

Council Communique

University of Newcastle Council – Report of Outcomes – 3 July 2026

The University of Newcastle’s vision is to be a world-leading university for our regions. Our purpose is to deliver an exceptional student experience, preparing graduates for life in an increasingly interconnected society, and to serve our regions by taking research that matters to the world and bringing our global expertise home. Our roadmap to achieving this vision is the Looking Ahead 2030 Strategic Plan.

The University Council is the governing body of the University. The Council’s role is to act in the best interests of the University, to be responsible for the strategy for the University and to hear from senior management on the implementation of that strategic direction. The Council operates in accordance with the University of Newcastle Act 1989 No 68 (the Act) and the University of Newcastle By-law 2017 (the By-law), which set out the powers and functions of the Council and how these must be performed.

To find out more, visit the [Council pages](#) of our University website

Meeting Details and Site Visit

The meeting was held on the Callaghan campus on Friday 3 July.

The Council attended a site visit at the NIER precinct, and was provided with an overview of research being undertaken by Dr Jessica Allen and Dr Simin Moradmam in the Modern Manufacturing Workshop. Council then welcomed the opportunity to meet informally with staff during morning tea.

Acknowledgements

The Council noted that, with her term coming to an end, this was the final Council meeting for Ms Julie Phillips, who has been Chair of the People & Culture Committee for the past four years and a valued Council member for the past 10 years. Council expressed its sincere gratitude for her expertise and commitment during this time.

Chancellor’s Update

The Chancellor provided an overview of her ongoing engagement program with University students, staff and external stakeholders. The Council was also briefed on key outcomes from recent meetings of the University Chancellors Council (UCC).

The Chancellor advised of her visit to Muswellbrook for the Hunter Industry Open Day in May and of her attendance at the recent Supporter Thank You event. This event was an opportunity to personally thank supporters for their generosity, having contributed \$27.1m towards research and scholarships in 2025.

Council was advised of the successful graduation ceremonies held at the Central Coast and Callaghan campuses in June and commended the Graduations team for their professionalism, dedication and commitment to delivering these important events.

Vice-Chancellor’s Update (including WHS report)

The Vice-Chancellor provided the WHS update including an overview of the events recorded in AIMS during April and May. Council was advised of the implementation of SafeZone, the new system designed to support emergency and safety communication across our campuses. In supporting our commitment to preventing and responding to gender-based violence, Council was advised that a new training course

‘Respect Matters: Addressing Consent and Gender-Based Violence’ is required to be completed by all staff.

The Vice-Chancellor provided an update on his recent engagements, including the Strategic Plan Industry Launch, Upper Hunter Industry Open Day, Business NSW Central Coast Economic Breakfast, Central Coast Alumni Function featuring local Olympian Matt Graham and the recent series of Graduation ceremonies.

Council was advised of the recent appointment of Professor Craig Simmons to the role of Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation, and the recruitment of Professor Jennifer McDonnell as Pro Vice-Chancellor Student Experience.

The Vice-Chancellor highlighted the professionalism and adaptability of staff during the Canvas outage disruption, and thanked staff for their continued support and commitment during this period.

Council was advised of the significant \$18.9M commitment from the Mark Hughes Foundation for continued brain cancer research. The Vice-Chancellor provided an update on rankings, student load and financial performance.

Guest Speakers

At the request of the Council, the following guest speakers joined the meeting:

- The Hon John Hatzistergos AM, ICAC Commissioner, joined the meeting online and provided a presentation on key corruption risks facing NSW universities.
- Professor Barney Glover, Chief Commissioner of the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) provided an update on ATEC, including its transition to a statutory body, the development of mission-based compacts and student allocation arrangements, and its emerging stewardship role in shaping national tertiary education policy, equity participation and sector performance.

Looking Ahead 2030 Update

Mr Joel Palmer, Director Strategy, Planning & Performance, joined the meeting. Council was advised of the work undertaken to inform the development of the Education, Research and Engagement Supporting Plans. In parallel, work is underway to define an appropriate governance model to support the effective implementation of Looking Ahead 2030 and its supporting plans.

Council Committee Reports – Meetings held 11 and 12 June 2026

Finance and Infrastructure Committee Update

The Chair provided an update on issues discussed at the Committee meeting on 12 June, including the financial report, restricted philanthropic funds update, the Business Improvement Program (BIP) Close Out Report, investment performance update, Callaghan Student Accommodation Contractor award, the SSAF Consultation Plan 2026, campus strategy update and the Horizons update, including discussions around the potential for future opportunities for the Central Coast and Tamworth.

Risk Committee Update

Council was provided with an update on issues discussed at the Committee meeting on 12 June including a Higher Education Risk Radar presentation from the Internal Auditor, internal audit reports, accreditation update, academic risk update, philanthropic funds update, the Annual Student Misconduct report and a variation to the Sendak Prize Trust Fund.

Nominations and Governance Committee Update

The Chair provided an update on issues discussed at the Committee meeting on 11 June including an update on Council membership, honorary degree nominations, the NUSport Oval Naming proposal, annual review of academic delegations (phase 2), the UNSA Annual Report for 2025, an update on the Expert Council on University Governance recommendations, the 2027 Council meeting calendar and controlled entity governance matters.

People and Culture Committee

The Chair provided an update on issues discussed at the Committee meeting on 11 June including the six-monthly update on the Gender Based Violence Prevention and Response plan, a presentation on the Research and Innovation Division Workforce profile, the annual Student Wellbeing and Safety Report, an update on the Strategic Review Health Check report, the Your Voice mid-year update and People and Culture reporting options. The Council also heard from both the postgraduate and undergraduate student representatives on Council as part of their mid-term feedback.

Chancellor's Committee Update

The Chancellor provided an update on emerging workforce issues that were discussed at the Committee meeting on 11 June.

President of Academic Senate Update

The President of Academic Senate provided an overview of his report. Council noted that Senate had undertaken detailed consideration on key University initiatives, including leadership appointments, implementation of the Looking Ahead 2030 Strategic Plan, the Academic Workload Allocation Model Policy Review terms of reference, developments relating to ATEC, and progress across teaching, learning, research and student experience. Senate actively engaged in strategic and academic matters, providing oversight, challenge and assurance in accordance with its governance responsibilities, and approving a range of academic governance and policy matters.

Other Business

The Council discussed the establishment of a new Student Led Organisation, the Student Conduct Rule and considered an Emeritus Professor Nomination.

Senior Executive Updates

The Chief Operating Officer, Interim Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research & Innovation and Interim Deputy Vice-Chancellor Engagement & Equity provided Council with updates on their areas of business.

Next meeting

The next meeting of Council will be held in Tamworth on 28 August 2026.