

Council Communiqué

Meeting 2, 2026 – 28 May



Deakin University is established in the public interest by the [Deakin University Act 2009 \(Vic\)](#) to deliver accessible, high quality education and research to meet the needs of students and the community. The University's objects are set out in the Act and at the end of this communiqué.

The University Council actively oversees the University's strategy, performance, risk management, culture and compliance consistent with its purpose and in the public interest.

The Council met on 28 May 2026 at the Melbourne Burwood Campus and dealt with matters as follows in accordance with its governance responsibilities and [2026 business schedule](#).

This communiqué provides a summary of the key decisions and strategic discussions from the meeting.

Strategic focus

Long term financial sustainability

Council held a strategy session on long term financial sustainability. This followed advice to the previous meeting that Government visa settings have led to a significant decline in the number of new enrolments by international students at Deakin and other universities. This is not just a 'blip', it has a material impact on current year and future revenue. The current financial position is sound but there are long term challenges.

Council and the Executive Leadership Team had a full and broad-ranging discussion on addressing the financial sustainability challenge. The session considered the longer-term outlook.

Discussion points included pace and cadence of decision making, giving attention to new revenue streams, maintaining awareness of financial challenges facing students, and ongoing, open approach.

The intention was not to reach any resolutions at this stage but to set the scene for continuing strategic discussion to arrive at the best long-term approach.

The unwavering objective is to achieve Deakin's public purpose in education and research. Looking after our students and staff is paramount.

Academic Portfolio Review

Council held an information session on the Academic Portfolio Review as a matter of strategic importance, under the delegated authority of the Vice-Chancellor.

Council received a presentation from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic on Deakin's Education and Employability Guiding Plan 2026-2030, finalised and published in May 2026. The Plan sets out how Deakin will continue to deliver an excellent student experience and ensure learning remains rigorous, inclusive and future-focused in an AI-infused world. It focuses on responsive learning, seamless experience, personalised success and lifelong learning.

Council was informed that to support successful delivery of the Plan's vision, Professor Vanderlelie has led a review of the Academic Portfolio. This has identified areas of opportunity and challenge. A change proposal is being developed to ensure that the portfolio addresses students' needs and works in a fully coordinated manner. The proposal is close to being fully developed and will then be the subject of consultation in accordance with the University's Enterprise Agreement.

Council were advised that measures are in place to support staff wellbeing during the process. Consultation is a genuine opportunity for staff to provide feedback which will be carefully considered and addressed. The final form of the change plan will be informed by consultation.

Council considered the University's consultation readiness assessment for proceeding with the change proposal.

Council discussion focused on, and encouraged the team to, be clear on the vision of success for the Portfolio and how processes, tools, systems, ways of working and services will be improved through changes.

Key matters

Performance

Council considered the latest Key Performance Indicators Dashboard tracking the University's performance against targets across the Strategic Plan for the period. Council noted a challenging outlook for 2026, driven by lower than expected commencing enrolments and returning load for international students. Notwithstanding this, the University has performed well in terms of research income with sustained growth.

Council also noted that factors including current global uncertainty, financial considerations and visa uncertainty are contributing to cautiousness in international student sentiment, with lower conversion from offers to student acceptances.

Stakeholder expectations and engagement

Workforce engagement

Council had a detailed discussion about the results of the 2026 University Staff Engagement (MY Pulse) survey.

Council noted that in a challenging environment for higher education, Deakin has demonstrated resilience.

Council discussed participation rates as well as the approach to capturing qualitative data to ensure feedback is optimised. Teams are developing actions in response to local results and management will report on action and progress to the People and Culture Committee.

Council noted that negotiations for the next Enterprise Agreement have commenced. In the meantime it is important to provide staff with a salary uplift in 2026, and this will be recognised with a 4% increase to be provided mid-year.

Antisemitism and social cohesion

Council considered the University Report Card Sectoral Assessment authored by Emeritus Professor Greg Craven AO and the University's draft submission to the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion, noting it had sought feedback from Jewish staff and students, and is committed to contributing constructively to the Royal Commission's work.

Inquiry into enhancing Victorian university governance

Council noted that the Vice-Chancellor appeared at the Inquiry on 15 May 2026 as did other Vice-Chancellors. He shared his reflections on the experience.

Foreign Interference and high-risk jurisdictions

Council considered an update on foreign interference and high-risk jurisdictions and impacts on the university sector.

Modern Slavery

Council approved the University's Modern Slavery Statement for the period 1 January to 31 December 2025 and acknowledged the Statement as a thorough document which appropriately emphasises the proactive identification and treatment of relevant risks.

Artificial Intelligence

Council considered an update on the work of the University's AI Taskforce and results of a survey undertaken to determine current practice and usage of genAI tools across Deakin. Council noted AI is no longer experimental and it is becoming embedded practice. Deakin GEM is showing steady uptake as an internal platform.

Council also discussed the importance of understanding emerging workforce requirements and implications of AI and technological change.

Council will have a deep dive on AI strategy at a future meeting.

Educational standards

International Branch Campuses (IBC)

Council considered progress reports on the IBCs in GIFT City India and Bandung Indonesia. Council also discussed a report on the business plan and a new reporting and performance framework for GIFT City.

The framework will enable the Campus to be strategically focused and enhance performance across all areas, and to move the campus from program implementation to ensuring long-term success and growth. In addition, the framework and progress reports will be important inputs to the development of the future strategy for IBCs.

Risk culture

University Risk Appetite Statement

Council had a discussion on making enhancements to the University's Risk Appetite Statement relating to defence and national security research.

Compliance with workplace obligations

Council discussed the latest report on the University's ongoing Enterprise Agreement Compliance Assurance program and noted recent system improvements. This a standing item on the Council agenda and reflects Deakin's firm commitment to meeting workplace obligations on an ongoing basis.

Academic governance

Council considered a report from the Chair, Academic Board on academic governance matters including:

- Deakin's transnational education strategy and the establishment of a dedicated committee of Academic Board to replace the IBC Working Group and to provide oversight of academic governance, strategy, risks, quality and standards
- reviewing and ensuring University processes reflect the National Student Ombudsman report recommendations regarding confidentiality clauses in student complaints policies.

The Chair thanked the Academic Board for the informative report which added value to Council's understanding of the work of the Board.

Governing body matters and performance

Council received the minutes from recent meetings of its committees, and a range of reports covering risk, health and safety, complaints handling, cyber security, and latest reports on financial performance and major projects.

Council also received its Skills Matrix which will be published on the University's website in accordance with the Expert Council on University Governance's Principles.

Elected staff and student members on Council

Council approved a proposal to increase the number of elected staff and student positions on Council from one to two each, to provide an elevated student and staff voice on Council with a spread of perspectives: undergraduate, postgraduate, academic staff and professional staff member.

Council was advised that there is strong support for the increase from student and staff constituencies, the National Tertiary Education Union and the Deakin University Student Association. Council also noted the high level of interest in increasing elected student and staff positions by the current Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Enhancing Victorian University Governance.

Council expressed its appreciation of the excellent contribution of current and past elected student and staff members and strongly supported the proposal to increase elected members across a two-year cycle. This reflects Council's own commitment to good governance and inclusive decision-making.

Enhancements to Council's committee structure

Council reviewed and approved revisions to its committee structure, with transitional steps towards full implementation of the new structure from 1 January 2027.

The changes reflect opportunities to realign activities of Council Committees to further support the activities and business of the University, and the Expert Council on University Governance's Principles, especially its explicit emphasis on staff, student and culture matters and non-financial risks, including academic and social licence.

The elected student and staff members of Council will join the People and Culture Committee (to be reconstituted as the Students, Staff and Culture Committee) as members from its next meeting.

Council Operating Protocol

Council approved the introduction of a Council Operating Protocol. Council is committed to the highest standards of governance, integrity and ethical conduct, and welcomed the Protocol which aligns with the Council Charter and Council Operating Provisions. It includes emphasis on data driven decisions that are forward looking.

Concluding matters

In closing the meeting the Chancellor acknowledged the dedicated work across the University on the range of important items considered at the meeting.

The Chancellor welcomed ongoing feedback on the new meeting format and arrangements and on what is working and what can be improved. All contributions are important.

The next Council meeting will be held on 6 August 2026.

Disclaimer

Please note that this report provides an overview for the University community of the Council's decisions and actions at the relevant meeting. It is not intended to cover every decision made at the meeting or the full detail of decisions and discussions. It has regard to the need for decisions of the governing body to be kept confidential for legal or commercial reasons.

Inquiries and requests for further information can be directed to the University Council Secretary at council-secretary@deakin.edu.au.

Further information

Please see the [Council's webpage](#) for detailed information on Council's membership, committees, Charter, annual business schedule, Operating Provisions, Operating Protocol and reports addressing a range of governance matters.

Please see the University's [Policy Library](#) for:

- University Statute and Regulations, including the Council Regulations
- Council approved policies relating to the governance of the University, including the University's Policy Framework.

The Objects (aims) of the University (from s 5 of the Deakin University Act) are as follows:

- (a) to provide and maintain a teaching and learning environment of excellent quality offering higher education at an international standard;
- (b) to provide vocational education and training, further education and other forms of education determined by the University to support and complement the provision of higher education by the University;
- (c) to undertake scholarship, pure and applied research, invention, innovation, education and consultancy of international standing and to apply those matters to the advancement of knowledge and to the benefit of the well-being of the Victorian, Australian and international communities;
- (d) to equip graduates of the University to excel in their chosen careers and to contribute to the life of the community;
- (e) to serve the Victorian, Australian and international communities and the public interest by—
 - (i) enriching cultural and community life;
 - (ii) elevating public awareness of educational, scientific and artistic developments;
 - (iii) promoting critical and free enquiry, informed intellectual discourse and public debate within the University and in the wider society;
- (f) to use its expertise and resources to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia in its teaching, learning, research and advancement of knowledge activities and thereby contribute to—
 - (i) realising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aspirations; and
 - (ii) the safeguarding of the ancient and rich Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage;
- (g) to provide programs and services in a way that reflects principles of equity and social justice;
- (h) to confer degrees and grant diplomas, certificates and other awards;
- (i) to utilise or exploit its expertise and resources, whether commercially or otherwise.