



LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Legislative Council Select Committee

MEDIA RELEASE

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Inquiry into the Provisions of the *University of Tasmania Act 1992*

The Legislative Council Select Committee inquiring into the provisions of the *University of Tasmania Act 1992* has today released its Final Report, making 88 findings and 19 recommendations focused primarily on amendments to the Act.

“The inquiry was established in response to community concerns on a range of matters relating to UTAS, including executive management practices, workplace culture, facilities management and infrastructure development, funding priorities, loss of academic staff and diminishing quality of student experience,” said Inquiry Chair, the Hon Meg Webb MLC.

“The inquiry did not seek to adjudicate matters of operational management or specific decisions of the University, rather it focused on whether the provisions of the Act are fit for purpose, particularly in terms of accountability and oversight.”

Ms Webb said under the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry, the Committee considered extensive evidence presented in 151 submissions and 12 days of public hearings.

“The Committee noted a clearly expressed deficit of trust in the University in evidence to the Inquiry, with submissions made by students, alumni, and current and past academics highly concerned and distressed by aspects of governance, management, decision-making and strategic direction.”

The Committee has made an overarching recommendation for a comprehensive review of the *University of Tasmania Act 1992* and prompt implementation of the results of that review. There are 19 further recommendations, the majority of which relate to amending specific aspects of the Act.

“Comprehensive review and amendment of the Act presents an opportunity to structurally address the current deficit of trust in the University and improve accountability and oversight.

“The Committee warns against a piecemeal approach from the Government in addressing the recommendations in this report. A comprehensive review which picks up on matters covered in recommendations and includes appropriate public consultation, will be a positive way for the Government to demonstrate necessary stewardship of this important public institution.

“As the State’s sole university, UTAS holds a place of significance for Tasmania. It is essential for the social, cultural and economic development of Tasmania that the University is able to

successfully deliver on its central mission of teaching and research to a level of excellence.

“The Committee strongly encourages the Government to act quickly on the recommendations of this inquiry, and believes it presents an important opportunity for the Tasmanian community, especially in the south of the state, to re-establish trust in the governance and oversight of UTAS,” said Ms Webb.

The Final Report is available on the Parliament of Tasmania website:

<https://www.parliament.tas.gov.au/committees/legislative-council/select-committees/lc20select20-20university20of20tasmania>

Members of the Committee are:

Hon Meg Webb MLC (Chair)

Hon Mike Gaffney MLC (Deputy Chair)

Hon Sarah Lovell MLC

For further information: Hon Meg Webb MLC, Inquiry Chair – 0427 911 719

Ends

Inquiry Terms of Reference

To inquire into and report upon the provisions of the *University of Tasmania Act 1992* with particular reference to —

- (1) The constitution, functions and powers of the University;
- (2) The constitution, role, powers and obligations of the Council and Academic Senate;
- (3) The appropriateness of the Act to ensure accountable executive, fiscal and academic decision-making;
- (4) The appropriateness of the Act to protect and promote academic freedom, independence and autonomy; and
- (5) Any other matters incidental thereto.

Recommendations

The Committee made the following overarching recommendation:

As a priority, the Government conduct a comprehensive review of the University of Tasmania Act 1992, including matters specified in recommendations in this report, and promptly legislate the results of that review.

The Committee made 19 recommendations:

1. The Act be amended to include a preamble.
2. The Act be amended to provide for casual staff to be included in the constitution of the University.
3. Section 6 of the Act be reviewed and amended to ensure contemporary and appropriate functions are included.
4. Consider a mechanism to assess the performance of the University against the functions in Section 6 of the Act.
5. The Act be amended to establish restrictions or prohibitions on the disposal or long-term lease of land that has been granted to the University by the Crown, land purchased with public money, or Crown land.

6. The Act be amended to provide for the constitution of the University Council to include a minimum of two student members, with at least one elected from the student body.
7. The Act be amended to provide for the constitution of the University Council to include a minimum of two members of the academic staff elected by the academic staff.
8. The Act be amended to provide for the constitution of the University Council to include a minimum of two members of the professional staff elected by the professional staff.
9. The Act be amended to ensure there is more balance between the number of appointed and elected members on the University Council.
10. The Act be amended to clarify the purpose and function of Ministerial appointments to the University Council.
11. The Act be amended to ensure when considering the best interests of the University, University Council must explicitly include consideration of the University's obligations to the Tasmanian community.
12. The Act be amended to prescribe key requirements for the constitution and method of appointment of the Academic Senate, to ensure a higher proportion of academic representatives rather than managerial appointments and fewer ex officio appointments.
13. The Act be amended to prescribe the functions of the Academic Senate to include a determinative role on core academic matters.
14. Amend the Act in relation to annual reporting by the University, including:
 - a. more specific detail on what the Annual Report is required to contain in relation to income and expenditure;
 - b. a requirement to report on the delivery of the functions of the University;
 - c. a requirement to include detail of all salaries, remuneration and fringe benefits for executive management roles at the University; and
 - d. a requirement for more timely tabling of the University's annual report in Parliament.
15. In addition to the Annual Report, include a requirement in the Act for the University to produce:
 - a. an annual corporate plan to be published at the beginning of the year; and
 - b. an annual Environment, Society and Governance (ESG) report.
16. Review Section 7(2) of the Act to retain Treasurer's approval for University borrowings and ensure it reflects contemporary borrowing and borrowing-like arrangements.
17. Consider formalising processes for regular Parliamentary scrutiny of the University, including:
 - a. The Annual Report
 - b. The annual corporate plan
 - c. Major infrastructure projects
18. The Act be amended to include a requirement to protect and promote academic freedom.
19. The Joint Standing Committee on Integrity consider an inquiry into the performance of the Integrity Commission and the Ombudsman in relation to complaints regarding the University of Tasmania.