

UTS Council meeting report

17 June 2020

This report covers some of the non-confidential matters considered by UTS Council at its 17 June 2020 meeting.

**The Report structure replicates the flow of the agenda.*

Strategic items of business

Strategic Briefing (DVC Education and Students)

The DVC (Education and Students) briefed Council on the significant progress made in 2019/2020 towards achieving the goals of the UTS2027 strategy, which were focussed firstly on improving the current student experience, and secondly on creating new business opportunities through the development of online courses, stackable degrees and micro-credentials available to students and enterprises.

The emergence of COVID-19 saw a rapid response by the university in moving to an all online operating model for teaching and learning. Key areas of focus in this new environment will include a review of the vision for teaching and learning, reassessing the support required by students and staff, and increasing the range of learning products to generate new sources of income.

Council was advised of the benefits of partnering with an external organisation in the delivery of OLM courses, particularly in relation to following up prospective student interest.

Council discussed several aspects of the short forms of learning model which may impact ownership of intellectual property, the quality of teaching and graduate outcomes, workload of academics and longer-term financial sustainability of particular offerings. It was acknowledged that although many of these aspects had been well considered, there was still more work required in some areas to increase understanding, assess impacts, and implement improvements.

Council Financial Forecast 2020 to 2022 - COVID19 Impact and Mitigations

Council discussed the outlook for 2021 to 2024 and the financial impact of COVID-19 on surplus, cashflow and liquidity in three scenarios together with potential mitigations for each scenario. It was noted that the 2020 outlook remains unchanged. The scenarios take into consideration key variables such as when Australia's international borders will be reopened to support the entry of international students. The Vice-Chancellor advised that aspects of UTS2027 that support the university's financial position had been advanced, while other less impactful aspects slowed.

Academic Response to COVID-19

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic at the start of 2020 has meant that significant energy has been directed toward addressing the crisis, but has also been used, where possible, to make accelerated progress towards the UTS2027 goals. The capacity to deliver online learning has emerged as the key to continuing education, and tailored student support has become critical to responding to the disparate impacts of the pandemic.

The DVC (Education and Students) advised that the move of staff and students to on-learning was rapid and mainly successful, with the results of a mid-term student survey showing mostly positive satisfaction rates. The survey did however highlight areas for improvement in supporting isolated students, more effective use of Student Services Fees, and concerns about how subject outcomes would be fairly assessed. Actions have been taken to assist in addressing each of these areas of concern.

Council was also advised that much work has been undertaken to reshape the assessment process for all subjects. This has resulted in a range of methods utilised (as appropriate to each subject) such as live online invigilation (invigilation remotely using artificial intelligence), take home exams or open book online exams. Exam periods have just commenced so there is currently little data on the success or otherwise of this assessment phase. Council requested an update at the next Council meeting.

The DVC (Research) also provided a briefing on the range of initiatives undertaken to ensure impacts of the pandemic on research activities were minimised while still best protecting the health and wellbeing of staff and students. An exercise to identify activities that could be shut-down versus those that needed to remain operational was undertaken. The DVC (Research) noted the positive sharing of knowledge and experience across the university sector in how the pandemic was impacting upon research activities.

Operations and performance

Report from the Vice-Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor provides a report to each Council meeting containing updates on key developments and events that have occurred since Council's last meeting. Updates include; the implementation progress of the UTS 2027 Strategy, State and Federal Government issues, updates regarding the university sector and internal matters, particularly achievements and awards.

The Vice-Chancellor provided Council with a high level update of progress on UTS2027 and the impacts of COVID-19. He further advised on a range of activities the University is undertaking to work with stakeholders to reduce negative impacts of the pandemic. These include working with Federal and State Governments on initiatives to safely expedite the return of international students, support isolated students and to work with community partners to ensure a safe precinct. The Chancellor also advised of complementary initiatives co-ordinated through university chancellors at state and national level.

The Vice-Chancellor reaffirmed his commitment to giving particular focus to three initiatives in the UTS Strategy: accelerate and invest in enterprise learning; systems and

processes to remove duplication and accelerate opportunities for improvement; and new ways of working.

Council was also advised about the proposed pilot planned to enable international students to enter the state to commence or resume their studies. This pilot is being supported by the NSW Government (including NSW Health).

The Vice-Chancellor was pleased to advise that, in the recently announced QS Rankings, the University has jumped a further seven places to be ranked 133rd. The Chancellor congratulated management and staff on this result noting it was reflective of past excellent work.

On another positive note, Council was advised of The Law Council of Australia's recognition of UTS Law's Professor Jennifer Burn for her outstanding work in Migration Law and her commitment to helping those most in need of legal assistance in this area. It was noted that Professor Burn is considered Australia's leading anti-slavery lawyer and she has spent her professional career working to abolish human trafficking and slavery in all its forms.

UTS Sustainability Report 2019

The DVC (Resources) advised Council that the Sustainability 2019 Report details performance against the University's 2017 - 2020 Sustainability Strategy covering a range of initiatives embedded into core activities across Teaching and Learning, Research, Campus Operations, and Engagement. It covers activities from research on the impacts of climate change to equipping our students with the knowledge and skills they need to become the next generation of leaders.

Of significance, it was noted the report now provides assessment against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which provide an internationally recognised framework for action on sustainability and justice.

Council noted that operational highlights for 2019 included UTS signing the Climate Emergency Declaration, the opening of the 5 Green Star UTS Central building with its plastic free food court, and the winning of the Tertiary Education Facilities Management Association "Clever Campus Award" for continuous improvement of environmental performance. The Chancellor acknowledged that the report was a good reflection of the outstanding progress made by the University.

Reports from committees

Council has a number of committees, whose membership have particular expertise, to provide assistance and advice to Council on matters for Council consideration. These committees report back to Council.

Finance Committee

The Finance Committee advises Council on matters relating to the distribution and supervision of university finances, and acts on behalf of Council in areas of delegated authority.

Council discussed options for debt management and broad discussions regarding the University's currently reported financial performance and noted further discussions would occur at the August Council meeting.

Items for approval

Council and Committee Meeting Dates for 2020

Items for noting

Council are provided papers for noting and include activity that has occurred between Council meetings.

- Chancellor's Report
- Use of Power of Attorney, University Seal and Executive Action

Items of General Business

None.

Other reports

- Work Health and Safety Report
- NSW Auditor-General's 2019 Report to Parliament
- Audit and Risk Committee Report
- Physical Infrastructure Committee Report
- Commercial Activities Committee Report
- Academic Board Report
- Governance Committee Report
- Student/Council Liaison Group Report