



# Griffith Council News—February 2025

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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.*

## MEMBERSHIP

1. Council **welcomed** new Council member Professor John Dewar AO to his first Council meeting. Professor Dewar was appointed by Council at the 6/2024 (November) meeting as an additional member for a four year term from 1 February 2025 to 31 December 2028. Members noted Professor Dewar's strong connections with Griffith University, as both an alumnus, completing his PhD at Griffith in 1995, and as a Senior Leader in numerous positions including as Dean and Head of School, Griffith Law School (1999-2002), Pro Vice Chancellor (Business and Law) (2003-2005) and Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) (2005-2009). He has over 20 years' experience in higher education senior leadership roles most notably as Vice-Chancellor of La Trobe University, and significant state and federal government advisory positions as well as serving as Chair of the university peak body, Universities Australia. Professor Dewar's appointment brought valuable skill and experience to the Council, and aligns with the Universities Accord report and the priority of the Expert Council on University Governance to ensure governing bodies have members with the experience and expertise in the business of running universities. His roles as interim Vice Chancellor of the University of Wollongong (which concluded on 28 February 2025) and his continuing role at KordaMentha had been declared and managed as required and according to policy, and as detailed in the Council Declarations of Interest Register.

2. Council **acknowledged** that elected academic staff member Professor Eleanor Milligan had resigned from Griffith, and that her last day in office as a Council member would be 26 April 2025 and so the meeting was her last. Professor Milligan had served as an elected academic staff member on Council since 2021. The Chancellor thanked Professor Milligan and paid tribute to her contributions and noted Council's appreciation of her commitment and determination to make Griffith University a better place.

## 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.
2. The Vice Chancellor spoke to the report and commenced with an update on the implementation of the Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education (Action Plan), which included the establishment of the new National Student Ombudsman. The Office opened on 1 February 2025 and was already taking complaints. A regulatory impact assessment was being undertaken of the new National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence (also an action item from the Action Plan).
3. The Vice Chancellor then spoke about the income forecast for 2025 noting that early indications revealed a student income short fall of ~\$10 million due to lower international student applications and acceptances and demand decline in the domestic postgraduate market. Marketing and admissions teams were working hard to increase applications and acceptances. It was noted that students were dropping load, which also impacted income. The University had outperformed budget on all measures in 2024 through expenditure controls, but this had impacted staff and student experience. The decline in student satisfaction was being investigated through quantitative analysis of student comments, and a summary of findings would be brought to Council in the next *Vice Chancellor's Report*. While the University was on track to deliver the expenditure reductions planned for 2025-2028, priority would be given to changes that would not impact staff or students.
4. The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) addressed a question about the reduction in research higher degree (RHD) completions and advised that this had been a result of a smaller number of commencements four years prior. The University had been working to increase the pipeline, which had included engagement with industry partners to bring in additional scholarships. On a separate matter he noted that the risk rating for foreign interference had changed from low to moderate following the findings of the foreign interference internal audit, which the report stated was Substantially Effective,

but found that the foreign interference checking tool needed to be aligned with international gifts and donations.

5. Members discussed the following:

- The reduction in the number of PhD scholarships and its impact on the pipeline, noting that it was a complex picture impacted by an increase in the number of scholarship extensions granted, the increased stipend and a broader range of scholarships including those from industry that needed to be matched to students.
- The change from Ministerial Direction 107 to 111 noting that it had not had a significant impact on visa processing for Griffith, and that the pipeline of applications reducing was the greater concern.
- Potential impacts of a change in government post the federal election and engagement with crossbench to support change that would benefit students.

6. The Chancellor thanked the Vice Chancellor for the report.

## HEALTH AND SAFETY REPORT

Council **noted** the *Health, Safety and Wellbeing Report – Quarter 4 2024*, which had been circulated with the papers and was taken as read.

1. The Chief Operating Officer spoke to the report, which was based on data from October to December 2024, and highlighted the following:

- Lost Time Injury Frequency Rate (LTIFR) decreased from 1.77 in 2023 to 1.62 in 2025, with both years below sector benchmark (2.5).
- 2023 to 2024 saw a significant increase in incident investigations and regulatory notifiable incidents, which was largely due to increased line 2 assurance and self-reported issues.
- Chemical Safety Audit had progressed with specialists having completed 98% of high hazard spaces in the second round of audits, with less but similar findings and ongoing monitoring overseen by the Chemical Safety Committee.
- Physical Risk had reduced from medium to low but would continue to be monitored.
- Psychosocial Risk was rated as medium for legal compliance but low for exposure. Mitigations being implemented for legal compliance by March 2025 should reduce the risk to low.

2. Members discussed the slow progress on resolving issues around management of sharps injuries and noted the subsequent escalation to the Pro Vice

Chancellor (Health) to consider other controls. A report would be provided to the 2/2025 Audit and Risk Committee meeting.

3. Members discussed the potential need for further investment in safety leadership given it was trending down and whether it was something that raised concern from a culture perspective and should therefore be investigated. A report on this matter would be provided to the 2/2025 Audit and Risk Committee.
4. The Chancellor acknowledged that while there was still work to be done that it continued to track in the right direction.

## **2024 ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND BRIEFING FROM AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE**

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

1. The Chancellor introduced the item and welcomed the new Chief Financial Officer, Mr Alister Whitta, to the meeting and then invited the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, Pro Chancellor Karen Prentis, to provide a briefing on the review of the 2024 Annual Financial Statements. Council noted the submission titled 2024 Draft Financial Statements, which had been circulated with the papers and taken as read. Members considered the following documents:

- 2024 Draft Financial Statements (provided following the 1/2025 Audit and Risk Committee meeting)
- 1/2025 Audit and Risk Committee Resolution for Council (provided following the 1/2025 Audit and Risk Committee meeting)
- Report to Audit and Risk Committee on the 2024 Draft Financial Statements
- Chief Financial Officer to Vice Chancellor Certification Statement 2024
- Annual Report Financial Summary 2024
- Draft Management Representation Letter 2024
- 2024 Griffith University Queensland Audit Office (QAO) Audit and Risk Committee briefing Paper and Closing Report.

2. The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, Pro Chancellor Karen Prentis, reminded Council of the role of the Audit and Risk Committee in reviewing the annual financial statements as outlined in its constitution. She outlined the robust process the Committee had undertaken in carrying out its review and the assurance provided by the QAO, who would issue an unmodified opinion of the financial statements, and concluded the Committee considered the annual financial statements to be in an appropriate state for approval and for signing.

3. The Chancellor thanked the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee for leading the process and for her diligence. He also noted the robust process and the open relationship with the QAO, and that Council could have confidence about what was in the statements. He also acknowledged the work of management to turn around the finances and significance of the achievement before signing off the statements.

4. On the recommendation of the Audit and Risk Committee, the Council **resolved to approve** the 2024 Financial Statements subject to a minor required amendment being finalised.

5. The Chancellor and Vice Chancellor congratulated and thanked the Finance team and the Audit and Risk Committee for their work.

*The Chief Financial Officer left the meeting.*

## GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

1. Council **noted** the paper titled *Griffith University 2024 Annual Report*, which had been circulated with the papers and taken as read. Members noted that as a statutory body, Griffith University was required by the Queensland Government to submit an annual report each year in accordance with the Annual Report Requirements for Queensland Government Agencies.
2. Council **resolved to approve** the *Griffith University 2024 Annual Report* (subject to minor amendments requested by the Department of Education during the final compliance check), which would be tabled in Parliament on Thursday 27 March 2025.

## STRATEGIC PLAN

1. The Vice Chancellor spoke to the submission titled *Griffith University Strategic Plan 2025-2023 – DRAFT*, which had been circulated with the papers and taken as read. Members noted the draft strategy, and the accompanying draft strategy on a page, and the consultation that had informed their development.
2. Members were advised that input on this version of the strategy had been received from staff during the VC's recent town halls and from the University's senior leaders at the Senior Leadership Conference on 13-14 February. Feedback had been largely positive but with a consistent theme about better articulation of Griffith's point of differentiation and distinction. Along with

several minor changes, other key points included the design and artwork for the strategy to be reflective of Indigenous ways of being, doing and thinking, and amplification of the idea of students as partners. Work would be undertaken to finalise the strategy in the coming month, incorporating the feedback received from staff and from Council. It was also proposed that rather than launch the strategy at the University's 50th anniversary Oration in March that it be launched separately after the Oration to allow time to incorporate final feedback and to ensure it would not be lost in the event and therefore receive adequate focus.

3. Council members discussed the new strategy, and the Vice Chancellor thanked members for their input and advised that further feedback was welcome following the meeting. She further noted that Griffith's identity was strongly connected to its values and purpose and that this had remained central to the strategy.
4. Council agreed to the proposal to launch the final strategy after the Oration in March given time required to make final amendments following recent feedback, and to ensure it would have adequate visibility separate to the anniversary celebrations. Council also agreed that the final strategy could be approved by Flying Minute if it was ready ahead of the next ordinary Council meeting in April, given broad endorsement or the current state of the draft.

## 2024 UNIVERSITY KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS PERFORMANCE

1. Council **noted** the submission titled *2024 Griffith University 2024 KPI Performance*, which had been circulated with the papers and taken as read. Members recalled that the Vice Chancellor had provided an update on how they were tracking at the last meeting.
2. Members discussed the following key matters:
  - A need to understand the reasons for the decline in domestic student experience, noting that the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education) would report on student experience at the April Council meeting.
  - The drop in the THE World University Rankings as a result of methodology changes.
  - Outstanding research results, particularly with the number of DECRA's and future fellowships that had been awarded, which had been the result of excellent hiring and the work undertaken by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) and Vice President (Industry and External Engagement).
  - Focus on international retention needed given the decline and had been the result of Griffith's diversification strategy, which had subsequently

been addressed. Griffith has historically had strong international retention and satisfaction compared to the sector.

- Potential for movement in ATARs should international markets continue to decline, noting that it was not likely they would drop further but that instead there would be a greater spread of options, with alternative pathways explored for entry through preparatory programs and new advanced and double degree programs introduced with higher ATARs for high achieving students. While Griffith would like to increase its ATARs it needed to consider its position in the market.
  - Transnational education opportunities in India were still being explored, with no further developments at this stage. The incoming Vice President (Global) was experienced in transnational education.
  - A longitudinal data set tracking load intensity for continuing students (including both retention and FT to PT) would be a useful spotlight for inclusion in the next *Vice Chancellor's Report*.
3. Council **resolved to approve** the report on the University's performance against the 2024 University KPIs.

## CAPITAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM: MAJOR PROJECTS UPDATE

1. Council **noted** the submission titled *Strategic Campus Infrastructure Program Update*, which had been circulated with the papers and was taken as read. The Chief Operating Officer provided updates on major campus and infrastructure projects underway or planned for each of the campuses.
2. The N13 demolition continued to be challenging and had been delayed due to additional asbestos and mould and poor weather. Completion of demolition was now forecast for July/August, 11 months later than planned, which meant the site would not be ready for Open Day. The delay would also mean the demolition and make good would likely exceed the approved budget, which would be managed within the Capital Management Plan budget.
3. The New Sciences building (Technical Annexe) at the Nathan campus was on track for practical completion in April.

## CBD CONCEPT DESIGN

*The Director, Major Projects and Planning, Mr Steve Grimes, joined the meeting for this item.*

1. Council **noted** the submission titled *Treasury CBD Campus – Concept Design for Internal Fitout*, which had been circulated with the papers and was taken as read. The Chief Operating Officer presented parts of the *Brief Validation Report*, which was an annexure to the submission and highlighted:

- The design process and short timeline, which would help support opening for operation in 2027.
- Space budget—which had allocated approximately half to learning and teaching space, a third to workplace space, and the rest for local support. Quite a few of the spaces would be multi-use and designed for formal and informal learning and designed to accommodate events and executive education.
- Workplace and local support spaces would generally be working very hard with approximately 2.5 FTE per work point.

2. Members discussed the following:

- The use of public spaces and locked down spaces and their interplay, and the complexity from a security and people-flow perspective, but the importance of activation and to bring people in and bring the building to life.
- The need to showcase the building at the Oration, noting the opportunity to tell the hearts and minds story of the building and to capture the transformation of an iconic heritage building from a casino that profits and gambles, to a university that empowers and educates.
- Work integrated learning and research opportunities for students were being explored across all aspects of the project, including possible internships with key partners.
- Consultation undertaken to date and process for on-going building user consultation.
- Relocation of staff from Nathan and South Bank to the CBD campus would be balanced by the relocation of staff from Mt Gravatt, and repurposing of buildings on the Nathan campus was part of the Nathan master plan that had previously been approved by Council.
- Student attrition from other campuses to the CBD was not a concern given different campuses would have different offerings. While some cannibalisation of student load may occur, the University was expecting new student markets to open up from North and West.

3. Council **approved** the Concept Design uses and spatial allocations for the Treasury Building fitout. The Chancellor thanked the team for their work and noted that Council would look forward to seeing the next iteration of the design.

*The Director, Major Projects and Planning left the meeting.*

## ANNUAL GRIFFITH ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMERCIALISATION UPDATE

1. The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) Professor Lee Smith spoke to the submission titled *Griffith Enterprise Partnerships and Commercialisation Update 2024*, which had been circulated with papers and taken as read. He highlighted the following:
  - Growth in Consultancy and Commercial Research (CCR) revenue in 2024, and that in line with their strategy, the average value per deal had increased relative to 2024. The incredible success in the last Australian Research Council (ARC) linkage round and a new CCR Procedure introduced from 1 January 2025 would further support and incentivise engagement with CCR work at larger scales.
  - Government remained the biggest client by revenue, but the relative proportion of industry funded commercial research projects had increased in 2024.
  - The University had a Request for Quote (RFQ)/tender success rate of 52% in 2024, against an industry benchmark of 25%. Success rates for invited proposals were also high at 81% against the industry benchmark of >40%. Success rates were attributed to a more strategic approach to responding to tenders and invited proposals.
  - Griffith Enterprise had been working on a qualified pipeline of over 30 industry deal opportunities, with success in lead generation in 2024. Key deals and partnerships executed in 2024 were highlighted and included those around quantum commercialisation, and the continuing development of the \$280 million part partnership with Sanofi.
  - Income for industry PhD scholarships continued to grow and had equated to 45 new externally funded 3-year PhD scholarships.
  - The number of invention disclosures had increased, and Griffith Enterprise had launched a new professional development program to support commercialisation and industry engagement. Griffith's success in the Australian Economic Accelerator (AEA) was also noted.
  - Priorities for 2025 were outlined, along with challenges and opportunities.
2. Members discussed the great progress that had been made and in light of this how Griffith benchmarked in the sector, noting that the scale of commercialisation at Group of Eight universities was significantly higher given the money they had to invest.
3. Seed funding for proof of concepts was discussed, and early engagement with researchers to advise of their commercial potential was occurring to grow the pipeline. Decisions around early investment were also discussed, and the engagement of industry in that process. The Vice President (Industry and

External Engagement) advised that seed funding was a challenge in partnerships, and that the University had been in discussions with Queensland Investment Corporation (QIC) and venture capital groups about this.

4. In responding to a question about what was most exciting in the space at the moment, the Strep A research was highlighted as a game-changer world-wide, that would positively impact millions of people as well as generate significant income. Alignment of external industry partners with the four key research impact areas had also been exciting, particularly a coalition of investors for health and wellbeing looking specifically at supporting female performance in sport. It was also noted that the University had been shortlisted for a research Centre of Excellence bid that would be worth \$47 million if successful.
5. Council **noted** the update on Commercialisation and Commercial Research Activity in 2024 and the Chancellor thanked the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) for his presentation.

## INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Council **noted** the update about the independent review of Council's corporate governance to be undertaken in 2025 by Directors Australia in accordance with the *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021* requirement to periodically undertake an independent review.

## 2024 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE COMPLIANCE REPORT

1. Council **noted** the submission titled *2024 Annual Governance Compliance Report*, which had been circulated with the papers and was taken as read. The submission provided:
  - Information about recent announcements relating to university governance, including changes to the University Chancellors Council (UCC) Voluntary Code, now titled *A Code of Governance Principles and Practice for Australia's Public Universities* (formerly called the *Voluntary Code of Best Practice for the Governance of Australian Public Universities*) and the University's reporting obligations.
  - Information about the University's core regulatory requirements.
  - An annual update on the University's compliance monitoring, with key risks or obligations identified, recommended actions taken or planned, and outcomes.
  - An update on the University's Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) re-registration application.

- Links to annual reports on delegations, policy review and development, the Council's governance activities and compliance with the UCC Code and Corporate and Academic Governance risk assessments, and relevant review reports.
2. Members noted that the report outlined how the Council had fulfilled its roles and responsibilities and operated in accordance with best practice standards for university governance and in compliance with core regulatory requirements. Council **noted** the *Annual Governance Compliance Report* (2025/0001008) and its annexures.

## REPORT FROM UNIVERSITY COMMITTEES

### 1. *Audit and Risk Committee 2024 Annual Report*

- Pro Chancellor and Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, Ms Karen Prentis, provided a brief overview of the annual report, which was taken as read. She noted that the committee was on a process of continuing maturity, and that they had a good relationship with Management. She highlighted that while significant improvements had been made in 2024 across key functions overseen by the committee, there was still work to be done.
- Council **noted** the *Audit and Risk Committee 2024 Annual Report*.

### 2. *Finance and Infrastructure Committee 2024 Annual Report*

- Pro Chancellor and Chair of the Finance and Infrastructure Committee, Ms Amelia Evans, provided a brief verbal update noting the work of the committee undertaken in 2024 outlined in the annual report. She advised that the first meeting of the committee would be in March, and that the focus for the year ahead would be on budget repair and sustainability, and that it would be good to get a longer-term perspective given the 2024 focus had been more reactionary and short-term.
- Council **noted** the *Finance and Infrastructure Committee 2024 Annual Report*.

### 3. *People, Nominations and Remuneration Committee 2024 Annual Report*

- Pro Chancellor and Chair of the People, Nominations and Remuneration Committee, Ms Jessica Rudd, provided a brief verbal report noting the work undertaken by the committee in 2024 as outlined in the annual report. She **noted** that the committee's first meeting would be in March and that it remained focused on its job and the responsibilities outlined in its constitution.

- Council **noted** the *People, Nominations and Remuneration Committee 2024 Annual Report*.

#### 4. *Griffith Elders and First Peoples Knowledge Holders Advisory Board 2024 Annual Report*

- Council member and Chair of the Griffith Elders and First Peoples Knowledge Holders Advisory Board, Mr Joshua Creamer, provided a brief overview of the recent work undertaken by the Board, which had included the introduction of a new member selection process. He advised that the Board would look to maintain some continuity, while also making way for some new members. He **noted** that Pro Chancellor Rudd had agreed to assist with the process and sit on the panel with himself and the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Indigenous) Professor Jonathan Bullen.
- Council **noted** the *Griffith Elders and First Peoples Knowledge Holders Advisory Board 2024 Annual Report*, and the minutes from the 4/2024 (November) meeting.

## ANTI-RACISM STATEMENT

1. The submission titled *Draft Griffith Anti-Racism Statement* had been circulated with the papers and was taken as read. It was proposed that Griffith adopt a more specific anti-racism approach in addition to measures already in place, through the development of an anti-racism statement and associated Action Plan. The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee were charged with progress and an initial draft provided for noting. The draft statement was aligned with the University's Reconciliation Statement and reinforces the University—a place of teaching and research—as anti-racist and where all students, staff and community feel welcome and safe and that they belong.
2. Council **noted** progress on the Anti-Racism Statement at Griffith University and the ongoing development of an Action Plan, under the auspices of the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee.

## 2024 ANNUAL FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM ATTESTATION STATEMENT

1. The annual freedom of speech and academic freedom attestation statement responds to the Government expectation that each university complete an annual attestation statement, and is intended to attest that the University Council is satisfied that the University has a policy that upholds freedom of

speech and academic freedom as paramount values, as required under the Model Code; maintains an institutional environment in which freedom of speech and academic freedom are upheld and protected; and addresses questions in relation to the management of freedom of speech and academic freedom issues promptly, actively and in good faith.

2. In addition, the updated *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021*, which came into effect from 1 July 2021, included updated standard 6.1.4, which requires higher education providers' governing bodies to take steps to develop and maintain an institutional environment in which freedom of speech and academic freedom are upheld and protected.
3. Council **resolved to approve** the 2024 Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech Attestation Statement.

## **AMENDED GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK**

1. The submission titled *Amended Griffith University Governance Framework* had been circulated with the papers and was taken as read. Following approval of the Workplace Change Proposal, the Griffith University Governance Framework required amendments to reflect the changes. In accordance with section 15.3 of the Framework, the Chief Operating Officer approved the editorial amendments, which were required as a result of changes approved to related documents.
2. Council **noted** the amended Griffith University Governance Framework (2025/0001009), which was effective from the date of approval by the Chief Operating Officer.

**February 2025**