Submission No 84

INQUIRY INTO ENHANCING VICTORIAN UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

Organisation: Swinburne University of Technology

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Swinburne University of Technology

Submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Enhancing University Governance

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Submitted by:
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Introduction

Swinburne University of Technology (Swinburne) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the *Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Enhancing University Governance*, established by the Legislative Assembly on 3 December 2025 and referred to the Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee.

Universities play a pivotal role in advancing knowledge, fostering innovation, and preparing individuals for the future. At Swinburne, our mission is to bring people and technology together to build a better world. We are committed to tech and people-centred innovation, ensuring our graduates are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving digital landscape. Our focus on industry engagement and real-world impact sets us apart, making us a leader in technology and innovation. As a proud multi-sector institution, we uphold and dutifully implement the regulatory standards, accountability, and transparency required under legislation, codes and frameworks that currently support the sector.

The University is committed to strong governance that supports accountability, transparency, institutional resilience, and academic independence, while enabling universities to fulfil their public purpose.

This submission responds directly to the Parliamentary Inquiry's Terms of Reference, with particular focus on:

- accountability and transparency;
- staff, student and community voice at the highest governance level; and
- timely and effective implementation of the Expert Council on University Governance (ECUG) Principles.

Commitment to the Expert Council on University Governance (ECUG) Principles

Swinburne University strongly supports the Expert Council on University Governance (ECUG) Principles and the nationally coordinated reform process through which they were developed.

The ECUG Principles provide a comprehensive, principles-based framework for strengthening university governance, transparency, accountability and public trust. Swinburne regards the ECUG framework as the appropriate and sufficient foundation for governance reform across the sector.

Swinburne is committed to:

- Implementing the ECUG Principles through Council oversight, executive leadership and institutional governance frameworks;
- Reporting transparently on implementation progress;
- Regularly reviewing the effectiveness of its governance arrangements to ensure they remain contemporary, fit for purpose and aligned with best practice; and
- Ensuring governance arrangements remain consistent with the University's public purpose, legislative obligations and academic independence.

Swinburne supports nationally consistent governance oversight and considers the ECUG framework, embedded through national regulation, to provide a comprehensive and appropriate foundation for reform.

National Consistency and Regulatory Oversight

Swinburne supports a nationally consistent approach to university governance oversight.

Accordingly, the University affirms that:

- The ECUG Principles should be embedded and monitored through the Higher Education Standards Framework;
- The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is the appropriate body to oversee compliance with and reporting against the ECUG Principles;
- "If not, why not" governance reporting should be prescribed nationally to ensure consistency and proportionality; and
- State-based arrangements should complement, not replicate or override, national standards.

Swinburne recognises the important role of the Victorian Auditor-General in financial oversight and supports clear delineation of responsibilities between state financial assurance and national governance regulation.

This approach avoids regulatory duplication, reduces administrative burden and maintains coherence across jurisdictions.

Swinburne's Implementation Approach

Formal Gap Analysis Against ECUG

Swinburne is undertaking a structured gap analysis against the ECUG Principles.

This process is designed to:

- Assess alignment of Council charters, committee structures, delegations, policies and reporting practices;
- Identify any refinements required to ensure full compliance; and
- Embed improvements into governance frameworks in time for FY26 reporting (January 2027).

Council oversight of this process is being exercised through the Audit and Risk Committee, other relevant committees, and Academic Senate.

In addition to this structured ECUG alignment process, Swinburne conducts regular governance effectiveness reviews to assess Council performance, committee effectiveness, decision quality and oversight capability. These reviews inform continuous improvement of governance practice.

Representation and Voice

Governing bodies must better reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. This includes persons with disability, gender equity, First Nations representation and inclusion of both student and staff voices. While many universities, including Swinburne, have taken steps in this direction, further embedding transparent appointment processes and structural mechanisms to ensure active participation from these cohorts is essential to improve decision-making.

Swinburne recognises the importance of meaningful staff and student voice in governance.

Staff and student members of Council are full members of Council. They:

- Participate in all Council deliberations, including in-camera sessions (subject to the same conflict-of-interest requirements that apply equally to all Council members);
- Are eligible to serve on Council committees; and
- Contribute fully to Council decision-making consistent with their fiduciary duties as Council members.

Consistent with ECUG Principles 2 and 6, the University will:

- Review the effectiveness of existing mechanisms for staff and student representation at Council level;
- Review the effectiveness of existing mechanisms for staff and student voice at Council level and consider whether enhancements are required to strengthen representation and engagement;
- Consult with staff and student representatives regarding the most effective model for engagement, including the potential role and design of advisory forums.

The University considers effectiveness of voice to be as important as formal numerical representation and will assess structural, reporting and engagement mechanisms accordingly.

Engagement Between Council and the University Community

Swinburne supports direct, meaningful engagement between Council and the University community.

The University will:

- Review current mechanisms for Council engagement with staff and students;
- Consider enhancements to improve the clarity, regularity and impact of engagement;
- Ensure governance communication is accessible and transparent.

Workforce Composition and Sustainability

Swinburne acknowledges concerns raised across the sector regarding workforce composition and casualisation.

Consistent with ECUG Principle 8, the University:

- Recognises that workforce strategy intersects with academic quality, institutional resilience and financial sustainability;

- Notes that institutional starting points vary, including dual-sector operations and enterprise agreement settings;
- Will continue to review workforce composition through governance processes, including consultation with staff and unions;
- Will consider medium-term goals to strengthen workforce sustainability, continuity and quality outcomes.

Any targets or benchmarks will be considered in context and aligned with enterprise bargaining and academic planning frameworks.

Change Management

Swinburne recognises the importance of clarity, consultation and trust in periods of significant change.

The University will:

- Review and refine change management methodologies;
- Ensure governance oversight of major change processes;
- Continue engagement with staff and student representatives during significant institutional transitions.

Transparency and Public Communication

Swinburne supports clear, accessible communication about governance decisions and institutional performance.

The University will:

- Continue publishing governance information consistent with confidentiality and commercial obligations;
- Review opportunities to enhance clarity and accessibility of Council communications;
- Ensure annual governance reporting aligns with ECUG requirements.

Constructive Engagement with Stakeholders

Swinburne has engaged constructively with staff and student representative organisations regarding governance implementation.

These discussions have:

- Clarified stakeholder priorities;

- Identified areas of shared concern, including representation, workforce composition and transparency;
- Reinforced the importance of implementation discipline within the ECUG framework.

Swinburne considers ongoing dialogue to be a constructive means of strengthening governance practice while preserving institutional autonomy and Council accountability.

Conclusion

Swinburne University acknowledges the importance of continuous improvement in university governance. Good governance is essential to delivering high-quality education, maintaining public trust and responding to a rapidly changing world.

In conclusion of this submission, Swinburne:

- Strongly supports the ECUG Principles;
- Supports national consistency through TEQSA oversight;
- Is undertaking structured implementation and gap analysis to ensure full compliance;
- Regularly reviews governance effectiveness to drive continuous improvement;
- Ensures student and staff members are full and equal participants in Council governance;
- Will continue to strengthen governance practice through consultation and continuous improvement; and
- Does not support duplicative or additional state-level regulatory frameworks beyond the ECUG system.

Swinburne encourages the Government to consider potential reforms in the context of the broader tertiary system, with a view to enable rather than constrain the sector's capacity to innovate and respond to emerging challenges and issues.

The effectiveness of governance reform will ultimately be judged by outcomes: including improved trust, clarity, accountability and institutional resilience, rather than by structural prescription alone.

Swinburne remains committed to delivering those outcomes.