



# Griffith Council News—June

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**Council News is a high-level summary for staff of some of the key items and outcomes from the most recent ordinary Council meeting.**

## Vice Chancellor's Report

1. Council **noted** the *Vice Chancellor's Report to Council*, which had been circulated with the papers and was taken as read. The Vice Chancellor delivered the report in two parts, commencing with an update on key issues and notable highlights.
2. Following Griffith's findings and admission of staff underpayments to the Fair Work Ombudsman (FWO), an enforceable undertaking had been entered into with the FWO setting out the steps Griffith would need to take to address these contraventions and avoid future contraventions. The Vice Chancellor acknowledged that while not intentional, the University should have had better oversight of its processes and invested in its systems. The University had done its best to respond and to deal with difficult circumstances. Communication with staff had commenced, and to date there had not been many enquiries.
3. Notable achievements since the last meeting were highlighted, and included:
  - Announcement of the King's Birthday 2025 Honours List, with several members of the Griffith community recognised including the former Deputy Chancellor Ms Rachel Hunter PSM DUniv, who was awarded an Officer of Order of Australia (AO) in the General Division for distinguished service to public administration, to tertiary education governance, and to the community of Queensland.
  - The official launch of Pat Weller's book *Doing Things Differently: Griffith University at 50* and the new strategy *Creating a brighter future for all* on Thursday 5 June, which had been a great success, with the Federal Treasurer, the Honourable Dr Jim Chalmers MP, in attendance to launch the book.
  - An alumni event hosted by the Vice Chancellor in Hong Kong, with another scheduled in the United Kingdom with European based alumni and guest speaker, former Prime Minister the Honourable Julia Gillard AC. The Chancellor would head to the United States to host a 50th anniversary alumni event in Washington, with guest speaker Australia's Ambassador to the United States of America and former Prime Minister, His Excellency the Honourable Dr Kevin Rudd AC.

- Under embargo at the time of the meeting, Griffith had been ranked fourth in the world in the Times Higher Education (THE) Impact Rankings for 2025, jumping 20 places to be first in Queensland. The result would be announced on 18 June 2025, ahead of Open Day, and would be a strong point of distinction for Griffith.
4. The Vice Chancellor then spoke to a presentation with an update on student load. Domestic load had improved slightly and would be around budget, and above on continuing thanks to implementation of the retention strategy. International continuing load had improved, but commencing load was down. International students coming from Griffith College may improve this, but overall the decline in commencing students would likely result in a shortfall. Key revenue risks were again highlighted and remained the same as previously discussed. Possible revenue upsides included government needs-based funding for equity students, the potential for Griffith to regain its Simplified Student Visa Framework (SSVF) tier 1 classification, and increased demand for education services with population growth in South East Queensland. Actions to grow revenue in the short and long term were also **noted**, as were actions to reduce expenditure.
  5. Members discussed the Vice Chancellor's report, commencing with an acknowledgement of some of the improvements to student admission processes, with an anecdotal account of a very positive first-hand student experience describing it as simple, quick and easy.
  6. Factors contributing to international student load issues were discussed, and the potential to regain tier 1 classification under SSVF was acknowledged as an important lever that could improve visa processing and therefore increase international commencing load. The SSVF classification was also becoming a de facto quality indicator. The Vice President (Global), Marnie Watson, was working on a range of other strategies, and taking a focused and responsive approach to student recruitment.
  7. Quality measures in learning and teaching were considered, including whether targets and improvement strategies remained appropriate given recent results. It was **noted** that the survey results were only one measure, and that improved retention was a good indicator that some strategies were working.
  8. With student load growth remaining the primary financial challenge, members discussed the need for continued focus on building the University's reputation and position in the market, to present a package that would balance Griffith's excellence with its values. An example of this in practice was the recent changes to schools' engagement, sending Griffith's top researchers into schools. Building on this and noting the success of the Griffith Film School, education offerings for the business around filmmaking may be a potential new market, noting it was a growth industry in South East Queensland.
  9. The establishment of the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) and its overarching vision for the higher education sector was discussed, which included a move towards a nationally integrated approach. This would aim to ensure the retention of a broad spectrum of knowledge and skills development across the sector but in a more sustainable manner. The Vice Chancellor's new role as Chair of Universities Australia would play a key role in addressing ATEC's objectives while ensuring support for the sector.
  10. The Chancellor thanked the Vice Chancellor for the presentation, and **noted** that the issues raised, particularly in relation to student load and revenue, would remain a priority for Council.

## Health and Safety Report

1. Council **noted** the *Quarter 2 mid-cycle 2025 Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report*, which had been circulated with the papers and was taken as read. The report was based on data from

January to April 2025 and showed that most KPI trends were tracking favourably year to date. The following was highlighted:

- A third-party health and safety maturity assessment completed in Q1 2025 showed Griffith to be at level 3.1 'Calculative,' validating improvement. As a next step and to continue building safety maturity, Tier 2 Strategic Safety Improvement Plans were being developed across the University, as endorsed by the Executive Group.
- Sharps-related incidents remained stable. In response to a higher incident rate amongst postgraduate students, there was an immediate focus on better education and process improvement for that group.
- There had been four live wire incidents involving a building contractor. The University was working with them to refocus and ensure they have appropriate Safe Work Method Statements and supporting processes in place.

## Report on Research activities

1. The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) Professor Lee Smith spoke to the submission titled *Research Activity in 2024 Report*, which had been circulated with the papers and was taken as read. Before providing an overview of research activities undertaken in 2024, members were reminded that the Supercharging Research at Griffith (SuRG) program had been initiated in 2023 to improve the University's research performance. SuRG included work across the five key areas of Strategy, Capability and Performance, Investment, Vehicles, and the new high performing Biomedical Research Institute. In 2024, Griffith achieved significant growth in research outcomes, leadership, and sector recognition, with strong performance in Australian Research Council funding rounds and external research income. Despite a decline in HDR commencements and completions—partly due to post-COVID impacts—efforts were underway to enhance industry engagement and support timely completions. Research output remained highly productive, with notable improvements in citation impact. While university rankings showed mixed results, research impact was strong, and initiatives were underway to better communicate this globally. The Beacons and Spotlights initiative, launched in 2021, had elevated Griffith's profile but presented funding attribution challenges, and would be restructured under the SuRG program while maintaining its interdisciplinary focus. Development of the Research and Innovation Plan 2025–2030 was ongoing, with finalisation expected by year-end.
2. Members discussed the report starting with a question about the challenge of integrating the unique structures of Beacons and Spotlights within University structures and systems, with assurance that the proposal to transition to new Research Entity structures would clarify reporting and support improved return on investment tracking.
3. The significant opportunities to advance Australia's leadership in biotech and medical technology research and development were discussed, with a call for stronger formal partnerships with hospitals. The University's recent appointment of Professor Scott Bell, the establishment of the Australian Centre for Precision Health and Technology (PRECISE) and the pending Health and Advanced Technologies Research and Innovation Centre (HATRIC) were highlighted as important strategic steps to strengthen health sector collaboration.
4. A query was raised regarding a potential pivot towards commercially funded research; the response emphasised a broader diversification strategy that was more sustainable and would be supported by a newly developed Academic Performance Framework. In this context the mechanics of the block grant system were explained, noting the high value of industry funding and the shortfall in government contributions relative to research costs.

5. Concerns were raised about declining HDR commencements, with contributing factors including economic conditions, visa delays, and limited scholarship availability. It was **noted** that the University was working to address this through increased stipends and enhanced industry engagement.
6. The future of interdisciplinary research was discussed, with reaffirmed commitment to evolving the Beacon model to support complex, cross-disciplinary challenges. The Chancellor expressed the importance of maintaining open dialogue as this evolved, and before the University moved away from Beacons and Spotlights. It was agreed that this be brought back to a future Council meeting for discussion.
7. Council **noted** the *Research Activity in 2024 Report*. The Chancellor acknowledged the leadership of Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) Professor Lee Smith in achieving such a significant uplift in research outcomes, and congratulated all who had been involved, noting the institution-wide effort.

## New University Budget Model

*The Chief Financial Officer Mr Alister Whitta joined the meeting for this item.*

1. The Chief Operating Officer introduced the item and emphasised that the new budget model presented for approval was designed to support budget repair but would not itself repair the budget. He advised that the University was taking a three-year view and making margins transparent by area, with a focus on financial sustainability and accountability.
2. The Chief Financial Officer spoke to the submission titled *New University Budget Model*, which had been circulated with the papers and was taken as read. He emphasised the new model's alignment with strategic directives and operational planning. The model made the links between revenue and costs transparent, included incentives for strategically aligned behaviour, and aimed to avoid perverse incentives like cost-cutting for rewards. The risks of adopting the budget model were **noted**, particularly its reliance on implementation. This included effective communication, training, and ensuring that groups and schools were well informed of budget response and improvement options. If student numbers decreased, central area costs would need to decrease, and it was **noted** that in some areas this would be challenging due to fixed costs. Reporting mechanisms would be adopted to identify overspend and underspend, which would assist budget owners with adjusting during the year.
3. The Chancellor opened the floor to questions, starting with an inquiry about the implications for a school that falls short of budgeted student load. It was **noted** that any shortfall would necessitate a reduction in resources, although some challenges to this approach were **noted**. To support budget holders through the change in budget model, Finance and the Transformation Office were developing training on the budget model and to strengthen financial literacy.
4. Members discussed the intent of the new budget model was to efficiently and sustainably rebalance resources, based upon student load and other revenue and expenditure drivers. Quality would continue to be monitored and that the intent was to ensure a sustainable financial future, not to harm the organisation. The new Academic Performance Framework would be positioned to support both quality and sustainability, aligned with supporting the strategy and the new budget model.
5. Members agreed there was a need to address unsustainable resource allocation and poor financial management. At one level, the new budget model was about ensuring resource allocation shifted with student load in a measured way. Some would decline just because of the market—not because of poor management, but the University needed to be able to

- address this. There was incentive built in, but not penalty—the model was about meeting demand, supporting the strategy, and ensuring sound and rigorous budget management.
6. The Chancellor **noted** that it was a challenge to introduce a new budget model, particularly given the current downward financial trajectory, but that there needed to be a sharp focus on a sustainable financial future, and to do that the University would need to drive different outcomes.
  7. On the recommendation of the Finance and Infrastructure Committee, the Council **resolved to approve** the progression of the budget model for use in preparing the 2026-2028 budget based on the proposed structure outlined in the report from Nous, with further refinement and simplification to occur on the drivers and how space charging would be applied.

*Mr Alister Whitta left the meeting.*

### **Amended Risk Appetite Statement and 2025/2026 Insurance Renewal**

1. The Chief Operating Officer spoke to the submission titled *Amended Risk Appetite Statement and 2025/2026 Insurance Renewal*, which had been circulated with the papers and was taken as read. He advised that finalisation of the Risk Appetite Statement had been delayed because it had undergone an extensive rewrite. The risk appetites had been amended to reflect the current context and were aligned to the new strategy and informed by discussions at the Audit and Risk Committee.
2. The Chair, Audit and Risk Committee, Pro Chancellor Karen Prentis advised that the Risk Appetite Statement had been discussed at length by the Committee, with a focus on ensuring it reflected Griffith's innovation. She commended management for addressing the feedback and recognised the new statements as a significant and positive step change for the University.
3. On the recommendation of the Audit and Risk Committee, the Council **resolved to approve** the University's draft Risk Appetite Statements and **noted** the insurance renewal update.

### **Capital Infrastructure Program: Major Project Update**

1. The Chief Operating Officer spoke to the submission titled *Strategic Campus Infrastructure Program Update*, which had been circulated with the papers and was taken as read. He provided updates on a number of projects, highlighting progress with the N13 demolition, HATRIC proposal and the Mt Gravatt exit.
2. On the recommendation of the Finance and Infrastructure Committee, Council **noted** the status update on the Strategic Campus Infrastructure Program.

### **Nathan campus student accommodation**

1. The Chief Operating Officer spoke to the submission titled *Nathan Campus Student Accommodation*, which had been circulated with the papers and was taken as read.
2. The proposal for the Nathan Student Accommodation project was discussed, which would deliver high quality on-campus accommodation. An architect had been engaged to prepare a masterplan for its staged delivery, with a preliminary concept provided. Members discussed the exciting new development, noting the important role quality accommodation plays in student experience, attraction and campus activation. It was acknowledged that while the current accommodation had served its purpose well since it was built for the 1982 Commonwealth Games, that student needs and expectations had changed over time and that the Nathan campus accommodation was no longer meeting these requirements and needed renewal.



3. On the recommendation of the Finance and Infrastructure Committee, the Council resolved to approve commitment of funds to the renewal and development of student accommodation at the Nathan campus.

## Independent review of Corporate Governance

Council **resolved** to approve the:

1. the *Independent Council Corporate Governance Review Report* (May 2025), including Attachments A, B, C, D and E.
  - a. the *Independent Corporate Governance Review - Implementation Plan* (refer Attachment C), including actions and timeline, subject to amendments recommended at the meeting.

## 2024 Modern Slavery Statement

1. The submission titled *2024 Modern Slavery Statement* (refer agenda item 17.0) was circulated with the papers and taken as read. Under the *Modern Slavery Act 2018* (Cth) Griffith is required to prepare and submit a yearly Modern Slavery Statement to the Australian Government's Online Register for Modern Slavery Statements. The statement must confirm the University's commitment to advancing human rights and describe actions taken to identify and address modern slavery risks in their operations and supply chains.
2. On the recommendation of the Audit and Risk Committee, the Council **resolved to approve** the 2024 Modern Slavery Statement for signing by the Vice Chancellor.

## Other report to Council

Council also **noted** or **approved** the following:

3. Reports from the following University committees
  - a. Academic Committee 2/2025 (May) meeting
  - b. Audit and Risk Committee 2/2025 (May) meeting
  - c. Finance and Infrastructure Committee 2/2025 (June) meeting
  - d. People, Nominations and Remuneration Committee 2/2025 (June) meeting
4. Council and Council Committee Membership Appointments—Audit and Risk Committee
5. Honorary Degree Nominations

## Delegated authority and policy changes approved

Council **delegated authority** to the Provost (for Academic policy documents) and the Chief Operating Officer (for Governance and Operational policy documents) to approve amendments required to Council and Council committee approved policy documents to ensure alignment with the new Strategic Plan.

Council **approved** amendments to the following policy documents:

6. Council and Committees Remuneration Policy (2025/0001043) and Council and Committees Remuneration Procedure (2025/0001044), to be effective from 28 June 2025
7. Code of Conduct (2025/0001045), to be effective from 16 June 2025

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