality of Governance in Higher Education Providers specified that university Councils should set Vice-Chancellor and senior Executives' remuneration within the benchmark range set by the federal Remuneration Tribunal. However, as a federal university, ANU already meets this requirement. Remuneration at the ANU and across the sector remains out of step with community and public expectations.

Executive management and external consultants

Like many universities, ANU has seen a proliferation of non-academic Executive management roles while 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 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. The ANU Governance Project has attempted to play a crucial role in creating opportunity for staff, students, and community stakeholders to have their say and be meaningfully heard during a time of institutional crisis.

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
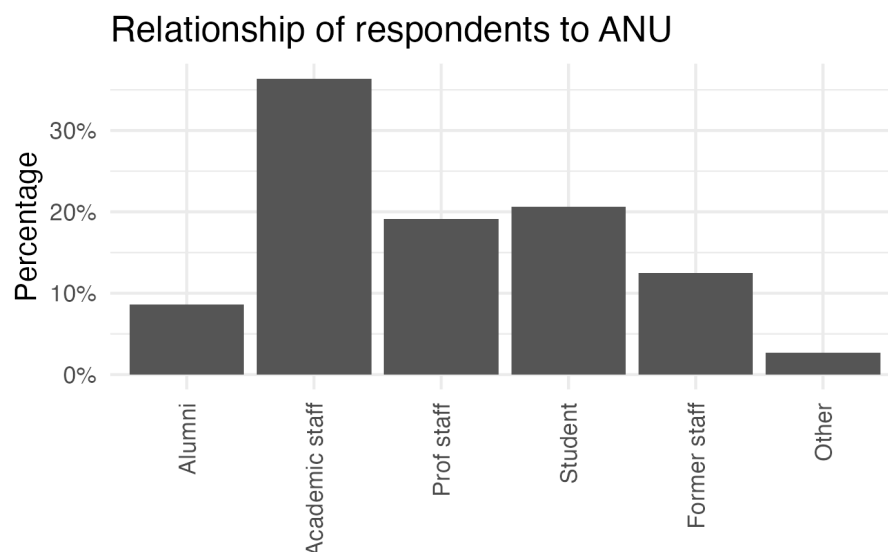
Source: ANU governance project survey, August 2025

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%).

During that period, we also ran small group discussions or 'kitchen table conversations' with 75 ANU staff and students. These one-hour conversations allowed members of the community to explore the impact and lived experience of ANU's governance and creatively identify suggestions for improvements.

In early September, we convened a governance workshop, which brought together over 40 participants from across Colleges, central portfolios, and student bodies to review the findings from our survey and conversations and help prioritise reforms. Every College was represented, alongside central service divisions, and members of senior leadership, graduate students, undergraduate students, and academic and professional staff.

In September and October 2025, we shared a draft version of this report for public consultation, requesting feedback to catch any errors or omissions. We are pleased to report that feedback on the report was positive and reaffirmed the core report findings; we have included further recommendations from the community in this final report. We also met with university leaders (Deans, Executives, and Council members including Interim Vice-Chancellor Rebekah Brown and Chancellor Julie Bishop) to share community-recommended reforms and identify areas of agreement between the university leadership, external stakeholders, and the community on governance reforms; this work is ongoing.

The body of evidence documented in the following chapters represents the most detailed community-led assessment of ANU governance to date, and to the best of our knowledge the first time such an in-depth study of experiences and community-led solutions for university governance has been conducted in Australia. More than that, this project represents a good faith effort by the ANU community to be part of the solution. ANU staff, former staff, students, alumni, and other members of the community have 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 or made time to seriously consider these community-led reforms.

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

Do you believe that the ANU needs to reconsider how it is governed?

1 = no change required and 10 = a complete overhaul.
Source: ANU governance project survey, August 2025
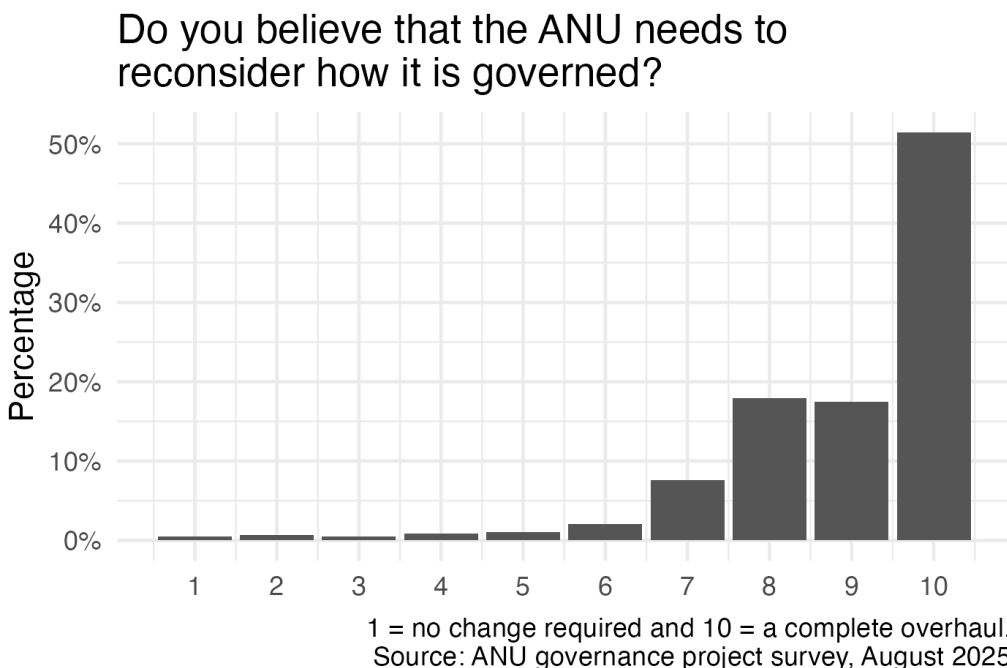
Over 96% percent of respondents agreed that they believed the ANU needed to reconsider how it is governed. More than 50% of respondents stated that they believed the ANU's governance required 'a complete overhaul'.

Figure 3: Satisfaction with current practices

How satisfied are you with
ANU's current practices of...?

Median, 66% & 95% intervals
of satisfaction ratings

1 = completely unsatisfied and 10 = completely satisfied
Source: ANU governance project survey, August 2025
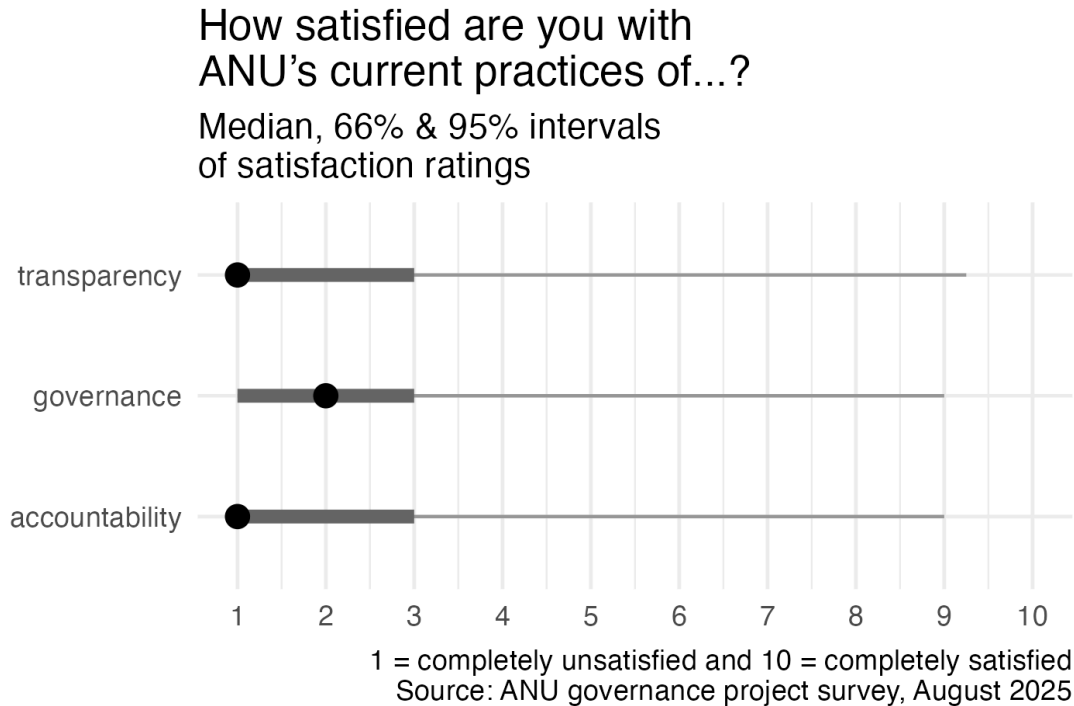
Figure 3 reveals how overwhelmingly dissatisfied the ANU community is with both practices of transparency and accountability. Views on overall governance are only marginally better.

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 Section 3: Values).

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 the Executive 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/serf 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.'*

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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, poor representation, 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 in decision making 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.
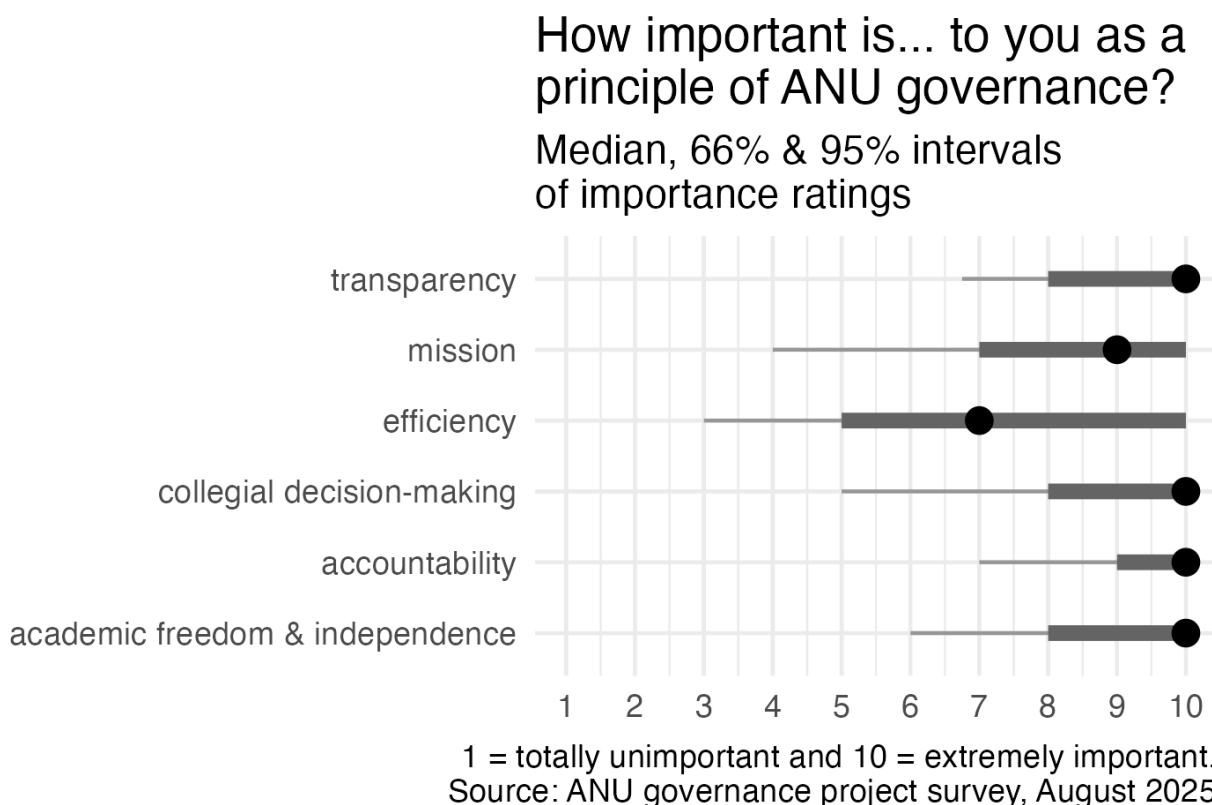
Section Three: Values Held by the ANU Community

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 and assisting where appropriate and where capacity and resourcing permits.

Figure 4: Importance of governance principles

How important is... to you as a principle of ANU governance?

Median, 66% & 95% intervals of importance ratings

1 = totally unimportant and 10 = extremely important.
Source: ANU governance project survey, August 2025

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

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> *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.

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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.'

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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.

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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.'

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> *'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: Solutions 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 and exacerbated academic risk.

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 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. The reforms discussed below emerged from the survey and kitchen table conversations, then were refined and developed further through the deliberative project workshop and the community consultation period for the draft version of this report.

This section presents the consolidated set of reforms, organised to provide a clear pathway for strengthening governance. It begins with reforms to the ANU's core governing bodies — proposing the creation of a new University Senate and setting out recommended changes to Council and Academic Board — and distinguishes between the reforms that require legislative amendment and those that can be implemented internally under existing Council authority. It then turns to a series of systemic governance reforms that apply across all levels of the University, including measures to strengthen transparency and accountability, improve incentives for good governance, and support the wellbeing and participation of staff and students. Many of these systemic reforms can be implemented by Council and the ANU Executive without requiring legislative reform.

1. Reform of ANU Governing Bodies

We lay out first solutions from the community that address the role, relationships, and practices of our core governing and representative bodies, including a call for the

establishment of a University Senate, reforms for Council, Academic Board, and a new Office of Internal Audit and Review.

The ANU, like most Australian universities, has a broken accountability loop in its internal governance system. According to the ANU Act of 1991, ANU's primary governing body, Council, is accountable only to itself – it is a self-perpetuating body. Council appoints the Chancellor, and the Chancellor leads and appoints the nominations committee which functionally appoints the majority of Council members (the Minister formally appoints these members but in practice the power to reject nominations is limited). In practice this means low accountability and a disincentive towards openness, transparency and accountability. How can Council members be expected to act independently of the Chancellor when we have embedded a conflict of interest directly into our university legislation? What incentive have we created for governing bodies to connect to their communities and stakeholders?

External accountability is weak:
The ANU Council is only weakly or indirectly accountable to external stakeholders (Government and the Australian public), principally via the regulator TEQSA, the Federal Education Minister and the Federal Parliament. As of November 2025 external accountability is in the process of being strengthened via the efforts of the Minister for Education and his Expert Council on University Governance, potential reforms to the TEQSA Act, and the ongoing Senate Inquiry into the Quality of Governance in Higher Education Providers. While welcome, reforms to external regulations are better geared to respond once crises have already emerged: they do not solve the problem of poor internal accountability.

Relying on external accountability can make it difficult for internal stakeholders to raise issues before they become major problems. It leaves the University's transparency and accountability systems dependent on good leaders rather than strong systems. Worse still, when problems arise within the University governance system neither internal stakeholders (staff and students) nor external stakeholders have constructive pathways to query and challenge decisions. The reputational damage ANU has sustained in 2025 is testament to the importance of having effective, legitimate internal pathways for staff and student concerns to be heard and addressed.

Internal accountability is absent: At the ANU, like most Australian universities, the ANU Council is currently structurally unaccountable to any internal stakeholders (staff and students) within the University. While we have a lower-level body, Academic Board, tasked with maintaining the quality of our teaching, scholarship, and research, the capacity of this body to support deep strategic thinking on academic risk and bringing the voice of staff and students to Council is limited by several factors:

- Currently, the Chair of Academic Board is appointed by the Vice-Chancellor, not elected, and thus faces a structural conflict in offering an independent voice of

staff and students to the University Executive and Council. **As of October 2025 this places ANU firmly out of alignment with the Expert Council on University Governance Principle 3.1b, which requires that the chair of such a body be elected or appointed independently of senior management.**

- Academic Board is tasked with assessing all changes to curricula and degrees, academic policies, issues of academic freedom, and all other issues related to quality of education and teaching at the University. This results in meetings where members receive hundreds, sometimes over a thousand, pages of detailed curriculum updates to parse before meetings. There is little capacity to engage in deep strategic thinking on academic risk and other systemic issues.

- 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.

As a result, there is no internal body that has capacity to offer internal accountability to Council.

Misalignment with governance best-practice: This accountability gap does not align with best practice governance standards in other sectors. In public companies shareholders delegate their power to boards, who direct the company to make and sell things. At the AGM shareholders get to say whether they think the CEO and the Board has done a good job. In Parliament, citizens vote for politicians, who work to produce public goods, and voters hold them accountable for doing so at election time. Here too, there is a clear accountability loop between governing bodies and their stakeholders. Internationally, top public sector universities in the United States and Europe typically have strong academic 'Senates', which offer academic oversight and a counterweight to the corporate management of the University to ensure these universities remain focused on their mission of producing public good for their societies.

The solution: below, we lay out solutions for addressing the broken accountability loop and misalignment with governance best practice in our governing bodies at the ANU. These community-led recommendations will ensure that ANU's governance is more resilient to future crises and that academic risk is better measured and mitigated.

We separate our recommendations by the body to which they relate: University Senate, Council, Academic Board, and an Office of Internal Audit and Review.

Longlasting, sustainable reform will require legislative reform of the ANU Act; interim measures can be adopted internally by ANU Council under its existing remit.

University Senate

Recommendation 1: Establish a University Senate.

Universities need a functional body for academic and community representation that is capable of holding governing bodies accountable.

A call for the establishment of a University Senate was one of the most common solutions put forward by the community in our project, alongside broader demands for improved staff and student participation in decision-making. As many participants stressed, a University Senate for the ANU 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.

Council would retain ultimate decision-making and governance oversight powers, but establishing a Senate would build an internal mechanism for direct accountability and community voice to provide a check on Council.

A University Senate would also build resilience into our national university.

When there are periods of crisis at our University, we need to have robust internal mechanisms to deliberate, address, and resolve them. A University Senate offers such a forum. An internal body for effective staff, student, and community representation would create space for internal deliberation, and help to rebuild social license.

Establishing a University Senate with the functions and composition outlined in this section would:

- enhance internal accountability, reducing reliance on regulatory, ministerial and parliamentary oversight;
- create channels for internal discourse and assessment of academic risk, including on difficult issues such as change management
- align with standards for the governance of public companies and institutions;
- promote transparency and trust through open proceedings, preventing scandals and placing an internal check on the Executive and Council;
- Reinforce university autonomy and responsibility for governance.

Academic, alumni, and faculty senates are already institutionalised in some of the world-leading public universities as a core feature of good governance. These bodies operate successfully across American public and private universities, including the University of California system, where University of California Berkeley maintains its position as the highest-ranked public US university. Notably, UC Berkeley's faculty senate exercises even stronger authority, including budgetary oversight. Senates

provide representative and deliberative oversight over corporate governance - they are the cornerstone of good university governance at the University of Oxford and Cambridge, and even Harvard University is in the process of establishing a faculty senate in response to governance crises and threats to academic freedom. **Establishing a University Senate at the ANU would bring us into line with governance best-practice at top global universities**.

How should a University Senate be designed?

At our project workshop, we canvassed several models for a Senate, including reforming Academic Board as an act of Council, establishing a new, separate Senate body as an act of Council, and amendment to the ANU Act to establish a Senate as a permanent institution.

> *Recommendation 1.1: The ANU and its stakeholders should commit to a co-design process with the community to shape a new University Senate.*

The final design of the ANU's first University Senate must be a collective project inclusive of the whole of the ANU community and its stakeholders. We recommend the ANU and its stakeholders commit to a co-design process with the community to shape the specifics of a new University Senate, 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, ANU should adhere to the engagement principles and standards laid out in the Australian Public Service (APS) Framework for Engagement and Participation and international best practice standards on deliberative forms of engagement from the OECD.

We offer here a model for consideration by the community, by university leaders, and by external stakeholders, based on amendment to the ANU Act.

A Permanent University Senate for the ANU

> *Recommendation 1.2: The ANU Act should be amended to establish a University Senate as a representative accountability body.*

Legislative reform of the ANU Act is the most direct, effective and sustainable pathway to establishing a robust University Senate at the ANU.

Institutionalising a University Senate in law is the best way to ensure longevity of this accountability body and guard against reversal or neglect by future ANU administrations. **Without legislative reform, a Senate could only be created as an act of**

Council; and it could be dissolved at any time by Council. It also provides an opportunity to build a new best-practice model of a university senate appropriate for Australia's national university, incorporating representation from First Nations, Government, and community leaders alongside staff and students.

Legislative reform would ensure that the relationship between the University Senate and Council could be appropriately balanced. Fundamentally, Council's self-perpetuating nature can only be reformed through amendment to the ANU Act, given the composition of the nominations committee (through which the Chancellor leads the appointment of the majority of members of Council) is embedded in the ANU Act.

Via legislative reform, core accountability powers for the Senate to provide a check against Council could be considered, including participation in appointments of Council members, and formal approval of major structural changes. Below, we provide further details on the potential composition and powers of a University Senate.

Composition of University Senate

Composition of the University Senate could include elected representatives of continuing and fixed-term staff, graduate and undergraduate student cohorts, alumni, a minimum representation of First Nations members including representatives from the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, and the public, with public representatives appointed by the Minister, the Federal Parliament, the ACT Legislative Assembly and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. Current staff and student members should form a significant majority.

The Chair should be elected by members of the Senate to support transparent and democratic decision making.

The University Senate is conceived as an internal accountability mechanism that enables structured engagement between the university community and Council. Its purpose is to provide a regular venue for questioning, review, and coordinated scrutiny of major decisions, while leaving the authority of the Council intact.

While Faculty and Academic Senates in other institutions in Australia and overseas can be exclusive representative bodies for academic staff only, we recommend a broader composition that represents our full community and is appropriate for our national university.

It would function as a large, deliberative oversight body representing key stakeholders, with a membership that balances academic and professional staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students, and public-interest representatives such as Ministerial and parliamentary nominees, First Nations representatives, and other community stakeholders.

We forward this model as an innovative way to **rebuild the social license of our university,** better connecting the university to the Australian public via incorporation of public and community stakeholders.

<center>**Functions and Responsibilities**</center>

A Senate should be imbued with key powers and functions, including providing a voice for the community, scrutiny of Council, an accountability function, and contribute to shared decision-making.

Core accountability functions should include participation in the nomination of external Council members, and the capacity to review and question key institutional reports. The Senate's reporting line to and check on Council should be direct and not filtered by the University Executive. Mechanisms for two-way community communication between the Senate and Council should be formal and regular, and could even include a structured 'question time' - inspired by that of Australian Parliament and previously practiced at the University of Melbourne.

While additional functions should be identified through the co-design process, core proposed functions of a University Senate have been outlined in the table below.

Table 1: Core Functions of a University Senate

Purpose	Function
Voice	Require that items be placed on the agenda of Council and meetings of the ANU Executive
Scrutiny	Call members of Council and the Executive to answer questions at formal meetings
	Require formal responses from Council to written questions
	Require that management or Council provide requested documents
Accountability	Participate in the Nominations Committee to select Council members
	In limited and exceptional circumstances, recall Council members
	Receive and question key institutional reports (e.g. Annual Report)
	Review performance of the governing body
Shared decision-making	Approve major structural changes to colleges or research schools
	Advise management on change-management proposals, including receiving a statement of reasons if advice is not followed

Relationship with existing governing and management bodies

The Council would remain the accountable authority with complete responsibility for the control and management of the institution, and the University Executive would remain in control of operational matters. The Senate would provide oversight, accountability, and a venue for stakeholder voice, but it would not have the authority to overrule Council decisions beyond a small set of narrowly defined approval functions.

The University Senate could complement or replace the existing Academic Board.

- If the former, the relationship between and scope of responsibilities of Academic Board and the Senate would need to be carefully delineated to avoid duplication.

- If the latter, longstanding issues that currently prevent Academic Board from being able to fulfill its existing responsibility to facilitate information flow and debate between the academic community and the senior leadership of the University would need to be addressed (we offer a set of solutions for this under Recommendation 3). Additionally, mechanisms to safeguard academic freedom and independence would need to be strengthened in order to allow for external community representation (for example in overseas institutions some of these issues are resolved by creating a sub-committee staffed only with current staff and student representatives to deliver curriculum reform and program approvals).

Operations and Establishment

The Senate could meet frequently, potentially six times each year, and its meetings would be open to the public, supported by livestreams, recordings, and published summaries to enhance transparency.

Establishing a University Senate would require amendments to the Australian National University Act 1991, along with consequential amendments to the Australian National University (Governance) Statute 2024. These legislative changes would create a new Part of the Act that establishes the new accountability body, sets out its functions and powers, prescribes its composition, and empowers it to determine its own operating rules. They would also adjust existing procedures for appointing and removing Council members and include transitional provisions allowing the Minister to establish an initial new accountability body that would subsequently determine its own operating rules.

Parliamentary support for the establishment of the first University Senate for the ANU would not only provide statutory protection for the University community by preventing Council from dissolving the body during a future crisis if scrutiny becomes inconvenient,

but **clearly signal that the Australian Parliament expects strong internal accountability and stakeholder participation in university governance**.

ANU Council

Recommendation 2: Reform Council to improve transparency, incentivise connection to the community, and enhance its deliberative functions.

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. Reforming ANU Council requires a combination of legislative and internal reform 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.

Four thematic sets of sub-recommendations laid out below. They include:
- Composition of Council and its Committees
- Enhancement of staff and student voice in Council deliberations
- Accountability and transparency
- Deliberative quality of council

Recommendations that require legislative reform are clearly marked, but Council can undertake the majority of these recommendations under its existing remit..

Composition of Council and its Committees

Recommendation 2.1: The ANU Act should be amended to require that at least half of Council members are elected staff and student representatives and that the Chair of Academic Board is a voting member.

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, underrepresents 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. Participants in our project called for the *ANU Act* to be amended so that **at least half of Council members are elected staff and student representatives. This should include the Chair of Academic Board as a voting, ex-officio member**. 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.

This recommendation would require legislative reform of the ANU Act.

> *Recommendation 2.2: The Council skills matrix should be updated to require that a majority of Council members have significant expertise in higher education and/or public administration*

As of October 2024, the Senate Inquiry Interim Report recommends that "universities set and implement a minimum proportion of members with public administration and higher education expertise on university governing bodies." We recommend that at the ANU a **majority of Council members should have significant expertise in higher education or in public institutions**. This would retain an important role for external expertise and diversity of expertise on Council, but ensure that most Council members are familiar with the work of university and other public institutions that offer public good to Australian society.

An additional step could be to search initially for external appointed council members among ANU's alumni community. This could help to rebuild trust by ensuring that governance is shaped by those who are most invested in the University's and its future.

This recommendation would not require legislative reform and would help to demonstrate ANU commitment to the Senate Inquiry's Interim Report recommendations.

> *Recommendation 2.3: The Chancellor should appoint half the Nominations Committee from amongst the elected staff and student members of Council.*

Under the ANU Act, the Nominations Committee of Council is responsible for making recommendations to the Minister for Education for the appointment of the seven external members of Council – the majority of Council members. The Chancellor chairs this committee and determines its six members.

We recommend that the composition of the nominations committee on Council be altered to increase staff and student voice in nominating appointed members of Council. Specifically, we recommend that the Chancellor be required to appoint half of the Nominations Committee from among the elected staff and student members of Council.

This would require the Council's approval of a revision to the Nominations Committee Charter, not legislative reform.

> *Recommendation 2.4: Council's Remuneration Committee should include elected staff and student Council members, the elected Chair of Academic Board, and publish how its remuneration decisions are linked to clear performance metrics.*

ANU Council's Remuneration Committee is currently comprised of Chancellor (ex-officio, as Chair), the Pro-Chancellor (ex-officio, as Deputy Chair), the Chair of Council's Finance Committee (ex-officio), and, if required, due to an ex-officio member holding roles of both Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Finance Committee, up to one other Council member appointed by the Council.

Members of the ANU community expressed concern that the remuneration of ANU Executives was out of step with community expectations, and that the process for determining the remuneration was opaque and carried risks of misaligned incentives.

Composition of the Remuneration Committee should be altered to increase staff and student voice in determining the remuneration and conditions of employment of the Vice-Chancellor, monitor the Vice-Chancellor's performance, the process of appointments for Vice-Chancellors, and to monitor, review, and where appropriate make recommendations to the Vice-Chancellor on the remuneration and the conditions of employment of the University's Executive.

We recommend that the Remuneration Committee include a minimum proportion of elected staff and student Council members, the elected Chair of Academic Board as an ex-officio member, and that the Committee should annually publish how its remuneration decisions are linked to clear performance metrics.

This recommendation could be implemented by Council reforming the Remunerations Committee Charter and would not require legislative reform.

Implementing this recommendation would demonstrate ANU alignment with the Expert Council on University Governance's Principles, whereby governing bodies are accountable for establishing a remuneration framework that reflects ethical considerations, including public trust, reputational risk, and the University's social context and purpose as a publicly funded institution.

Enhancement of Staff and student voice

Recommendation 2.5: Staff and student representatives on Council should be compensated and incentivised adequately for their time and contribution.

Currently, appointed members of Council are financially compensated at $35,000 annually (or $75,000 for the Chancellor), while staff and student elected representatives on Council contribute their time without any compensation.

We recommend that all Council members be incentivised and compensated for the time they dedicate to the governing of the ANU. For elected staff members, we recommend this be calculated as a time loading. For students, we recommend arrangements be made to award course credit.

Recommendation 2.6: Terms for elected Council members should be staggered to enable handover and mentorship opportunities.

Currently, the terms of elected academic staff members start and end at the same time (notwithstanding those who serve additional terms). This makes it difficult for incoming staff members of the Council to find their feet, despite informal handover practices.

We recommend that terms for elected Council members be staggered – with three of the six staff and student members elected and taking up their role in one year, followed by the remaining three in the second year. Additionally, we recommend considering how student members' terms can be staggered.

This would be a simple, free, and effective reform to ensure that current elected Council members can mentor new incoming members on Council processes and how best to ensure community concerns are conveyed and understood at the Council level.

Improving accessibility and transparency of Council

Recommendation 2.7: Meetings of the Council should be livestreamed and recorded for dissemination to staff, students, alumni, and the general public, for non-confidential items.

Staff and student participants in our project consistently called for greater transparency, especially at the Council level. There was a direct call from some participants for live-streaming Council meetings and for broadening staff and student access to Council as observers.

As noted earlier in this report, livestreaming of university governing bodies is not unusual at public institutions in the United States, and meets a community expectation that tax-payer funded universities are transparent and accountable to the public.

Livestreamed Council meetings could be made available to the community within a few days after the meeting (if livestreamed via YouTube, this would be near-instant).

In addition, we recommend better communicating to staff and students how they can attend non-confidential portions of Council meetings as observers. Currently, the process to do so (contacting the Director of Governance and asking to attend) is not widely known.

Recommendation 2.8: Detailed minutes of Council should be made available within a week following meetings.

Minutes should be made available in a timely manner (we recommend within a week) after every Council meeting, and should be at a level of detail that allows public understanding of the strategic considerations made at Council. We recommend emulating the University of Arizona as an example of best-practice detail for governing body minutes.

This practice should be codified in the ANU Council Charter.

Recommendation 2.9: ANU Council should establish a clear and transparent framework through which agenda items at Council are made confidential.

While there are items discussed at Council that must remain confidential, the default must become transparency. We need a clear framework through which agenda items are designated as confidential, erring in favour of transparency where possible. Elected

members of Council should be involved in the process of determining transparency or confidentiality. This framework should be codified in the Council Charter.

Improving information flows to Council

> *Recommendation 2.10: Council members should have access to sources of information that are independent of the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor.*

Currently, while Council members are permitted to request any information they need, all requests for information from Council members are required to be made through the Chancellor, the Vice-Chancellor, or the University Secretary.

We recommend removing this requirement, and allowing Council members the right to request any information they need from any university source, in order to improve the independence and quality of information provided to Council members.

Additionally, Recommendation 4 calls for the establishment of a new, independent and adequately resourced office for internal audit and review. Once established, this would be a key channel of information for Council members that is independent of the Executive.

> *Recommendation 2.11: The Council Agenda should include, as a standing, non-confidential item for discussion, a report from Academic Board that provides an assessment of the impact of decisions of the Executive on research, teaching, and ANU's strategic goals. This agenda item must always be open for debate.*

Currently, the Chair of the Academic Board attends Council meetings as an ex officio, non-voting member. They present an annual report to Council but otherwise only make reports to Council sporadically when asked. We recommend that a report from Academic Board focused on an assessment of the impact of the Executives' decisions on research, teaching, and ANU's strategic goals.

This must be tabled as a standing, non-confidential agenda item to create a systematic and regular reporting line to Council on ground level impacts on teaching and research. This is designed to ensure that academic risk is systematically considered and debated as part of Council's deliberations.

This will require amendment of the Council Charter and Standing Orders.

Recommendation 2.12: Council should develop a practice of regular engagement sessions between Council members and members of the community.

There is an urgent need to bridge the disconnect between Council members and the community. Appointed Council members have no structured program to assist in learning how ANU is organised or functions as an institution, nor to engage regularly to monitor and address issues in the community.

We recommend a Council committee to be formed to facilitate engagement with students and staff. The structure and program of this engagement could replicate the example of the current Council committee on safety and wellbeing by conducting regular engagements across the university community. In these gatherings, Council members would have an opportunity to hear from staff and students about the issues most important to them.

These events could also include staff and student members who do not currently have formalised arrangements to meet with the community beyond their regular work and study areas.

Improving the deliberative quality of council

Recommendation 2.13: New, bespoke training material should be developed, relevant to the ANU's unique status as Australia's sole national university, to improve the training and professional development offered to Council members.

The professional development and induction materials offered to incoming Council members is critical to developing their understanding of ANU's functions and capacity to govern ANU effectively.

Council members are currently offered training and inductions that focus on individual meetings with senior university leadership, and an Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) course on university governance. The AICD course largely applies corporate governance practices to the university sector. It includes excellent material on understanding financial matters at universities, but lacks coverage of academic risk and sufficient emphasis on the importance of ensuring effective information flows between Council members and the community.

We recommend the ANU invest in developing new, bespoke training material relevant to the ANU's unique status as Australia's sole national university, and require that incoming Council members undertake this training. This work must be done through insourcing, not use of external consultants (see Recommendation 19).

This should include how to assess and address issues of academic risk, common mechanisms for effective information flows in cases of best-practice university governance, as well as a deep overview of the unique structures and governance settings of the ANU.

Implementing this recommendation would demonstrate ANU action in response to the [Senate Inquiry Interim Report](#) **Recommendation 8** (that universities adopt a best-practice model for the induction and continuous professional development of council members, including governance training where appropriate).

Recommendation 2.14: Update Council Standing Orders to improve the quality of deliberation during Council meetings.

To improve the quality of discussion and debate during meetings, Council should adopt clearer principles of deliberation and amend the Council Standing Orders accordingly. This includes three recommendations focused on balanced participation, free-flowing debate, and motions to close debate. Specifically:

Recommendation 2.14.1: Council members should be able to speak more than once on a matter so that questions, clarifications and responses can occur naturally, promoting more effective oversight of decisions.

Recommendation 2.14.2: The Chair can propose a motion to close debate on an issue, but this should only occur with a majority vote of Council members.

Recommendation 2.15: Council should meet more frequently - at least 12 times per year.

Current practices of limited deliberation have developed at Council in part to manage the compression of the enormous scope of its agenda into limited Council meeting times. Council meetings are already long and often run overtime.

To give Council sufficient time for deliberative debate and greater capacity to conduct oversight of the University, we recommend that Council meet more frequently than its current six scheduled meetings per year.

We recommend that Council meet at least 12 times per year. If necessary, some of these meetings could be conducted online, or two meetings held back to back, at the discretion of Council.

This requires reform of the ANU Governance Statute.

Academic Board

Recommendation 3: Reform Academic Board to strengthen oversight of academic mission, transparency, and quality of information flows.

Academic Board currently serves as the primary body to represent the academic interests of the University. **It is a crucial pillar of university governance, as made clear in the Expert Council on University Governance report**.

Academic Board 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, the Board currently 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. The community reported to us ongoing issues which impact the Board's ability to fulfill its existing mandate, including:

- **Member overburden**: major issues of information flow into and out of the Board, including members being overwhelmed with high volumes of paperwork ahead of meetings (often over 1000 pages), most of which relate to curriculum reform and not broader strategic issues
- **Minimal strategic capacity**: capacity for strategic discussions on whole of University issues or academic risk remains minimal due to the broad remit of Board, the large number of agenda items, an opaque process determining which agenda items are for discussion, and the need for better summaries of the information included in information packs.
- **Insufficient independence from senior management**: The Board in its current form is not sufficiently and structurally independent from senior management (for example in some instances the community reported that the Board has declined to take steps to review the actions of the University Executive when it might have done so). The Board has no formal role in evaluating University resourcing plans before they go to Council and cannot therefore ensure that key information about the impact of planned budget changes on quality of research, academic risk, and alignment with ANU's national mission gets to Council.

We recommend an immediate and urgent strengthening of Academic Board's capacity to scrutinise issues of academic risk and strategic issues that impact the whole University, and to provide independent and high quality strategic advice to Council.

This will improve information flows up to and assist ANU in aligning with the Expert Council on University Governance's Principle 3 (Independence), which includes the principles that academic bodies such as Academic Board:

- "work effectively with the governing body and its committees to ensure academic risk is effectively managed"; and

- "regularly report its activities to the governing body, including on academic quality, research and certification of awards"

Council can undertake this work immediately via reform of the Academic Board Charter.

Recommendation 3.1: Strengthen the Academic Board's focus on strategic issues, including alignment with academic mission and academic risk, by updating its objectives and formal responsibilities.

- **Recommendation 3.1.1:** Academic Board should have as part of its objective and mission a focus on the academic mission of the University, in addition to its current focus on maintaining the highest standards in teaching, scholarship and research.
- **Recommendation 3.1.2:** The formal responsibilities of Academic Board should include:
  - advising on the impact of change management or major institutional reforms on the University's academic mission and the quality of teaching, scholarship and research.
  - reviewing the annual budget and reporting to Council on the impact of proposed resourcing on the national mission and quality of teaching, scholarship and research.
  - reporting to the Council on the impact of governance on the quality of teaching, scholarship, and research, and the University's academic mission.
  - providing strategic advice to Council on any matter related to the core mission of the University.

Recommendation 3.2: Conduct a rapid investigation to investigate how Academic Board can more effectively discharge its existing responsibility to provide a forum to facilitate information flow and debate between the academic community and the senior Executive.

While Academic Board currently has a core responsibility to facilitate information flow and debate between the academic community and the senior leadership of the University, our assessment is that this duty is not currently being adequately met.

The recommendations in this section will go a significant way to addressing these issues of information flow and are based on broad community consultation including with those who have experience serving on Academic Board. However, to ensure all possible solutions are brought to light and considered, we recommend a rapid assessment of additional ideas to facilitate information flow and address systemic issues around the Board's role & power at ANU.

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Recommendation 3.3: The Chair of Academic Board should be elected.

The Chair of the Academic Board is currently appointed by the Vice-Chancellor. This reduces the Academic Board's capacity to effectively operate independently of senior management as a deliberative body that represents the academic voice and has a direct reporting line to the Council. In order to ensure the independence of the Chair from the Executive, the Chair should be elected rather than appointed.

This would require an amendment to the Academic Board Charter (Clause 6) and would **align the ANU with the recommendations of the Expert Council on University Governance, including their specific Principle 3.1a that requires the chair of academic bodies to be elected or appointed independently of senior management**.

Recommendation 3.4: Academic Board should review the annual budget before it is taken to the Council for approval. The Vice-Chancellor should be required to engage with, and take the views of Academic Board into account, regarding proposals for institutional change and resource allocation.

The current Charter requires the Academic Board to advise the Vice-Chancellor and Council only on matters related to issues such as academic freedom. We recommend that the remit of the Academic Board be broadened to include matters of institutional change and resource allocation.

This will help to ensure that key information about the impact of planned budget changes on quality of research, academic risk, and alignment with ANU's national mission gets to Council. Having an effective mechanism for internal staff and student deliberation over resourcing is crucial to ensuring the long-term resilience of our institution, especially given continued funding shortages across the higher education sector.

Under this recommendation, operational responsibility for creation of budget & resourcing planning remains with the Executive, and final decision-making power regarding budgets and resourcing remains with Council; this recommendation is for Academic Board to have review and advisory powers to ensure high quality information gets to Council.

In order for this to occur, Academic Board members must be provided with clear proposals from the Vice-Chancellor for resource allocations to portfolios and colleges with reasonable notice ahead of the consideration of annual budgets by Council.

Such proposals and the Board's review must be evidence-based and produced in writing.

> *Recommendation 3.5: Meetings of Academic Board should be livestreamed and recorded for dissemination to staff, students, alumni, and the general public, for non-confidential items.*

To align with best practice that we recommend at the Council level (Recommendation 2.7), and to respond to community calls for greater transparency of our governing bodies, Academic Board meetings should be livestreamed and recorded for dissemination to staff and students of the University, with the exception of confidential items.

As noted under Recommendation 2.7, this is already an established practice at comparable top public universities overseas.

> *Recommendation 3.6: Improve the quality of information to Board members by providing a one-page summary of the strategic choice being put forward for the Board's consideration for each agenda item, allowing members to recommend changes in the format of reports, and to require members of Executive portfolios be available to answer questions upon request ahead of meetings.*

Currently, relevant staff in Executive portfolios are responsible for the development and preparation of reports and other papers to be presented to the Board. Participants in our project explained that the quality of summarised information in these information packs enormously impacted their capacity to make informed decisions.

Board members reported being overwhelmed with extensive information packs (often over 1000 pages long). One-page summaries at the start of each agenda item or paper for consideration would make the task of assessing this information more achievable.

To ensure that board members have the access to the best quality information ahead of meetings, we also recommend that elected members of the Board be permitted to request a change in format of reports including the inclusion of additional data, and to request a member of the relevant Executive portfolio be available to answer questions upon request before the Board meeting.

> ### *Recommendation 3.7: Establish a standing committee of Academic Board on academic risk and strategic initiatives.*

This recommendation is designed to create capacity for in-depth discussion and oversight of core issues of academic risk and major strategic issues likely to impact the quality of research and education at the ANU and to prevent mission drift.

Given the impending co-design of the next ANU strategy and other major changes at the University, a standing committee to capture, debate, and convey staff and student views on these issues is urgent.

This is intended to improve information flows to Academic Board, especially given the extensive agenda at the full board level.

A key activity of the committee would be to produce regular reports to go to Council on the impact of decisions of senior Executives, including assessment of the impact of (Recommendation 3.8).

> ### *Recommendation 3.8: The Academic Board agenda should include, as a standing, non-confidential item, a report to Council that provides an assessment of the impact of Executive decisions on research, teaching, academic risk, and ANU's strategic goals.*

Recommendation 3.8 ensures that a regular written report is provided from the standing committee established under Recommendation 3.7 and that there is a direct reporting line to Council from Academic Board on core issues of academic risk and major strategic issues likely to impact the quality of research and education at the ANU and to prevent mission drift. We have described this as an assessment of the impact of Executive decisions on research, teaching, academic risk, and ANU's strategic goals, but the item should include any issues related to the above areas that are deemed necessary by the Board to convey regularly to Council.

Recommendation 2.11 requires Council to include on this regular written report on its agenda as a standing, non-confidential item.

This will require amendment of both ANU Council Charter and the Academic Board Charter.

> ### *Recommendation 3.9: Review and reform the Academic Quality Assurance Committee and other committees underneath Academic Board as necessary to ensure high quality information reaches Academic Board and to address Academic Board overload.*

Beyond our direct recommendation for the creation of a committee to address academic risk and strategic issues (recommendation 3.7 & 3.8), we also recommend reviewing and reforming as necessary the Academic Quality Assurance Committee and other committees under Academic Board, to clarify responsibilities and reporting lines with the aim of reducing overburden issues on Academic Board and liberating capacity for Board deliberation of strategic matters.

Recommendation 3.10: Academic Board membership should be expanded to include two representatives of casual and fixed-term staff.

In line with our Recommendation 24, two positions for casual or fixed-term academic staff should be included in the Academic Board.

We recommend two such positions so that the two members can support each other in preparing and representing their community effectively at Academic Board.

Eligibility criteria for such positions should be determined in consultation with casual and sessional staff representatives.

Recommendation 3.11: Academic Board membership should be expanded to include both Masters and Doctoral student representatives

Currently, Academic Board includes two student representatives, one undergraduate and one postgraduate, both appointed by the Vice-Chancellor after consultation with the student association.

Given the importance of embedding student voice throughout the University, we recommend expanding representation to ensure that both Masters and Doctoral student cohorts are represented at Academic Board.

This is especially urgent given the focus at the ANU on increasing postgraduate enrolment numbers for 2026.

Recommendation 3.12: Staff and student representatives on the Academic Board should be compensated and incentivised adequately for their time and contribution.

Academic and professional staff and student representatives on Academic Board contribute their time voluntarily and on top of existing workloads. Academic staff are overloaded, and professional staff are unrealistically informed that they cannot work on Board issues during business hours.

Given that Academic Board needs to take on a more substantive strategic role for the University, we recommend that all members be incentivised and compensated for the time they dedicate to their Academic Board responsibilities.

For elected and ex-officio staff members, we recommend this be calculated as a time loading. Professional staff specifically must have their contributions recognised as part of their core employment tasks at the University and permitted to prepare for Board meetings during business hours. For students, we recommend arrangements be made to award course credit. For casual staff members appropriate rates of remuneration should apply.

Internal Audit and Review Office

Recommendation 4: ANU should establish and resource an 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. Our recommendation is that an independent audit and review office be established in 2026 to report directly 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.

2. Reform of ANU systems and processes

This section sets out Recommendations 5-30 for reforms to ANU's systems and processes. These are specific mechanisms and proposals to improve practices, processes, and policies so that the University's operations more closely align with the ANU community's values of good governance. Most of these measures could be implemented directly by Council or the Executive – with the exception of Recommendation 5 (Chancellor should be elected), which requires legislative reform.

The recommendations are grouped by theme under the following headings:

- Leadership practices and culture
- First Nations voice in governance
- Financial and budget transparency
- Regular review of administrative and governance policies
- Consultancies and Insourcing
- Workload policies
- Performance reviews
- Equity, diversity, and inclusion data and policy
- Staff psychosocial safety, satisfaction, and wellbeing

Leadership appointments, practices and culture

The ANU community raised concerns about the proliferation of Executive positions, opaque appointment processes, and misalignment between institutional priorities and the incentives facing senior leaders. Community members expressed strong concern that excessive Executive salaries and the expanding size of the leadership group risk attracting leadership that is misaligned with the values of collegiality and public service. There were widespread concerns that senior leaders are too distant from the broader university community, and that greater visibility, accountability, and opportunities for two-way dialogue are required to rebuild credibility and trust. Additionally, the community expressed overwhelming support for electing or endorsing key university leaders. During the project workshop, staff and students considered these issues in greater detail and recommended a formal election for the Chancellor and an endorsement mechanism for the Vice-Chancellor and Deans.

The following recommendations outline reforms to leadership selection, remuneration, accountability, and engagement.

Recommendation 5: The 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 the Chancellor.

University leaders are elected at top universities in the UK and Ireland, including at the [National University of Ireland](#), [University College Dublin](#), [University of Oxford](#), and the [University of Cambridge](#). At these universities, candidates develop public campaigns and hold events with the community or staff and students to listen to their views and build support.

Election of the most senior leader at the ANU would instill this office with community legitimacy, build accountability, and directly incentivise senior leadership to remain responsive to staff and student concerns.

Election of the Chancellor would require changes to legislative reform of the *ANU Act*.

Recommendation 6: Deans and the Vice-Chancellor should be appointed through a transparent process including staff and student feedback and endorsement.

Participants in our project called for greater participation in selecting future Deans and Vice-Chancellors, as senior academic leaders of the community.

While some in the community called for direct elections for these positions, others preferred to establish alternative mechanisms of community endorsement that ensured internal and external candidates were on an equal playing field.

We recommend that, at a minimum, the appointments process for our Deans and the Vice-Chancellor should include:

- Broad consultation with staff and students on any new appointments of Deans or Vice-Chancellor, on the process, position description, KPIs, internal or external search, etc.
- Include, where possible, staff and student members of the ANU community on the selection committee.
- Allow staff and students to apply to join a "community stakeholder committee", which will participate in evaluating short-listed candidates alongside other stakeholder meetings that often occur as part of Dean and Vice-Chancellor selection. Shortlisted candidates will make a presentation to this set of stakeholders, for example on their intended strategy for leading the University – including time to take questions. Several delegated members of the community stakeholder committee should summarise community feedback and report back to the selection committee.

○ This meeting could be conducted confidentially but must be open to all members of the community stakeholder committee.

Greater community participation in the selection of Deans and Vice-Chancellors, as with Recommendation 5 above, would instill these academic leaders with greater internal legitimacy.

This adjusted appointments process for Deans and the Vice-Chancellor can be pursued via reform of Australian National University (Governance) Statute 2024 and the "Procedure: Appointments - Senior Management Contracts for University Executive and Deans".

Recommendation 7: Research School Directors should be appointed through a transparent process including staff and student feedback and endorsement.

Closed and opaque appointments processes were identified in the Nixon Review as a major driver of poor culture at the ANU and must be urgently addressed. Our recommendation would allow for a confidential external search, although we advocate that the default should be transparency.

We recommend that, at a minimum, the appointments process for School Directors should include:

- Broad consultation with staff and students on any new appointments of Directors, on the process, position description, KPIs, internal or external search, etc.
- The inclusion, where possible, members from schools on the Selection committee. This must be in line with existing ANU policy, which includes a requirement that members of the Selection committee hold appointments equal to or higher in seniority than the intended new appointment.
- A requirement for shortlisted candidates to make a presentation to all staff – for example on their intended strategy for leading the research school – including time to take questions. This meeting could be conducted confidentially but must be open to all school staff. Several delegated staff should summarise feedback from the school and report back to the Selection committee. Existing ANU policy requires that this not include a formal ranking process of candidates.
- Allowing staff (and potentially students) to apply to join a representative stakeholder committee, which will participate in evaluating short-listed candidates alongside other stakeholder meetings that often occur as part of Director selection.

We have developed a standalone paper on appointments for Research School Directors with further details on this recommendation.

Recommendation 8: The selection criteria and KPIs for University Executive positions, including the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellors, and Pro Vice-Chancellor, should be revised and published, and include clear thresholds, KPIs, standards and alignment with community values outlined in this document.

This recommendation is intended to offer more transparent and regular awareness of the KPIs of senior leaders and managers at the ANU. In particular, communicating this information in terms of how it aligns with the values of good governance identified by members of the ANU community would be a good way to demonstrate connectedness between Executive and leadership appointments and the community, and re-establish trust.

Recommendation 8 is intended to layer on top of recommendation 2.4, regarding the revised composition of the Remuneration Committee in Council, and Recommendations 5 and 6, on appointment mechanisms for senior university Executives.

Recommendation 9: Senior Executive salaries should be rationalised and fixed as a transparent percentage loading on professor salaries.

Executive remuneration should not be individually negotiated but tied to a clear, transparent structure based on academic salary loadings.

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.

This recommendation builds on and extends the Senate Inquiry Interim Report recommendation 4, which recommends university Councils set the vice-chancellors' and senior Executives' remuneration within the appropriate classification and remuneration range identified by the federal Remuneration Tribunal. It extends this Senate Inquiry Interim recommendation in ways that align closely with the Expert Council on University Governance Principle 8.2 on Remuneration, particularly the focus on "ethical considerations, including public trust, reputational risk and the university's social context and purpose as a publicly funded institution".

Recommendation 9 is intended to layer on top of Recommendation 2.4, regarding the revised composition of the Remuneration Committee in Council, and Recommendations 5 and 6, on appointment mechanisms for senior university Executives.

Recommendation 10: The number of senior Executive positions should be reviewed and rationalised to ensure the Executive team remains proportionate and connected to the University's mission.

Related to Recommendation 9, the rationale for the size of the current senior Executive at the ANU was a major focus of critique from participants in the project, particularly as lower-level staff faced significant cuts.

This recommendation is for a one-off review and reset of the size of the University Executive team, ensuring the size of the Executive team remains proportionate to the University's size and mission.

This recommendation builds on and extends the Expert Council on University Governance's emphasis on increasing transparency of remuneration of senior Executives, connection to KPIs, and demonstrating the value of the senior leadership team in achieving the University's mission.

Recommendation 11: Senior University Leaders, including elected and appointed Council members, the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor, and Deans, should commit to attending university leadership listening tours, 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, we recommend that:

> *Recommendation 11.1: The agenda for listening tour forums should be set by the community.*

> *Recommendation 11.2: The majority of time should be reserved for the community to speak or ask questions.*

A listening tour will create opportunities for genuine two-way dialogue, and help to ensure that decisions are better informed by the experiences of both students and those who teach and conduct research.

> *Recommendation 11.3: College Deans should hold regular town halls or staff-directed forums.*

Relatedly, we recommend a commitment by Deans to regularly hold staff-directed forums at the College or School level, to ensure the goodwill earned through the immediate listening tour is leveraged into longer term governance legitimacy.

Currently regular College and School Forums are held at some Colleges and Schools but not others, leading to a divergent experience of governance depending on where staff and students are based. **We recommend replicating this positive governance practice consistently across the University**.

Recommendation 12: ANU should Introduce annual 360-degree performance reviews for managers at all levels, incorporating feedback from the staff they manage as well as from peers and supervisors.

This recommendation reflects concerns that current performance assessments for managers rely too heavily on top-down reporting. Well-designed and regular 360-degree reviews would provide more balanced evaluations, facilitate accountability to the staff they lead, and help foster leadership practices that support equity, transparency, and professional development.

360 degree reviews are already practised at major US public universities – for example at the University of Oregon, University of Minnesota, and the University of North Carolina.

The Performance and Development Policy should include principles for these reviews of managers and should be supported by an agreed Procedure document.

First Nations voice in governance

Recommendation 13: ANU should initiate a process, led by First Nations staff, students and community, to determine how ANU and the University mission can honour Indigenous sovereignty and support decolonisation.

As Australia's national university, it is appropriate that we lead in developing a nation-first pathway to decolonising university governance. This recommendation calls for ANU to initiate a pathway to focus on truth-telling, reconciliation, and identifying an appropriate and community-supported role for First Nations in ANU Governance.

This process should be led by First Nations peoples and grounded in Indigenous governance principles, knowledge systems, and cultural protocols. ANU must allow time and resources that are required for this essential work to occur.

Financial and budget transparency

Recommendation 14: The ANU Finance Office should 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. We recommend that 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.

While the recent efforts to offer quarterly budget updates are welcome, they are not yet embedded in ANU's governance frameworks or permanent practice.

Doing so would bring ANU into line with international best-practice. For example, many US public universities are required (often by external legislation) to publicly report detailed information about budgets, staff salaries, diversity, complaint records, and much more to education authorities. Detailed current and projected future budgets, including breakdowns by College and work unit, are publicly accessible.

Under the previous budget model at ANU (ie up until 2019), much of this information was available to staff and students, albeit not consistently across all Colleges.

Returning to a practice of budgetary transparency on both revenue and expenses would be a positive step and demonstration of responsiveness to a major community concern. Detailed, disaggregated budgets would make income and expenditure clearer to staff, strengthen trust, and enable fairer decision-making at the local level.

Recommendation 15: ANU staff and students should be included in co-design of the next University budget model.

Interim Vice-Chancellor has recently [announced plans](#) to design a new budget model for the University, intended for implementation in 2027. The current budget model (the Expenditure Control Framework) was never intended to be a long-term model for the ANU, and has embedded perverse incentives for frontline researchers and educators. Pre-2020 work on designing an incentives-based model to layer on top of the expenditure control framework was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As of November 2025, planning for design of the new budget model is in very early stages, but may build on this pre-2020 work.

We recommend that ANU staff and students be actively incorporated into co-design of this new budget model. Rebuilding legitimacy and the resilience of our financial governance requires is best achieved by having the community feel that they helped build the model under which they operate – and it is also an effective method to catch unintended disincentives that are difficult to predict at the Executive level.

We are at the point at the ANU where staff and students told us through the Project that they do not *believe* the numbers being shared by finance and the rationale for restructuring. This is not simply a matter of tightening up external regulation or sharing more financial data – this is a **crisis of legitimacy in financial governance**. As Section 1 stated, in the current funding landscape the higher education sector is likely to continue to face financial austerity and repeated rounds of redundancies and cuts. **We must have governance frameworks for contesting the distribution of scarce resources that are seen as internally legitimate and foster constructive rather than destructive deliberation** – **and do not set the Executive against the community**. This is a major driver behind our recommended creation of a University Senate or Reformed Academic Board (Recommendations 1 and 3), but also applies directly to the way we design and share our budgets: the community should be included wherever possible.

Effective formats to include the community in this process might include: staff stakeholder committees, budget roundtables, workshops or even kitchen table conversations to roadtest key elements of the budget. Town halls and larger events might be used for specific purposes but do not allow for the granular and direct feedback necessary for the community to feel that they truly help to build a new budget model.

Regular review of administrative and governance policies

Recommendation 16: ANU should conduct an annual or biennial review of governance arrangements and their impact on education, research, and the academic mission of the University.

This process should be led by the ANU community and informed by an independent survey of views on the effectiveness of governance at the Executive and Council, College, and School levels.

This recommendation reflects the importance of ongoing, community-led evaluation of governance at ANU. A regular review process, anchored in staff and student representation and supported by independent survey data, would create an informed dialogue between the ANU community, Council, and the Executive, and help ensure governance structures remain transparent, accountable, and effective.

Recommendation 17: Administrative policies, including the roll-out of new systems, must be developed in genuine dialogue with staff and students, and should measurably reduce — not add to — the overall administrative burden on staff.

Recommendation 18: ANU should conduct a comprehensive audit of administrative systems and policies at least every five years, explicitly assessing administrative burden with the goal of protecting staff time for the University's core mission.

These recommendations reflect concerns about the growing administrative load on staff, driven by constant system changes and poorly designed processes.

Currently, ANU does not have an effective system to accurately measure the administrative burden on staff, which was widely reported as a major obstacle to staff productivity.

Ensuring staff and students have a genuine voice in the development of administrative policies, and establishing regular audits focused on reducing burden, would help protect capacity and productivity for the University's core mission of teaching, research, and public good.

Consultancies and Insourcing

Recommendation 19: ANU should have a policy and practice of 'insourcing,' drawing on expertise within the university community first before engaging external consultants.

Participants in our project argued that ANU employs world-class expertise across a wide range of fields, and insourcing should be the first option before seeking external advice, with staff participation treated as voluntary and either recognised in workload policies or appropriately remunerated.

We believe that insourcing will typically be cheaper and more applicable to the realities of the ANU than that available via external consultants. It also aligns with the increasing emphasis on insourcing as first preference for the Australian public sector, including for the ACT Government.

Insourcing carries a risk of staff burnout if such work is not properly incentivised and resourced. **The ANU policy on insourcing should be carefully designed so as not to inadvertently create a heavy, unpaid service burden on staff.** We recommend that:

> *Recommendation 19.1: Academic and professional staff should be appropriately incentivised and compensated for their contributions, either through direct compensation or through research, education, or service time loadings.*

> *Recommendation 19.2: Insourcing opportunities should be allocated through transparent, inclusive processes including open calls for expressions of interest, and avoid reinforcing existing service burdens for groups with already disproportionate loads.*

Although it may be instinctive to recognise insourcing as a form of institutional service, we anticipate that broader use of insourcing is likely to result in ANU staff using their expertise to gather and analyse data and produce impactful outcomes – **it is better considered as a form of impact-oriented research**.

Additionally, while some research has found that insourcing is particularly beneficial for female, younger, and older employees, we are aware that recognising insourcing as purely a service task would create a perverse incentive for junior female staff members, who typically already carry heavy service loads.

We have recommended above that insourcing be compensated through a range of measures as appropriate and as agreed upon between the University and the relevant academic and professional staff members involved, including direct compensation, recognition as a research activity, an education activity, or a service activity.

Recommendation 20: ANU should review and strengthen its consultancy procurement and reporting requirements to ensure they are followed in practice, and that all consultancies are publicly listed in

real time with meaningful, detailed information about the services provided.

Building on Recommendation 19, Recommendation 20 reflects concerns about the overuse of external consultants and the associated costs, opacity, and misalignment with the University's values.

Publishing detailed, real-time information on consultancies would increase accountability, allow scrutiny of spending decisions, and ensure procurement practices align with community expectations of transparency. ANU should benchmark its approach against recognised best-practice procurement frameworks.

> *Recommendation 20.1: ANU's procurement and consultancy policies and procedures should be updated to include a positive duty to demonstrate that the procured advice could not have been delivered in-house.*

A preference for relying on in-house expertise should be recognised as a principle on the Procurement Policy and supported in the Procurement Procedure by requiring a positive duty to demonstrate that Medium, Large scale, and Major procured services cannot be performed by employed staff, especially in cases where the procured service is in the form of advice and not technical labour.

Workload policies

Recommendation 21: ANU should publish workload policies across the University and ensure that Clause 52 of the Enterprise Agreement is implemented in practice, with transparent and equitable workload models developed in consultation with staff.

These recommendations reflect concerns about the lack of transparent and consistent workload practices across the University. Staff reported inequitable and unsustainable workloads, the absence of clear models, and the impact this has on retention and morale. Transparent workload policies, developed with staff input, would enable fairness across diverse areas, and explicitly linking fixed-term and casual/sessional hours to local workload models would close a current gap in the Enterprise Agreement and provide greater equity for fixed-term staff.

Equity, diversity and inclusion data and policy

Recommendation 22: ANU should regularly and systematically collect, publish, and update disaggregated demographic data of staff and

students, in a way that does not risk identifying individuals, in order to reveal progress towards inclusion throughout the University and inform improvements to Equal Opportunity and other relevant policies.

This recommendation is informed by sources of frustration experienced by the community when attempting to gather data about suspected inequities at the University. For example, the disproportionate ratio of male senior academics to female junior academics at the College of Health and Medicine should not have required a grand initiative such as the Nixon Review to uncover. It is recommended that the diversity criteria should include wider demographic indicators of privilege.

Recommendation 23: ANU should ensure that diversity is actively considered in the composition of governing bodies, including Council and University committees, with meaningful representation of groups such as Indigenous peoples, people with disability, and students.

This recommendation reflects the importance of both measuring and embedding diversity in university governance. Comprehensive demographic data that includes factors such as gender, cultural background, disability, language(s) spoken at home, place of birth, sexual orientation, and Indigenous identity would provide a sound evidence base for policy. Ensuring governing bodies themselves are diverse would give voice to underrepresented groups and strengthen the legitimacy of university decision-making. The University's Equal Opportunity Policy should include a positive duty to set and meet these diversity and inclusive behaviour expectations.

Recommendation 24: 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.

This recommendation reflects concerns that students and staff in non-continuing roles are often excluded from decision-making despite their central role in teaching, learning, and research. Greater inclusion would recognise their contributions, reduce feelings of marginalisation, and ensure decisions are informed by their perspectives. For example, students could be invited to attend School and College Education Committees and Academic Board meetings twice yearly, while sessional staff should be routinely included in departmental and team meetings as standard practice.

Recommendation 3.8 directly addresses this issue in terms of representation of casual and fixed-term staff on Academic Board.

Staff psychosocial safety, satisfaction, and wellbeing

Recommendation 25: ANU should consistently publish Pulse survey results in a timely manner. The methodology must be amended to remove the requirement to specify work unit, to ensure staff can provide honest feedback.

Recommendation 26: ANU should establish clear follow-up mechanisms so that issues raised in Pulse surveys are addressed and reported back to staff. Staff must also be involved in genuine co-design of survey design and process.

These recommendations reflect concerns that the current Pulse survey process does not deliver meaningful transparency or action. Timely publication, anonymity safeguards, and systematic follow-up would strengthen staff trust in the process, while involving staff in co-design would ensure the survey addresses issues of real importance within ANU and contributes to a constructive dialogue.

Recommendation 27: ANU should regularly publish trend data on complaints related to bullying, sexual harassment, and other forms of misconduct. Reporting should also include evaluation by staff and students of their satisfaction with the processes (not outcomes) of misconduct and complaint investigations.

This recommendation reflects strong support for greater transparency around health, safety, and wellbeing at ANU. Regular public reporting would increase accountability, provide a clearer picture of the prevalence of misconduct, highlight whether complaint processes are experienced as fair and effective, and puts the onus on universities to actively address the root causes of poor cultural issues documented in the Nixon Review.

The collection and dissemination of trend data (disaggregated by type of complaint where possible) would allow for protection of confidentiality while better allowing the institution to track progress in improving ANU culture.

For comparison, in the US, the federal Title IX law mandates public reporting from universities of complaints and misconduct data, as a key element to "ensure students' right to an education free from sexual harassment and gendered violence", among other forms of misconduct.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman's [Better Practice Complaint Handling Guide](#) highlights the importance of ensuring this data on "complaint volumes and trends including data about complaint issues, causes and outcomes, systemic issues and relevant complainant data (for example, geographic, demographic, cohort information)" is adequately collected and shared with executives of public institutions so that action can be taken.

Implementing this recommendation would **demonstrate tangible progress towards meeting the Expert Council on University Governance's Principle 6 (Inclusive and Responsive)**, including the specific requirement to monitor staff and student complaints and feedback, including trends and themes, and that appropriate and timely action is taken in response.

Recommendation 28: ANU should establish safe and effective mechanisms for staff to report misconduct (including bullying and harassment), with investigations carried out by an independent authority — either external to ANU or an empowered internal ombudsman .

This recommendation reflects concerns about the lack of credible avenues for addressing misconduct, including by senior university officials. An independent mechanism would ensure complaints are handled impartially, protect staff from retaliation, and help address systemic cultural issues that have undermined trust in existing processes.

> *Recommendation 28.1: As an effective mechanism, we support establishing a Staff Ombudsman, as recommended in the [Nixon Review](#), and establishing a pathway for the Staff Ombudsman to request investigation by external regulatory bodies.*

Doing so would not only meet the requirements of Senate Inquiry Interim Report, but also demonstrate tangible progress towards aligning with the Expert Council on University Governance's Principle 6.3, which requires that there are effective, transparent, and confidential processes to capture student and staff input on the University's strategy, policies, performance, culture, staff experience, wellbeing and safety, and that there are effective external systems for students, staff and others to confidentially raise concerns and complaints and to provide appropriate feedback, with whistleblower complaints referred to appropriate people. Nixon Review Recommendation 16 also suggests ongoing appointment of an ombudsman to a central and independent ANU Ombudsman office as a measure to improve transparency and consistency of complaints handling.

Recommendation 29: ANU should cease the use of non-disparagement and non-disclosure clauses in release, separation, and settlement arrangements.

This recommendation reflects concerns from the community that such clauses are routinely used to suppress criticism, conceal misconduct, and protect poor performance.

All Australian universities are required by the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* to have a policy that upholds academic freedom, with "academic freedom" defined as:

 (a) the freedom of academic staff to teach, discuss, and research and to disseminate and publish the results of their research;

 (b) the freedom of academic staff and students to engage in intellectual inquiry, to express their opinions and beliefs, and to contribute to public debate, in relation to their subjects of study and research;

 (c) the freedom of academic staff and students to express their opinions in relation to the higher education provider in which they work or are enrolled;

 (d) the freedom of academic staff to participate in professional or representative academic bodies;

 (e) the freedom of students to participate in student societies and associations;

 (f) the autonomy of the higher education provider in relation to the choice of academic courses and offerings, the ways in which they are taught and the choices of research activities and the ways in which they are conducted.

ANU has a policy on academic freedom in the Enterprise Agreement, which applies to current staff. When staff separate from the University, however, ANU has [confirmed](#) that, by default, a non-disparagement clause is included in separation agreements (Deeds of Release). It means that **former staff who signed agreements with such clauses no longer have full academic freedom and are not permitted to express their views openly about the ANU, including reporting governance issues or other issues of concern**.

This default practice weakens the capacity of the university community to have open and honest conversations about the state of governance at our national university, and is inappropriate for a publicly funded institution.

Ending their use as default practice would improve transparency, strengthen accountability, and help ensure that staff and students can speak openly about their experiences without fear of sanction.

Recommendation 30: ANU should undertake a review of "in practice of" positions (e.g. professors of practice) to establish clear criteria and benchmarks for their use.

This recommendation reflects community concerns that awarding academic titles to industry experts without academic qualifications without appropriate oversight and supervision can contribute to confusion and mistrust as well as undermine the integrity of academic positions and titles.

A review would provide transparency, clarify appropriate standards, and ensure these positions balance recognition of professional expertise with the preservation of academic values.

As an example, where "professors of practice" engage with teaching duties, the Procedure: Knowledge, Pedagogical Skills, and Qualifications requirements for Educators should quantify the specific Australian Qualifications Framework equivalents for various levels of industry experience.

Conclusion

The release of this report marks a unique moment in the history of Australian higher education governance. To our knowledge, a community-led listening and engagement process of this scale and depth has never before been undertaken in a higher education institution in Australia. 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.

Appendix A: Recommended Amendments to the ANU Act

Three of our recommendations require amendment to the Australian National University Act 1991 (and consequential amendments to internal Statutes and Charters).

These reforms are crucial. While our internal reforms will improve accountability, transparency, and address information flows, **legislative reform of the ANU Act is the only way to fully close the accountability gap and address the self-perpetuating nature of Council**. Implementing the reforms below via amendment to the ANU Act, in combination to our recommended internal reforms, would position ANU as a national leader in the section for good university governance, and establish a benchmark for the rest of the sector.

Table 2: Amendments to the ANU Act

Recommendation	Detail
Recommendation 1 Establish a University Senate via Legislative Reform	The establishment of a representative body for the community in legislation is crucial to long-term sustainability and closing the accountability loop. The establishment of the ANU Senate would require the creation of a new Part of the Act that: - Provides for the existence of the University Senate - Enumerates its functions and powers - Prescribes its composition - Empowers the Senate to determine its own operating rules - Amends existing procedures around the appointment and removal of Council members - Establishes suitable transitional arrangements so that the initial Senate can determine its composition and manner of operations While we recommend further co-design with the ANU community to finalise the details, we propose the below features to be embedded in the legislation. The **composition** of such as Senate should include: - elected representatives of continuing and fixed-term staff,

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- graduate and undergraduate student cohorts,
- alumni,
- a minimum representation of First Nations members including representatives from the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, and
- the public, with public representatives appointed by the Minister, the Federal Parliament, the ACT Legislative Assembly and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body.

Current staff and student members should form a significant majority.

The **functions** of the Senate should include:

- Require that items be placed on the agenda of Council and meetings of the ANU Executive
- Call members of Council and the Executive to answer questions at formal meetings
- Require formal responses from Council to written questions
- Require that management or Council provide requested documents
- Participate in the Nominations Committee to select Council members
- In limited and exceptional circumstances, recall Council members
- Receive and question key institutional reports (e.g. Annual Report)
- Review performance of the governing body
- Approve major structural changes to colleges or research schools
- Advise management on change-management proposals, including receiving a statement of reasons if advice is not followed

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Recommendation 2.1

Amend the ANU Act to require that at least half of Council members are elected

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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, underrepresents the expertise of the ANU

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staff and student representatives	community, and is too heavily weighted toward ministerial or corporate appointments. Legislative reform is needed to reset this balance. Participants in our project called for the *ANU Act* to be amended so that **at least half of Council members are elected staff and student representatives. This should include the Chair of Academic Board as a voting, ex-officio member**. 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.
Recommendation 5 Amend the ANU Act to require that the Chancellor to 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 the Chancellor. University leaders are elected at top universities in the UK and Ireland, including at the National University of Ireland, University College Dublin, University of Oxford, and the University of Cambridge. At these universities, candidates develop public campaigns and hold events with the community or staff and students to listen to their views and build support. Election of the most senior leader at the ANU would instill this office with community legitimacy, build accountability, and directly incentivise senior leadership to remain responsive to staff and student concerns.

Appendix B: Relevance of Recommendations for Sector-wide Higher Education Governance Reform

Although this project and its engagement focused on the ANU, the ANU Governance Project Working Group believes that many of its findings and recommendations are relevant to the whole Australian university sector. We draw attention to specific recommendations that should be considered by parties interested in reforming universities in general below.

Table 3: Sector-wide relevance of recommendations

ANU Recommendation	*Sector-wide relevance*
Recommendation 1: Establish a University Senate	The broken accountability loop between governing councils/boards and university communities is endemic within the Australian university sector. For this reason, we recommend serious consideration be given to establishing accountability bodies such as a University Senate across the sector to strengthen democratic decision making and the link between governing councils and university communities.
Recommendation 2: Council Reform	While governing Council cultures, policies, and processes vary between universities, Senate Inquiries underway at the national and state/territory level and the Expert Council have heard evidence that many University Councils experience the problems we have documented at ANU, including marginalisation of staff and student members, lack of transparency, and disconnect between Councils and University communities. Sector-wide reforms to consider include: • At least half of council members elected by staff and students (Recommendation 2.1) • Councils to include a majority of members with higher education/public administration expertise (Recommendation 2.2) • Proper compensation for staff/student council members (Recommendation 2.5)

	- Livestreaming non-confidential components of council meetings (Recommendation 2.7) - Detailed meeting minutes published within one week (Recommendation 2.8) - Regular engagement between councils and university communities (Recommendation 2.12)
Recommendation 13: First Nations governance and sovereignty	Universities should engage First Nations staff, students, and communities to strengthen Indigenous sovereignty and voice in governance. This important work must be appropriately and ethically resourced.
Recommendation 19: Insourcing	Universities should adopt transparent, inclusive insourcing policies that prioritise internal expertise before external consultants.
Recommendation 20: Strengthen procurement and real-time disclosure	Universities should tighten consultancy procurement, ensure compliance, and publish consultancy arrangements with meaningful real-time detail.
Recommendation 22: Inclusion, diversity and equity data	There should be sector-wide expectations for better collection, publication, and updating of de-identified demographic data to track progress on inclusion, diversity, equity, and access. This would align Australia with international best-practice.
Recommendation 23: Diversity on governing bodies	Universities should ensure meaningful representation of Indigenous peoples, people with disability, students, and other underrepresented groups on councils and committees.
Recommendation 24: Include students, casual sessional and fixed-term staff in governance	Universities should expand participation for casual sessional staff, fixed-term staff, and students in governance and decision-making forums.
Recommendation 27: Transparent misconduct and complaints reporting	Universities should publish trend data on all forms of misconduct, including staff/student satisfaction with investigative processes. This would align Australia with international best-practice and incentivise proactive improvements to complaints handling.
Recommendation 28: Independent authority for misconduct reports	Universities should ensure safe reporting pathways and independent investigation of bullying, harassment, and other misconduct.

Recommendation 29: Cease use of non-disclosure and non-disparagement clauses	Universities should cease the use of non-disparagement clauses or agreements in employment release, separation, and settlement arrangements.

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