

SENATE SPOTLIGHT

#1–2024



President's Welcome

Welcome to the very first edition of the *Senate Spotlight*, the newsletter of Academic Senate.

Every year the Office of the President of Academic Senate surveys the members for their feedback and suggestions for improving the workings of Senate and the running of the meetings. A regular section of the Survey involves communication of Academic Senate's work to the broader academic and University community. In response to the answers to the Survey we have developed this newsletter that we hope you will share with colleagues across the University.

Each issue will contain a Focus Article written by one of our academic community. The article will centre on one particular issue in depth and provide members, staff and students with information that can be shared broadly within the University. In this issue we will explore the recommendations from the recent [Australian Universities Accord Final Report](#). I would like to thank Associate Professor Jill Duncan for her contribution to our Focus Article on How the Accord will impact on students with a disability.

The review recommended that by 2050 the most under-represented groups in higher education, including those people with disability be represented in according to their proportion of the Australian population. This move seeks not only reduce inequality in this cohort, but also to address acute skills shortages the nation faces. For Universities, it will involve additional support for our students and staff, along with changes in teaching practices. Equity in higher education is an important area for the sector as a whole to address for the wellbeing of our students and staff, and to ensure that our equity requirements are met in relation to governance.

Also in each issue, will be the chance to "Meet a Member" of Academic Senate. It is my hope that this will help put a face to the name as well as provide students and staff with alternate avenues to seek guidance and raise issues that may be of relevance to Academic Senate and its Committees. In this issue we meet Deputy President of Academic Senate (DPAS) Associate Professor Nancy Cushing.

I hope you enjoy Issue 1, we are always seeking to improve, and welcome any feedback you may have for the newsletter. Please email PAS@newcastle.edu.au with your suggestions.

Thanks and regards

Tania

Professor Tania Sourdin

President of Academic Senate

Meet a Member



Associate Professor Nancy Cushing

Associate Professor Nancy Cushing

School of Humanities, Creative Industries and Social Sciences

College of Human and Social Futures

Deputy President of Academic Senate (Research) Elected

Why did you become a member of Academic Senate?

I was attracted to the Academic Senate role after holding positions including Deputy Dean of Students, Assistant Dean Research Training and Cluster Leader for Historical, Cultural and Critical Inquiry. Each of those roles exposed me to the inner workings of the University and made it clear that Academic Senate is an important site of dissemination of knowledge about what is happening across the University and of discussions with an impact on future policies, procedures and practices. I wanted to be part of that process.

What would you like to achieve in this role?

My current role is Deputy President of Academic Senate (Research). My aim is to help to ensure that support is in place for emerging researchers across the University, from the HDR students embarking on research careers, to ECRs working on small scale projects, through to those in mid-career stepping up to larger, more complex research undertakings. As the research environment changes, with ever more emphasis on industry funding, I want to ensure that opportunities for pure research remain, and that those who become teaching-focused have schemes that support their pedagogical research. I want to ensure that no one is left behind and that the University's research is broad in scope, high in quality and targeted in impact.

What do you wish the academic community at the University knew more about in relation to academic governance?

My key point is that the Senate sits at one point of a triangle with the University Council and the Vice Chancellor with Executive Management on the other two. Of these bodies, Academic Senate is the place where the voice of academics can be heard. I would love to see people making more of this opportunity. One action anyone can take is commenting on draft policies on the Policy Library Bulletin Board: <https://policies.newcastle.edu.au/bulletin-board.php>. These comments are taken seriously, including in during discussions of new and revised policies in Senate meetings.

What is your favourite part of being an academic?

For all that we whinge a bit from time to time, I still think being an academic is the best job. It allows me to pursue the things I am interested in – such as my current book on the impact of non-human animals on Australian history – and to share them with others in public talks, in my teaching and in scholarly outputs. Through this activity, I make connections with wonderful, intelligent and engaging people across the country and around the world. And often enough, there are wins and rewards that come along, from positive student feedback, to publishing in a top journal to winning a prize or award, that add an extra uplift. I don't know of another job that offers all of this.

Students with Disability and Universities Accord

The recently released Australian Universities Accord Final Report (the Report) has been received with mixed sentiments from people with disability and university administrators. Negative sentiments include the report's misleading statistics, use of ableist language and the use of a medical model as opposed to a social model of disability. More positive sentiments include the recommendation to apply a funding loading to ensure support in the form of reasonable adjustments for students with disability and a recognition of intersectionality for students with disability who may experience multiple disadvantages.

The term 'profound disability' is used in the Report and suggests negative connotations, implying that individuals with disability are entirely incapacitated or lacking in abilities. This perpetuates stereotypes and contributes to ongoing discrimination and marginalisation. Profound disability emphasises limitations rather than capabilities. Profound disability is aligned with the medical model of disability, which views disability as an individual's deficit. Whereas the social model of disability emphasises the role of societal barriers in disabling people. Finally, on this point, the report suggests that those students 'labelled' with profound disability do not engage in higher education, an entirely false assumption.

Regarding enrolment figures, the report states that students with disability make up 11.6% of enrolments compared to an expected enrolment of 8.4%. This assumes that equality of participation in higher education for people with disability has been achieved, but this result mirrors data collection and comparison complexities and is, at best, inaccurate. The data reported is adjusted for age profile and disability severity, which again is assumed to preclude some individuals with disability from participating in higher education. Definitions and the collection of disability statistics in higher education and national data collections, such as the ABS Census, differ, making direct comparisons unachievable (Department of Education, 2024).

While some universities proclaim a success for enrolment of students with disability, students with disability experience significantly lower success rates than the national total (7% lower); for example, attrition rates for 2021 commencers were higher among low SES students with disability (21.6%) compared with both students from low SES backgrounds (18.0%) and students with disability (16.9%) (Education Department, 2022). While students with disability seem to be engaging more frequently than other equity groups, difficulties in data collection and quality suggest that this cohort likely remains underrepresented (Education Department, 2024).

The report highlights the negative influence of multiple disadvantages. For example, attrition rates for 2021 commencers were higher among low SES students with disability (21.6%) compared with both students from low SES backgrounds (18.0%) and students with disability (16.9%).

On a positive note, the report recognises the additional costs involved in teaching students who require additional support to complete their studies, including students with disability. The report suggests that a per-student funding amount for under-represented students recognises the cost of the additional support they need to succeed, including students with disability.

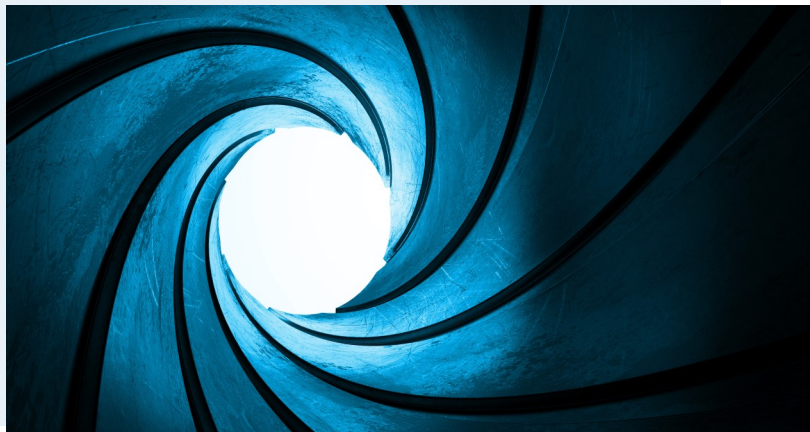
Finally, the report highlights issues affecting student well-being that need ongoing attention, including student safety, mental health, improving accessibility for students with disability, and a lack of social support and culturally safe spaces (Department of Education, 2024).

The report calls for addressing systemic barriers to ensure equitable access to higher education for all Australians. The report's underlying and important message is that every person in Australia should have access to the transformative benefits of higher education.

References

Department of Education. (2022). Higher education statistics - Student data - Section 16 Equity groups 2022 Section 16 Equity performance data. Retrieved from: <https://www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2022-section-16-equity-performance-data>

Department of Education. (2024). Australian Universities Accord final report. Retrieved from: <https://www.education.gov.au/australian-universities-accord/resources/final-report>



Discussion and Discussants

What are Discussants?

For good governance, discussion of items is encouraged to be as open as possible. In response to member requests for more in-depth discussion, the PAS introduced the discussant system in 2023.

One or two discussants were assigned to selected items at each meeting. Discussants were advised by the Secretariat with the notice of publication of papers, and were encouraged to meet with their co-discussant to formulate comments and questions for the paper.

What Items Have Discussants Led the Conversation On in 2024?

Major Issue Discussions

International Onshore Admissions Report 2020-2023

Academic Workload Allocation Model
Pilot 12 month review for 2023

Viva Implementation Update

TEQSA Update

Upcoming Discussions at the May Meeting

Academic Calendar Changes

Academic Risk Discussion
Focus Area Staff Risk Indicators

Voluntary ERA Submission

Student Equity Performance Report 2023

Policy Discussion

Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and Procedures

Microcredentials Framework and Policy

Ethical Human Research Procedure Manual

Research Peer Review Guideline

Code of Conduct

Expert Teaching Arrangements Policy

At all meetings

CHMW College Board Report

CESE College Board Report

CHSF College Board Report

PALS Board Report



Academic Senate Members

Ex—Officio

Professor Alex Zelinsky AO
Professor Kent Anderson
Professor Mark Hoffman
Professor Zee Upton
Professor Craig Simmons
Professor Robert Greenberg
Professor Elizabeth Sullivan
Professor Amanda Johnson (Interim)
Ms Jackie Taylor
Professor Steven Warburton
Professor Juanita Todd
Professor Jennifer Milam
Mr Nathan Towney
A/Professor Anna Bennett
Professor Kylie Shaw
Professor Julia Connell

Elected Students

Imogen Reid
Laura Dowling
Sartaj Singh Sahota

Elected Staff

Professor Tania Sourdin
Dr Angela Page
Dr Elizabeth Roberts-Pedersen
Dr Bin Li
Dr Megan Huggett
Dr Joseph Pegler
Mr Nathan West
Dr Jude Weidenhofer
Dr Penelope Fotheringham
Professor Elena Prieto-Rodriguez
Professor Jesper Gulddal
A/Professor Nancy Cushing
Professor Florian Breuer
Professor James McCoy
Professor Galina Mirzaeva
Professor Jon Hirst
A/Professor Allison Cummins
A/Professor Daphne James
A/Prof Narelle Eather
Professor Francesco Paolucci
Dr Taiwo Akanbi
Miss Maria Cano Dominguez
Dr Shep Chidarikire

VACANCIES

- 1 Level A, B or C academic from the College of Health, Medicine and Wellbeing
- 1 Undergraduate Student (Campus location other than Newcastle campuses)
- 1 Postgraduate Coursework Student
- 1 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Student

Suggest a focus article

PAS@newcastle.edu.au