

SENATE SPOTLIGHT

#4—2025



President's Welcome

Welcome to the fourth edition of the Senate Spotlight, the newsletter of Academic Senate. It is my intention to raise Academic Senate's profile and this year, I have introduced some new measures to allow Academic Senate members to communicate the important work they do as a Senate member. We are always seeking ways to communicate the work of Academic Senate and I hope you find this publication of use in communicating the issues of interest at Academic Senate as well as getting to know some of our members.

Prior issues of Senate Spotlight have contained a Focus Article written by one of our academic community, which has centred on one particular issue in depth and provides members, staff and students with information that can be shared broadly within the University. This edition we have the honour of receiving an article on the role that Academic Senates and Boards can play in supporting the implementation of the Accord by Chief Commissioner of the Australian

Tertiary Education Commission, Professor Mary O'Kane. I highly value this input from ATEC and sincerely thank Professor O'Kane for the time taken to write this article for us.

This issue, we also welcome an article from Professor Steven Warburton on the University's draft Assessment Framework. In the ever-changing world of GenAI, it is imperative that the University provides a robust framework to ensure that students receive their course and program learning outcomes from their studies and that the risk to academic integrity is mitigated as best as possible. All staff are encouraged to provide feedback into the draft, and I thank Professor Warburton for the detailed work done for the Framework.

As the planning for the new Strategic Plan draws to close with the end of the year, I would acknowledge the work of Mr Joel Palmer and his team at Strategy, Planning and Performance for ensuring all staff are kept up to date on the progress of the Plan and for providing so many opportunities for feedback to be given to help shape the future direction of the University.

This issue, in our "Meet a Member" we meet Academic Senate member, Dr Kate Ferguson-Patrick from the School of Education at the College of Human and Social Futures. 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. Thank you, Kate for letting us get to know you a bit better in this issue.

Finally, I would like to remind all members of our additional avenues to discuss issues with me via our new "PAS Open Offices". These follow each meeting of Academic Senate and will be at Callaghan, NuSpace and Ourimbah in person, and members from Singapore have a dedicated Zoom time. Please drop by and have a chat, no appointment necessary. Further details will be provided coming up to our next meeting.

I hope you find this newsletter meaningful and engaging. As always, we are committed to learning and improving, and we warmly welcome any feedback or suggestions you may have. Please email PAS@newcastle.edu.au with your suggestions.

Thanks and regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marcus Rodrigs".

Associate Professor Marcus Rodrigs

President of Academic Senate

Focus Article – The Role of ATEC

By Chief Commissioner of the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC), Professor Mary O’Kane

When Associate Professor Marcus Rodrigs invited me to contribute to the University of Newcastle’s Senate Spotlight, I welcomed the opportunity to share insights on a topic that is both timely and transformative for our sector. It is always a privilege to connect with the sector, something that I have had the honour of doing on many occasions, most recently following my appointment as interim Chief Commissioner of the interim Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) on 1 July 2025. Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt AO and I, alongside our colleague, Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) Commissioner Professor Barney Glover AO have valued feedback from higher education system stakeholders over the past five months on suggested focal points for the activities, roles and responsibilities of the ATEC. These engagements have been invaluable in shaping our priorities and clarifying the role ATEC will play in stewarding Australia’s tertiary education system.

It’s important for me to take a moment to highlight the crucial role played by academic senates and boards in the operation and success of a university. As the primary body for academic policy, curriculum and governance, the academic senate has a duty to ensure the integrity and quality of teaching and learning. This work underpins the academic mission of every institution. Throughout the interim phase of the ATEC, I have sought to engage closely with the Committee of Chairs of Academic Boards/Senates (CoCABS), the Australian Chairs of Academic Boards and Senates (OzCABS) and the University Chancellors Committee (UCC). We deeply value insights from these communities, as we lay the groundwork for the establishment of ATEC.

The legislation to establish the ATEC formally was introduced to the Parliament on Wednesday 26 November 2025. Once passed – the ATEC will become a legislated body within the Department of Education. It will be comprised of three Commissioners who will serve as statutory officers. The ATEC will play a key role in driving important structural reforms across the tertiary education system to help meet Australia’s skills and knowledge needs.

In the meantime, the interim ATEC has been far from idle since commencing operations in July 2025. Our focus has been twofold: laying the groundwork for the ATEC legislation whilst also delivering on immediate priorities that are important for the sector. This includes consulting, engaging and collaborating with universities and the Department of Education on new funding arrangements and the design of mission-based compacts.

A core priority throughout the interim phase has been commencing work on costing and pricing to better understand the cost of teaching and learning. Lead by economist Professor Stephen Duckett AM, this critical work will enable ATEC to provide quality advice on appropriate funding levels per student.

Equity remains central to the mission of ATEC. Also, in line with the recommendations made in the Accord Final Report, we are committed to ensuring First Nations perspectives are central to and embedded within the higher education system.

The interim ATEC will convene a series of workshops on Enhancing Professional Practice in Higher Education, aimed at discovering system-wide approaches to assure teaching and learning quality across the sector. These sessions will culminate into a report to Government, providing actionable insights for continuous improvement.

The interim ATEC is progressing tertiary harmonisation priorities in collaboration with the Departments of Education and Employment and Workplace Relations, states and territories, and Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA), including consideration of recommendations from JSA’s Tertiary Harmonisation Report.

Other responsibilities include providing advice on Accord recommendations not yet actioned and maintaining strong links with bodies such as the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), the Australian Research Council (ARC) and the Australia Skills Quality Authority (ASQA). The interim ATEC has also been informally monitoring the progress of the Strategic Examination of Research and Development (SERD) and working to establish a Memorandum of Understanding and Service Level Agreement with the Department of Education. Our role also includes providing independent higher education advice to the Minister for Education when requested.

It’s a full agenda – but one that energises us. As the Parliament considers the ATEC enabling legislation, we will continue to consult and engage on the role the legislated ATEC will play in stewarding the higher education system. This is a pivotal moment, and collaboration will be key to shaping a future system that is equitable, sustainable and responsive to the needs of the nation.



Focus on Assessment: the new University of Newcastle Assessment Framework

By PVC Education and Innovation, Professor Steven Warburton and Sam Doherty

While the rise in access to and sophistication of GenAI offers exciting possibilities, it has also highlighted and perhaps amplified existing fragilities in some traditional forms of assessment. The impact is being felt at all levels of the global education sector.



This [University of Newcastle Assessment Framework](#) is our collective response. Developed collaboratively by staff from Schools, Colleges, and Academic Division, it builds on significant work already completed to protect the integrity of our awards while maintaining a rich, contemporary learning experience for our students.

The Framework has been tabled for discussion by the Teaching and Learning Committee in September and November. The framework has been released to staff, and College and School leadership received details of the framework in an email from the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor on 17 November.

The framework is part of the broader academic integrity ecosystem which incorporates elements and actions related to detection, investigation and response, governance and policy, education and awareness, data security, and assessment design and support.

Our Regulatory Environment

Under the Higher Education Standards Framework, all providers must be able to demonstrate that our students genuinely achieve the learning outcomes of their courses and programs, and that our grades reflect that achievement.

But beyond compliance, this is about trust. Our students, employers, professional bodies, and the wider community need confidence that a University of Newcastle degree represents real capability and real learning.



The University of Newcastle Assessment Framework, and assessment design initiatives, are contribute to a larger ecosystem of academic integrity initiatives.

Two Lanes – A modern approach to assessment

At the heart of the Framework is the application of a “two lane” approach to assessment which couples secure assessment (of learning) with open assessment (as and for learning) which provides opportunities for students to work appropriately with each other and AI in ways which are aligned with discipline norms and industry expectations.



Secure Assessment



Open Assessment

These are supervised assessment that facilitates observable attainment of program/course learning outcomes, verifying that students demonstrated the required knowledge and skills ([Policy on the use of Generative AI in Teaching, Learning and Assessment](#)).

A variety of different assessment tasks can be delivered in a way that delivers this security.

The “two-lane” approach has been developed by the [University of Sydney](#) and is being adopted and adapted by many institutions (e.g. [Uni Melbourne](#), [Curtin](#), [ACU](#), [UNE](#))

There is a growing sector consensus that “unsupervised assessments are no longer able to assure attainment of learning outcomes” ([Liu & Bates, 2025](#)).

Any assessment task that is not delivered in a secure, supervised fashion should be considered “open” and be delivered with the assumption that students **may** engage with GenAI to compete the task.

Minimum Expectations Coupled with Flexible Implementation

The Framework sets out clear expectations and timelines.

By 2026, every course will need to have appropriate secure assessment strategies in place, either at the course level (minimum one secure major assessment task in all courses) or as part of an approved program-level approach.

The provisions of the framework also provide flexibility for Colleges, Schools and individual educators to implement assessment methodologies that are aligned with course contexts, discipline norms and industry expectations.

These initial requirements are focused on the immediate safeguarding of the integrity of our awards. As the understanding and impact of emerging technologies continues to evolve, the University will continue to explore and implement assessment reform beyond these minimum requirements. This will include a focus on modern, technology enabled, assessment strategies which aim to uncover “evidence as to whether or not the work of learning has occurred” ([Ellis & Lodge, 2024](#)).



Support

This critical assessment reform, a key responsibility for all staff involved in educating our students, is complex and demanding. But it also presents an opportunity: to modernise our practices, to design more authentic assessments, and to ensure our graduates remain genuinely life-ready.

The launch of the Framework will include examples of secure and open assessment types, case studies, opportunities to engage with and learn from colleagues across the sector, and links to further resources.

Since the launch of the framework, Learning Design and Teaching Innovation have been running Framework implementation workshops, along with one-on-one learning design consultations for Course Coordinators. FAQs are being regularly updated to support implementation. All support options are available on the [Framework website](#).

Related Reading

-  [Academic Integrity, Artificial Intelligence, and Standards Working Group: Approaches to assessment design. \[Staff access only\]](#)
-  Corbin, T., Dawson, P., & Liu, D. (2025). [Talk is cheap: why structural assessment changes are needed for a time of GenAI. Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education](#), 1–11.
-  Ellis, C. & Lodge, J. (July 9, 2024). [Stop looking for evidence of cheating with AI and start looking for evidence of learning](#). LinkedIn.
-  Lodge, J. M., Bearman, M., Dawson, P., Gniel, H., Harper, R., Liu, D., McLean, J., Ucnik, L. & Associates (2025). [Enacting assessment reform in a time of artificial intelligence](#). Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, Australian Government.
-  [Learning Design and Teaching Innovation: GenAI and Assessment Examples. \[Staff access only\]](#)



Meet a Member



Dr Kate Ferguson-Patrick
Senior Lecturer and Primary Education Specialist

School of Education
College of Human and Social Futures
Elected Member

Why did you become a member of Academic Senate?

I joined Academic Senate to advocate for inclusive education across our university, ensuring that policies and curriculum frameworks reflect the diverse needs of all learners, particularly those from underrepresented communities. As a teacher educator, I believe it is vital to bring our voices into strategic decision-making to strengthen the quality and relevance of teacher education programs. I am also committed to upholding academic integrity and excellence in teaching, learning, and assessment, contributing to robust governance that supports both staff and student success.

What would you like to achieve in this role?

In my role on Academic Senate, I am enjoying getting to know people from other Colleges and Schools. I aim to strengthen the voice of teacher education in strategic decision-making, ensuring that the unique needs of accreditation, placements, and curriculum innovation are well represented. I am committed to advancing sustainability and global citizenship by supporting initiatives that embed the Sustainable Development Goals into teaching and research. Additionally, I seek to foster meaningful collaboration across faculties to promote interdisciplinary learning and research, particularly in education, health, and environmental studies.

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

I wish more members of our academic community understood that academic governance is not just about policy and compliance—it's about shaping the educational values and strategic direction of the University. It's a space where diverse voices, including those from teacher education, can influence decisions that affect curriculum design, equity, student experience, and academic integrity. Governance is collaborative and consultative, and when more staff engage with it, we strengthen our collective ability to create inclusive, future-focused, and high-quality learning environments.

What is your favourite part of being an academic?

What I love most about being an academic is the opportunity to mentor future educators, supporting preservice teachers as they grow into confident, reflective, and inclusive practitioners. I find great joy in creating transformative learning experiences that connect theory to practice and empower students to make a real-world impact, especially through the lens of the Sustainable Development Goals. Collaborating with diverse communities, lately in Pacific contexts, and engaging in research that promotes collaboration, global citizenship, and social justice keeps my work both meaningful and energising.

Discussion at Senate

What Items Have Been Discussed at Senate in the Second Half of 2025?

Major Issue Discussions

Foreign Interference and Anonymous Assignment Submissions
SFUN Results
TEQSA Risk Indicators – Staff Risk Indicators
New Strategic Plan – Engagement and Equity
University Rankings
CES Results
Undergraduate Student Re-enrolment Progression
Coursework Admissions
Academic Delegations
Material Change Notification - Termination of Third Party Arrangement (WSU)
Anonymous Assignment Submission
University of Newcastle Assessment Framework
Annual Cohort Reports
Program Reviews
University Strategy – Research Plan
Annual Academic Integrity Report (HDR)



Policy Discussion and Approval

Doctoral Degree (Research) by Prior Publication Admission Assessment Panel Procedure
English Language Proficiency Procedure
Publication and Dissemination of Research Policy
Adverse Circumstances Affecting Assessment Items Policy and Procedure
Enrolment Manual
Awards and Graduations Policy
JMP Admission and Selection Policy



2025 Academic Senate Membership



Ex-Officio

Professor Alex Zelinsky AO
Professor Zee Upton
Professor Belinda Tynan
Mr Nathan Towney
Professor Craig Simmons
Professor Robert Greenberg
Professor Lisa Wood
Professor Susan Ledger (Interim)
Professor Steven Warburton
Professor Juanita Todd
Mr Warwick Dawson
Ms Loren Collyer (Interim)
A/Professor Anna Bennett
Professor Kylie Shaw
Professor Abhishek Bhati

Elected Staff

Professor Marcus Rodrigs (PAS)
Dr Kate Ferguson-Patrick
Dr Elizabeth Roberts-Pedersen
Dr Bin Li
Dr Kyle Harrison
Dr Joseph Pegler
Mr Nathan West
Dr Cameron Younger
Dr Jude Weidenhofer
Dr Rachael Unicomb
Professor Marianna Sigala
Professor Jesper Gulddal (DPAS TL)
A/Professor Nancy Cushing (DPAS R)
A/Professor Terrence Summers
Professor James McCoy
A/Professor Michelle Kelly
A/Professor Vanessa Murphy
A/Professor Allison Cummins
A/Professor Daphne James
A/Prof Narelle Eather
Dr Angela Page
Dr Boyang Li
Miss Maria Cano Dominguez
Dr Shep Chidarikire
Professor Amanda Dawson
Dr Joyleen Christensen
A/Professor Troy Gaston
Dr Michelle Mansfield
Dr Annika Westrenius

Elected Students

Jennifer Lowe
Imogen Reid
Anushka Karki
Amelia Devine