



Australian  
National  
University

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REF: RB/161

8 September 2025

Senator Marielle Smith  
Chair of Education and Employment Legislation Committee  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: [eec.sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:eec.sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Chair

I write in response to your letter to the Chancellor dated 15 August 2025 regarding adverse reflections made in testimony given to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee (**Committee**) hearing in relation to the Inquiry into the Quality of Governance at Australian Higher Education Providers on 12 August 2025, where officials from the Australian National University (the **University**) appeared.

I provide this response in my capacity as Provost and Senior Vice-President of the University, and on behalf of the senior officers the subject of the adverse reflections made at the hearing on 12 August 2025, with the exclusion of the Chancellor, Julie Bishop, who is submitting a separate reply to the Committee with respect to testimony relating to her.

I note however that, for reasons outlined below, the relevant senior officers do not presently think it is appropriate to respond in full to the adverse reflections made at the hearing on 12 August 2025. As a result, this response is limited in scope, and I note that the relevant senior officers respectfully reserve their right to provide a more fulsome response in due course.

***The University's duty of care***

The safety and wellbeing of the University's staff and students is one of our highest priorities and most important responsibilities. The University cares deeply about fulfilling its work health and safety obligations and has, amongst other things, developed a comprehensive framework of policies and procedures to ensure compliance with these obligations.

The University takes the matters raised by the witnesses at the hearing on 12 August 2025 very seriously. Whilst the senior officers the subject of the adverse reflections have been granted a right of reply by the Committee, the matters traversed in this reply are intentionally limited.

In this regard, the University wants to ensure that staff members and students are not unduly subjected to political and public scrutiny that may cause a risk to their health and safety, or otherwise undermine their privacy. The University is also cognisant of the other various processes and inquiries that it is currently participating in and does not wish to do anything that may jeopardise, compromise or undermine those processes and inquiries.

### ***Ensuring due process***

The University takes any grievances raised by staff and students very seriously.

As with any organisation, grievances are typically handled confidentially and in accordance with established processes, to protect the interests of all parties involved, including the privacy and dignity of the person raising the grievance, as well as the right of any person/s the subject of the complaint to confidentiality and procedural fairness.

There is currently a TEQSA compliance assessment process underway, with former Public Service Commissioner, Ms Lynelle Briggs AO, tasked with reviewing specific aspects of the University's governance systems, supported by interviews with University staff, students, executive and Council members.

I also confirm that there is a workplace grievance process underway at the University.

On 19 August 2025, the University's Council established a specialist governance group to seek independent advice on how the University should best respond to the allegations raised at the hearing in the Senate on 12 August 2025. As Provost, I have been appointed as a member of that specialist governance group.

I am informed that in accordance with the Council Charter, there is also a scheduled independent, external review of Council.

The University and its senior executive officers respect and welcome each of these processes, as well as any opportunities for improvement of the University that may be identified as a result of same.

The University is balancing its right of reply against the importance of ensuring that any reply does not jeopardise, compromise or undermine the above-mentioned processes, or the protections available to the parties involved whilst also acknowledging the procedural complexity facing senior officers of the University in exercising their right of reply.

Accordingly, a limited reply, addressing only some of the adverse reflections made at the hearing on 12 August 2025 is the only appropriate response at this particular time. The relevant senior officers otherwise reserve the right to provide a more fulsome response to the adverse reflections once the abovementioned processes are completed, or earlier, if appropriate.

I request that this approach not be construed as the University or senior officers agreeing with any of the adverse reflections made during the hearing on 12 August 2025, but rather understood in the context of the University's desire to maintain the integrity and procedural

fairness of the other lines of ongoing inquiry. This approach is also consistent with the value the University places on safeguarding the privacy and health and safety of staff and students.

***Specific response to adverse reflections***

At this time, on behalf of the relevant senior officers of the University, I note only the following:

*In response to reflections about Pro-Chancellor Kitchen on page 34 of the Hansard transcript:*

Ms Kitchen has never had a child who studied at the University or lived on campus.

*In response to reflections about former Pro-Chancellor Flutter on page 34 of the Hansard transcript:*

At the time of Distinguished Professor Bell's appointment as Vice-Chancellor, Former Pro-Chancellor Flutter was not aware that her nephew had sought or secured a temporary, casual research assistant role.

Our Chancellor and all Council members serve as a result of a commitment to public service and to support Australia's national interests.

The University is of the view that all Council members act in the best interests of the University and discharge their responsibility in respect of their legislative obligations.

***Conclusion***

The University is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the adverse reflections made at the hearing on 12 August 2025. We confirm our acknowledgement of your advice on parliamentary privilege and respectfully reiterate that the relevant senior officers would like to reserve their right to provide a more fulsome reply following the conclusion of the above-mentioned processes and inquiries, or earlier, if appropriate.

The University values its relationship with all stakeholders, including the Australian Government, the Commonwealth Parliament, the Department of Education and the National Tertiary Education Union, and remains committed to active and constructive engagement with the Committee in relation to the quality of governance at Australian higher education providers.

Yours Sincerely

Professor Rebekah Brown FASSA  
**Provost and Senior Vice-President**