

ELECTION OF TWO ACADEMIC STAFF MEMBERS TO THE UNIVERSITY COUNCIL
FOR TERM 1 SEPTEMBER 2026 TO 31 AUGUST 2028
(14 NOMINATIONS RECEIVED)

CANDIDATE STATEMENTS

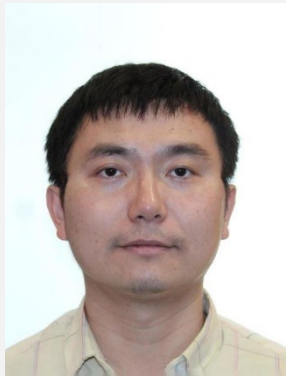
'The views expressed in the statements are those of the candidates only, and the statements and assertions expressed are made solely by the candidates and have not been validated by the Returning Officer'



Dr Tim Connor

I have worked as an academic at UoN for 16 years and I have been active in the NTEU since commencing. My research and teaching focus on corporate law and corporate governance, areas that strongly shape my interest in and commitment to effective, transparent, and collaborative university leadership. As someone who has engaged with broader governance discussions, including by providing evidence to the recent Legislative Council Inquiry, I am keen to contribute my experience and insights to strengthening UoN's governance and strategic direction. While we are operating in a challenging funding environment, I believe there are real opportunities to improve how we work together to navigate these pressures. My priorities include supporting high-quality research and teaching, maintaining rigorous and relevant curricula, and ensuring student experience remains central. If elected, I will work constructively with colleagues to support inclusive governance and ensure staff expertise informs the strategic direction of our University.

View University Staff Profile [here](#).



Associate Professor David Shao

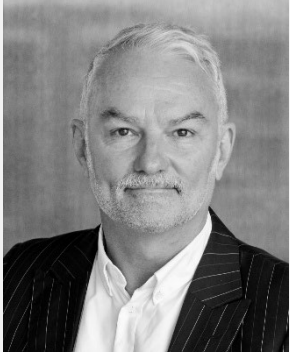
I am an Associate Professor at Newcastle Business School with an internationally recognised research profile in digital transformation, innovation, and sustainability, combined with strong teaching and research leadership. I have published extensively in leading journals and hold editorial roles, including Associate Editor for multiple Q1 journals and Editor-in-Chief of Sustainable Business and Management. At Newcastle, I lead and contribute to impactful academic initiatives, including serving as Program Director of the Global MBA, where I have supported strong program growth while maintaining high student satisfaction. I bring experience in building collaborative research and HDR programs, mentoring early career academics, and contributing to academic governance and institutional development. With an international outlook and active engagement across global academic networks, I am committed to advancing research excellence and student outcomes. I would contribute to Council with a collegial, evidence-informed, and forward-looking perspective in support of the University's strategic priorities.

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Dr Justin Ellis

A diverse council is vital to ensuring the university capitalises on its strengths in strategic decision-making. This requires a balance of external experience and an awareness of university processes and culture. I have academic senate experience (2026), and college board experience across two schools within the College of Human Social Futures (2020-2021 (HASS)/2024-2026(SLJ)). In addition to my commitment to service, I bring to the role my demonstrated research, education, and engagement track record on institutional trust. External recognition of this track record includes my appointment to the NSW Police Force Task Force Atlas community consultative committee (2024~) in response to the NSW Special Commission of Inquiry into LGBTIQ hate crimes 1970-2010. I am the elected NSW member of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Criminology committee of management (2025-2026), and a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors (2025~). It would be a privilege to represent you.

View University Staff Profile [here](#).



Dr Karen Handley

I am a senior lecturer in the Newcastle Business School (NBS) and am standing for election to University Council because I care deeply about my colleagues and the long-term reputation of the University. I joined the University in 2008 as a sessional lecturer, and have held past leadership roles in governance as Assistant Dean of CHSF and on the Executive of the NBS. My deep experience has honed a holistic view of University governance suited to assess complex issues and provide strategic direction as a member of University Council. I have experience serving on committees that support academic and research excellence and educational quality. I have developed strategic plans at both College and School level. A member of the NTEU, I am an active advocate for the Central Coast and the Newcastle region. I value diversity, fairness, work-life balance, sustainability and collegiality, and would be honoured to have your support.

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Dr S.A. Hamed Hosseini

I am standing for Council to help restore staff voice and democratic accountability, and reclaim a safer, fairer university. Recent staff-wellbeing data, parliamentary scrutiny of university governance, and our own workplace debates point to a serious governance challenge: workload, restructures, job security, equity, transparency, and trust must be treated as core Council concerns. I have served twice as an elected member of Academic Senate, worked at UON for 18 years, and been a long-standing NTEU member. I will maintain close communication with staff and the union and will use every appropriate Council channel to ensure major staff concerns are heard. My research project, "Overshadowed Labor in the Corporate University," examines how corporatized higher education can devalue staff labour, especially that of intersectionally marginalized workers. I will bring evidence-based, collegial, and independent advocacy to Council: careful governance, genuine accountability, and a firm commitment to rebuilding trust across our university community.

View University Staff Profile [here](#).



Dr Helen Giggins

Thank you for the opportunity to stand for election as Academic Staff Representative on University Council. As Deputy Head of School (Teaching and Learning) for the School of Architecture and Built Environment, I bring extensive experience in academic leadership, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and implementation of institutional projects that strengthen teaching, learning, and staff engagement.

I am committed to ensuring academic staff voices across Colleges and Schools are heard in decision-making, particularly during times of change. I will advocate for transparent governance, sustainable workloads, and a strong, inclusive academic community. My experience working closely with colleagues across the university has equipped me to represent diverse perspectives with integrity and care.

If elected, I will listen actively, communicate openly, and represent staff with energy and professionalism. I would be honoured to serve our academic community and contribute to the University's future direction.

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Professor Paul Dastoor

The University stands at a pivotal moment, one that calls for clear academic guidance, principled stewardship, and a renewed sense of purpose. Over recent months, I have worked closely with colleagues across all Colleges to help the Professoriate articulate a unified, constructive voice on the future of our institution. The hope and renewed confidence expressed in response by colleagues across our campuses has been profound, reaffirming my belief that our University can chart a more ambitious, values-driven future grounded in evidence, integrity, and courage.

As a long-serving Professor and academic leader, I bring experience in building major initiatives, navigating complexity, and fostering collaboration across disciplines and professional areas. If elected, I will ensure that Council hears and understands the aspirations of its academic community, and that our strategic direction reflects the best of who we are. Together, we will restore momentum, rebuild trust, and shape a stronger future for UON.

View University Staff Profile [here](#).



Professor Jonathan Hirst

I work in the School of Biomedical Sciences and Pharmacy and make a major contribution to teaching in the Biomedical Sciences and Pharmacy programmes. I also maintain an active research programme funded by external grants in the field of maternal and newborn health. My concerns include maintaining a supportive balance of teaching commitments and time for the development of an on-going research programme. This should involve assisting for early career staff in the development of their careers and in gaining promotion. I have had a major role in increasing equity across the university and was a foundation member of the college EDIC. I was a member of the University Athena Swann committee and contributed to our success in gaining silver status. I am the academic staff representative on the Unisuper Consultative Committee. In this role I promoted the divestment of fossil fuel assets. I am a long-standing member of NTEU.

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Catherine Burgess

As Deputy Dean of Education in the pathways program, I have led strategic initiatives, chaired governance committees, overseen quality assurance processes and driven institutional approaches to student access, participation, retention and success in a rapidly changing higher education environment. I have contributed to the governance and strategic development of a program that is recognised as the oldest, largest and most successful enabling pathway program in Australia providing alternative entry pathways to higher education.

My twenty years' experience spans curriculum design, teaching innovation, academic quality, staff development, student engagement and institutional leadership.

I believe that university governance requires members who understand the lived realities of students and staff, appreciate the complexities of contemporary higher education and can bring an evidence-based perspective to strategic based decision making. I value respectful governance and collaborative leadership.

As a Council member, I would contribute to decisions that will shape the future direction of the institution and influence the opportunities available to current and future generations of students. I would welcome the opportunity to contribute my experience, judgement, and commitment to educational excellence in this strategic governance role and I want to ensure that the University continues to deliver outstanding education while remaining accessible, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of the communities it serves.

View University Staff Profile [here](#).



Dr Louise Koller-Smith

I am a rheumatologist working in the public outpatient clinic at John Hunter Hospital and a lecturer in medicine through the Joint Medical Program, currently working as Medicine Discipline Lead for Phase 2. I was born and raised in Newcastle and have a deep love of the region, and I am a proud mother of two. My primary research and engagement focus is on preventative health through clinician and patient education, particularly in the field of rheumatoid arthritis. My teaching and learning focus is centred around collegiality, collaboration, and inclusivity, as well as streamlining course content and delivery to maximise relevance and engagement for students and improve the capability of our next generation of healthcare providers. I have policy and governance experience through my volunteer roles with the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and the Australian Rheumatology Association Policy and Advocacy Committee, as well as past roles on Basic Physician and Advanced Trainee education committees.

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Dr Judith Zhu

I am seeking the opportunity to contribute to University Council's strategic oversight and governance responsibilities and support the University's strategic direction and long-term development. Over 15 years of experience at the University of Newcastle, I have contributed through MBA teaching, research and academic service, including course leadership, contribution to Global MBA program development, and service as Student Academic Conduct Officer since 2017 and NBS Sydney campus coordinator.

My research in international business and industrial relations has deepened my interest in and understanding of interest representation, business strategy, organisational governance, policy, and performance. I have also developed leadership and governance capability through committee representation, experience as an observing member of the College Board, and through advanced leadership and board of director training.

If given the opportunity, I would be committed to contributing strategically and meaningfully to the governance responsibilities of the university council.

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Professor Coralie English

I have over 20 years' experience in academia across two institutions, including 11 years at the University of Newcastle, predominantly in balanced teaching and research roles. Having progressed through the academic levels from A to E, and held both teaching and research and research only positions, I have a strong understanding of the diverse pressures and expectations of academic careers.

I have held leadership roles at School and College levels, including Deputy Head of School Research & Research Training and Associate Dean, Research. Beyond academia, I am a Non-Executive Director of the Stroke Foundation, Chair of its Research Advisory Committee, and have completed formal governance training through the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

I am standing for Council because I believe effective governance is strengthened when informed by the lived experience of academics. I will bring a thoughtful, collaborative and strategic approach focused on ensuring academic perspectives shape Council decision-making.

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Professor Nikki Verrills

I am a Professor of Cell Biology and Biochemistry, Deputy Head of School (Research and Research Training) in the School of Biomedical Sciences and Pharmacy, and Director of the Precision Medicine and Health Research Program at the Hunter Medical Research Institute. I have worked at the University for 21 years and am deeply committed to ensuring the success of our university for its students, staff and our community. I am proud of our world-class research and its local and global impact, and I am highly motivated to strengthen support for research. While acknowledging external financial pressures and evolving challenges in education delivery, I will continue to advocate for realistic workload models and reduced administrative burden by improving our systems. I believe supporting our people to thrive - students, academics and professional staff - is key to re-building workplace culture and institutional success.

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Associate Professor Jill Duncan

I seek election to the University Council to contribute an informed, independent and strongly governance-focused perspective. As an Associate Professor in the School of Education with a long association with the University, serving as a conjoint from 2004 to 2016 and in a continuing role since 2017, I bring a deep understanding of the institution's development, current strengths and challenges. I hold governance qualifications from the Australian Institute of Company Directors and have 30 years' experience as a company director, with extensive expertise in fostering positive institutional culture and in fiduciary responsibility. I currently advise the NSW and Australian Governments on disability and the NSW Government on gender equity, roles that require balanced judgement and engagement with diverse stakeholders, including senior public servants and ministers. I am committed to advancing equity, diversity and inclusion and will contribute careful, independent judgement in the long-term interests of the University, its staff and students.

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