UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

ACADEMIC SENATE

Review Report
OCTOBER 2024

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SECTION 1

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction to this Report

The UTAS Academic Senate is committed to an ongoing culture of continual review, quality assurance and enhancement of the academic governance of learning, teaching, higher degree research and research training. In line with this aim a Review of the UTAS Academic Senate was conducted in 2024.

The Review included assessment of the Academic Senate against the:

TEQSA Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021, the Voluntary Code of Best Practice for the Governance of Australian Public Universities, the University of Tasmania Act 1992 and the findings in the Australia Universities Accord Report, and an electronic survey for 2023 members and observers of the Academic Senate.

It is our professional view that the Academic Senate meets the requirements for a high standard of governance as outlined in these standards and frameworks. We also heard that the Senate has allocated considerable time to reflect on the higher education world under the Accord, what this means for UTAS, and how UTAS might respond to it. It is our view that the thinking and preparation for the Accord, so far as it is able to with some of the detail of the Accord still to be finalised, has been of a high standard.

The process for this Review also included a document scan and interviews with the former, current, Deputy and Associate Chair of the Academic Senate, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Student Services and Operations, Chief People Officer, Secretary, Student President, and elected Senate Member and an ex-Officio Senate Member, survey respondents who sought to be interviewed, and other selected members of the University community.

The report considers the areas where the Academic Senate has performed well and where it can further develop. It includes recommendations which will assist the Senate and its Committees to enhance their contribution.

Executive Summary

We found the Senate members to be of a consistently high calibre, and it is clear that the University of Tasmania senior academics, management, staff and students have a deep commitment to UTAS and to its continuing success over the long-term. Many of the Academic Senate members commit considerable time and energy to their work for it.

The effectiveness of the Academic Senate, its inclusiveness, and its clarity of purpose has developed considerably in recent years under the former Chair, and there is good confidence in the current Chair who is continuing down this path of improvement and collaboration.

The Senate brings a thoughtful approach to appointments to its ranks and uses a Skills Matrix to ensure its composition meets its skills requirements. This is an innovative approach when contrasted with other universities.

However universities are very complex organisations, and the governance system within UTAS is correspondingly complex, and its governance bodies are prolific. In light of the emphasis on creating a university which is sustainable over the long term, it will serve UTAS well to seek on-going simplification of this system.

Governance structures and systems could be reconsidered with a view to improving efficiency, removing any duplication, and increasing alignment, clarity, and delineation of roles and purpose. Ideally the Senate and other governance bodies will be able to make critical decisions which are aligned to the university's needs in a holistic sense.

This is the key opportunity from this Review of the Academic Senate: to create a Senate which as a component of the university's overall governance model both ensures the highest of standards academically, *and* is efficient and robust.

During this review we heard that interviewees believe innovation is core to UTAS's continuing success. A focus on simplicity and efficiency has the added benefit of enhancing creativity and innovation. When we have constraints it narrows our options and concentrates our focus. This challenge stimulates creative thinking and and leads to more innovative solutions.

Thinking about New Zealand as an example of this in practice, it is renowned for its innovation on the global stage. There are common factors between this country and Tasmania and UTAS — large aspirations, a small population, and limited resources.

Aside from an emphasis on efficient governance, the other recommendations in this report are more by way of refinement than material change. The Senate is to be commended for its focus on high standards and its own attention to continuing improvement.

> "In the changing external environment there are more opportunities for us to get ahead of the curve rather than wait for things to be done to us. The Vice Chancellor is good at bringing in the external world and flagging what's on the horizon. Quality is becoming even more important, it's not just about getting students in— helping them succeed also matters. We'll be assessed in very different ways in the future."

SECTION 2

Academic Senate Performance Themes

There were some consistent questions raised and a diverse range of views expressed in the Review interviews and survey about the Academic Senate ("Senate"). These most prominent of these are detailed below.

1. Who should sit on the Academic Senate?

Currently through the Senate UTAS has a 'shared governance' model which includes the voices of ex officio staff members as well as academics and students. Faculty staff and management work cooperatively and collaboratively to balance faculty and administration perspectives.

A sub-group of those interviewed and surveyed hold the view that Senate membership should be comprised of academics rather than include members of university management. (The distinction between the two groups as expressed by interviewees was academics being those people who are in teaching or research 'coalface' roles rather than administrative roles).

While some are unhappy about the perceived dilution of the academic voice through having those with different roles within UTAS on the Senate, we endorse this, for the following reasons:

By having this variety of lenses from within the university:

- It helps ensure that UTAS's business decisions support the academic mission and vice versa - academic decisions can be made with known financial implications and financial decisions can be made by with known academic impacts.

  This is absolutely critical in the current circumstances and to achieve long term sustainability for UTAS. All decisions need to be considered in relation to multiple criteria – academic mission, financial implications, student impact, staff, etc. To do that best, having people with a diversity of perspectives and experiences who can participate in decisions and strategic directions from an informed position are vital.

- It enables a greater breadth of diverse perspectives and ideas to be shared and debated. As is widely recognised, this practice and the mere fact of having diverse individuals in any group promotes innovation, and innovation is a core part of UTAS's strategy for a sustainable future.

That said, given the Academic Senate is the main decision point for academic quality, it is appropriate that its membership comprise of a greater proportion of academics than professional staff. The Senate could consider a ratio of two thirds academic staff to one third professional staff. This will facilitate a productive breadth of perspectives and ensure that academic quality remains the overarching focus of the Senate.

2. How big should the Senate's membership be?

Having a structure where there are large numbers of members (84 according to the information provided to us) risks blurring two different core objectives for the Senate:

A. For the Senate to provide oversight, make critical decisions, and bring valuable insight and forethought to academic quality

B. To include the many voices from disparate communities within the University into the above processes for the Senate.

While the latter is a core requirement of the Senate, there are more effective and efficient means of achieving this than having greater numbers participate as Senate members. The best structure for the Senate is one that will both make optimum decisions *and* support innovation which will help UTAS differentiate itself in higher education. That strongly suggests a smaller Senate.

3. What are the other implications of a very large governing body?

The University is facing a financial crisis and its current structure is not sustainable. It is having to change how it structures itself and its work. Bringing a more multifaceted approach to how the Senate operates, one which as well as considering academic quality and stakeholder impact, also factors efficiency and cost into its priorities, will support this.

Having a smaller group in the Senate will free up the time of many of its current members, enabling them to achieve more in their field of expertise. It will reduce the inherent constraints about speaking up which exist in larger groups, facilitating more rigorous discussion and more robust outcomes.

Within larger groups debate and decision-making is complex and time consuming. There are many uncertainties in the environment that UTAS operates in, and this won't change in the medium term. The University needs to be flexible and able to adapt to change as it occurs. A smaller Academic Senate will better facilitate this.

4. What should be expected of Senate members?

Service is an expected part of the workload for the faculty and academic professionals who commit their time and effort to being part of the Senate. Theirs is a vital role and it is important that this is recognised and their contributions acknowledged and respected. At the present there are unequal contributions from Senate members.

All members need to be clear about their role on Senate and what it asks of them. More time spent on this in the induction process and general communication will assist, as will more efficient processes (e.g. papers) that require a less considerable commitment of time, and greater delineation with other UTAS governance entities.

One aspect of a Senate member's role which generated considerably commentary was the communication of the Senate's work including its strategic focus areas, key decisions, and deliberations. See more overleaf.

5. How should Senate members communicate with the university community?

It is a vital part of Senate members' role to communicate with the university community that they have most exposure and/or responsibility to. This is even more critical given the changes the university and its staff face, noting that communication is an area often underinvested in as part of change management to the later regret of those involved.

At present there is considerable variability in how this is done. Giving greater guidance for Senate members on communications—in induction, and providing a 'toolkit' to support them - and bringing greater scrutiny of communications from Senate members through periodic reviews of communication methodologies and effectiveness will support a learning approach and more consistency on how Senate information is disseminated.

6. Why is it hard to get people to volunteer for Senate leadership roles?

We heard that fewer people are nominating themselves to be members of the Senate. This warrants further investigation. One hypothesis is the time commitment required is daunting. Another view expressed by interviewees is that it is not held in the same regard as it once was. This may relate to the point below.

There appears to be a number of overlapping and/or potentially redundant components within UTAS's internal governance system, with a 'blurring of the lines' for the responsibilities of the Senate and other bodies such as the University Academic Leadership Team and University Strategic Forum.

We heard that the formation of these multiple bodies is having the unintended consequence of reducing some of the perceived value of the Senate and thus any stature that comes from being part of it.

The ideal scenario is one with a focus on the governance needs of the university in its entirety, and consideration of what this means for the purpose of each governance body, how the bodies align and/or complement each other, and what then can be removed from the governance 'system' to streamline and enhance its effectiveness.

7. Where are there overlaps within the UTAS governance system?

We heard that there is confusion about the delineation between some of the Executive Team working groups and forums, and the Senate and some of its Committees.

One example provided was that course approvals are required to be approved through the University Admissions Committee (Senate), the University Course and Unit Proposals Committee (Senate), the University Academic Leadership Team forum/working group (Executive Team), and the Markets & Revenue Working Group (Executive Team), and there is confusion about which group/Committee is supposed to do what as part of that approval process.

Whether the perception is accurate or not is almost not the point — what is important is how easy the system is to navigate for those who use it, how effective and efficient it is, how readily it facilitates progress on important decisions such as which courses to be implemented, and the quality of the associated decisions.

The simpler the governance system, the easier is it for those who work within it to understand it. Staff cannot be expected to remember the intricacies and complexities of how different bodies differ or align with each other on top of their own duties and priorities.

This leads us back to our proposal that a core principle in designing UTAS's governance system be simplicity. It will assist in bringing more focus on the critical matters, more clarity, efficiency, effectiveness and alignment.

7. The Senate is meant to be a representative body for the various stakeholder groups within the university, but not all its members vote.

Having less than complete votes by all Senate members reduces its legitimacy and influence. As the overarching body for quality within the university, it is arguably the most important body on academic standards within UTAS, and in this sense is the flag bearer for UTAS's reputation. It is important that *all* its members vote when motions are passed. This will also promote further accountability for Senate members.

8. How can we achieve greater leverage of Senate members' insight and experience?

At present the Senate has a high calibre of members with strong critical thinking abilities, but the governance model (i.e. a body with many members) does not facilitate optimal leverage of this.

The amount of time spent on strategic discussion overall in Senate meetings has increased and interviewees are seeing the benefits of this. However they would like to see it further develop, and for the Senate to be more selective and more focused on the critical and important matters.

This is a worthwhile aim and doing so will support the Senate to maintain a sufficiently elevated perspective and identify critical sightlines, progress and gaps, as well as have more time for 'blue sky' thinking on preparing for the future.

9. We want people to speak up so we broke into smaller groups for strategic discussions to make it easier. What else can we do?

The recent move by the Senate to workshop strategic matters has been very effective. However some Senate members are still not as forthcoming as ideal in important discussions and interviewees would like to see this change. While the Senate has a constructive open culture and many of its members recognise the value of rigorous debate and challenge, less senior members may feel constrained about expressing a view.

Reducing the size of the Senate will assist with this. It will also be helpful to reinforce to those quieter members how a diversity of views galvanises stronger planning and execution and acts as a protective mechanism against future issues, so they can better recognise the importance of their contribution to the Senate's thinking.

10. How should Committees best support the Senate?

There was considerable commentary about Senate Committees. It will be helpful to consider the purpose and requirements of the Committees holistically and revisit their overall structure, determining what if any reduction in their number can be achieved. Ideally this will be done in conjunction with consideration of the other governance bodies within UTAS.

For example in the course of this Review, we heard that the Senate could do more on sharing best practice learnings for teaching, learning and research, or on leadership development for staff. It is not clear whether these suggestions would be replicating effort being applied elsewhere in the university, or taking focus away from other more important areas, which is why recommendations on Committees cannot be made in isolation of other factors.

We also heard many conflicting views on Committees, such as the UCUPC being important and also that it was not needed, and that the MAC does much needed valuable work, and also that it does work that should be done by the Senate as its role is a core Senate accountability, that other Committees are required and have a distinctive purpose, but also that they overlap. See more detail overleaf.

As with the Senate there are some opportunities for improvement on Committee composition, these relating to the size of Committees (some are too large to be effective), the makeup of their members (they should be diverse, that is include people from a variety of levels of seniority and from academic and professional staff ranks), and the communication from Committees to the Senate and university (more needs to be done).

11. How else can we raise our own standards on governance?

There was much commentary about the importance of good data to inform the Senate's thinking and planning. It may be helpful to give Senate members training on data interrogation and how modelling can be used in the new world of universities. This will further strengthen the quality of governance and the related critical decisions.

UTAS has appropriately lofty aspirations in a global market. A robust governance model can be a solid foundation for UTAS's success. There may be global leaders that UTAS can learn from. One institution that comes to mind is Arizona State University ("ASU"). It also has a 'shared governance model'. When ASU developed this model it did so around a core purpose and principles to guide the approach.

ASU believes this model has contributed to the university being recognised as the "most innovative" university in the USA for six consecutive years, among other achievements.

While we are not comparing apples for apples, with the United States having its own unique higher education model, there may be some valuable learnings for UTAS from ASU and other similar universities in their approach to governance.

Further Enhancement Opportunities

Reporting

Senate reporting is voluminous and this makes it difficult for Senate members to be across the material and find time to reflect on it prior to meetings. Improved reporting will help the Senate to be more strategic and support a better quality of critical thinking in meetings. Papers can be refined to foster more strategic content and include more synthesis and clarity on the important points. Some papers could make it clearer what the issue is that the authors wishes the Senate to discuss.

Agendas

Agendas are full and sometimes important matters are at the end of meetings which can on occasion cause hurried discussions and decisions. Holding the critical and important matters early in the agenda will minimise the chance of this happening. While the number of issues that require oversight may have grown, priority in the agendas should be continue to be given to those issues or matters with material impact.

Reflection and learning

Holding brief reflection sessions at the conclusion of each Senate meeting will assist the Senate to continue to develop its contribution. Ensuring learnings and insights from Senate deep dives and case studies are shared with other university communities (this could form part of the Senate communications program) will engender more distributed benefit from these.

Considering Governance through a Fiscal Responsibility Lens

The complexity of the current governance system brings significant workload and time Impost for those who work within it. As well as considering how well it is achieving its aims, it may be instructive to calculate the fiduciary impact of the current structure relative to the UTAS budget.

For example, one measurement we use in Council and board scorecards which University management could also apply is the time and thus cost associated with servicing the internal governance requirements.

If this is calculated considering the members of each body, their annual recompensation, and the hours they spend in governance-related meetings, it will become clear how many days of staff time which governance consumes per year and what the cost of this is. Note: this does not include support staff. We heard that their numbers will reduce so this is a further area where it will be necessary to achieve more efficient ways of working.

Committee Performance Themes from Interviewee Commentary

The comments below are direct quotations from interviews and the survey.

Standing Academic Committee SAC	Monitoring & Assurance Committee MAC	University Learning & Teaching Committee ULTC	Student Experience Committee SEC
"We have the Standing Committee if we need to do things quicky outside of Academic Senate meetings given how quickly things change."	"MAC does its job well but if Senate was doing its job better we wouldn't need MAC. This a core part of the Senate's responsibility."

"It's not giving the appropriate amount of time and discussion for some reports, they need a deeper dive into them."

"MAC and ULTC look at very similar things; there's duplication."

"MAC has more time and space to do deep dives than Senate and gets authors in and been able to improve aspects of reporting e.g. we will pick up if something is a supposition rather than fact. It helps ensure benchmarking and reporting is more meaningful and ties the numbers more to strategy." | "The ULTC and UCUPC Committees overlap. The delineation between them needs to be clearer – the same things get talked about at both sometimes."

"The ULTC could take on a greater role in monitoring quality and feeding up to the Senate and back to the Colleges, especially with respect to action planning for improvement."

"ULTC provides important eyes on to issues of Teaching and Learning, but its work has been variable." | "The Student Experience Committee has about 30 members and it's too big."

"The Associate Academic Deans come to the Committee but not the Research ones."

"This Committee has become like a grievance forum, it's not focused on presentations but more of an agony aunt now. It needs to go back to its core purpose."

"The Committee has had good presentations about campus life."

"The SEC's brief is broad, but they are heading in the right direction with a review of their Terms of Reference." |

Interviewee Commentary

Committee Performance Themes continued

	University Research Committee URC	University Admissions Committee UAC	University Course & Unit Proposals Committee UCUPC	Nominations Committee NC
Interviewee Commentary	"The URC has done some really good work in reviewing HDR reports, research governance and some key areas of risk. This is important for Senate." "URC provides important eyes on to issues of Research but its work has been variable."	"UAC has a well described Terms of Reference and performs an important function."	"UCUPC is a principal quality assurance contributor to governance." "UCUPC isn't needed. We have a University Teaching and Learning Committee." "UCUPC is a key Committee with significant expertise and performs a key role. Without it the work of the Senate would be overwhelming, and I am not convinced that the appropriate governance with respect to course QA could be achieved."	No comments

Key Areas of Progress, Areas that are Working Well

We heard in interviews that there has been considerable progress achieved since the prior Senate Review, as shown below:

- The Senate uses a Skills Matrix for consideration in all appointments to its ranks, including for representative members. This has had a material impact on the alignment of its skills to the University's strategic requirements.

- Student representatives on the Senate have been instituted and this is seen to be very useful. To encourage their contribution they speak first in meetings.

- The former and current Senate Chairs have made considerable efforts to achieve more conversation, reflection and debate in Senate meetings.

- The focus in Senate meetings has become more strategic, and there are more sessions covering strategic matters.

- The Senate's culture has become less formal and more collegiate which facilitates those attending being more comfortable to speak.

- The Senate has shown a sense of urgency and moved quickly on important matters such as generative AI and its impact on learning, teaching and research.

- Under the new Chair formal voting has been reinstated.

- The Senate is becoming more diverse and its members are seeing the benefits of this.

- The Senate now breaks into discussion groups to enable more meaningful and forthright conversations.

- There is a good dynamic between the Senate and the Council, and having academics sit on the Council and Councillors come to Senate meetings strengthens this relationship.

- The change in the approach to Committee Chairs has been beneficial, with more separation of oversight and probing from those doing the work.

- The Senate and its Committees have a greater variety of events and speakers, for example having had a TEQSA person attend a meeting and a panel of high-profile employers in Hobart for an employability session. These are valuable, both increasing the university's external connections and supporting a stronger outward focus.

- Meeting agendas have been streamlined and are more efficient.

- The Senate holds a briefing meeting for elected members on the strategy sessions so they can communicate with their colleagues and represent their views at Senate.

- The Senate is seen to manage the regulatory requirements for TEQSA to a high standard.

Current and Aspirational Academic Senate Characteristics for the Future

In interviews we asked about the perceived attributes of the Senate as it is today *(Current Senate),* and the desired attributes for the future *(Future Senate)*, and these are illustrated in the wordles below.

The picture from interviewees of the current Senate has largely very positive elements, which is not always the case. It is notable that these include many characteristics of high performing boards, such as being *High standards, Open discussions, Strategic, and Protects integrity*, for which the Senate is to be commended.

The Future Senate wordle highlights that interviewees would like to see the Senate become more *Valued* within the university, be *Smaller* and more *Proactive, Strategic* and *Focused,* play more of an *Advocacy* role for UTAS, have all its members be more consistently *Engaged* and *Committed*, have *Rigorous* debate and challenge (while constructive), be *Forthright* with all members openly sharing their views, and increase its *Diversity*.

Current Senate

Engaged
Staid Aware
Strategic ■
Collegiate
Improved High-standards Open-discussions Protects-integrity
Reactive Process-driven In-transition Large
Quality-focused
Unwieldy

Future Senate

Valued Smaller UTAS-advocate
Strategic Communicative
Proactive
Forthright Engaged Rigorous
Committed Focused Diverse

The images above, which are known as 'wordles', represents the number of times a word is nominated as a descriptor by correspondingly amplifying the size of the word.

Interviewee Responses—The One Thing I Would Change about the Academic Senate

When interviewees were asked what one thing would they change about the Academic Senate, there was a diverse range of views across areas including the Senate's composition, role, and duties.

"We need to pay more attention to teaching quality. Now the regulator has power to distribute places at universities, the motivations for students selecting universities will change."

"We need to set threshold parameters for important decisions which sit outside of the Academic Senate meetings."

"Give the Senate more power to step in when there are management decisions being made that are counter to the university's best interests."

"Change elections – often a position opens up and we might get only one nomination. We need to get more. Some of our people are emerging governance experts—I'd like to see more people want to be part of the Senate."

"50% of the Senate's members are directly elected voting members. The people who talk are those who are willing to put their career on the line – if they criticise their superiors its 'career limiting'."

"Reduce the size of the Senate."

"Get projects in their embryonic state to the Senate for rigorous discussion and early socialisation — there's real benefit from the Senate's 'brains trust' and there'd be better cultural engagement and buy in."

"Reduce the turnaround time for important decisions and ensure the decision process is robust so we can have confidence in them."

"Have a combination of smaller focused meetings for monitoring functions and some (3 per annum?) broader strategic focused sessions with a bigger group attending."

"Policies and procedures used to come to Senate but they don't now so we don't know when they change. It would be good for these to come to Senate, running them through a Committee first."

"Make recommendations to improve the efficiency of the Committee structure. It impacts the Company Secretaries' roles and we're reducing resourcing."

"The Senate to do more development of senior university leaders."

"We're lacking a first nations voice - more of this would be good."

"Not have so many people in Senate."

"Have representation on Senate of Academics from Level 1 and 2."

SECTION 3

SECTION TWO: PLANNING AND PERFORMANCE
The Priority Recommendations That Will Create the Most Impact

We detail below the key actions which will best support the Academic Senate's success in the coming twelve months. We also identify the actions that will be most critical over the medium term ("*Critical on-going priorit*ies"). See the full list of recommendations in Section 4.

"We need to look at the consequence and purpose of having all represented at the Senate."

The FIVE actions in the next TWELVE months that will make the biggest difference*.

1. Develop additional tools to help Senate members disseminate information from Senate. (#4)

2. Have minimum terms for all Senate members of two years. (#5)

3. Reduce Senate size to an effective level (#6).

4. Develop a standard template for proposals to the Senate. (#12)

5. Undertake a holistic review of the Senate and its Committees in conjunction with other key governance bodies within UTAS. (#16)

Critical on-going priorities

- Change the Academic Standing Orders to have all members vote on key decisions and motions. (#2)

- Hold formal induction session which all incoming Senate members must attend. (#3)

- Agendas to include fewer things in them by prioritising the matters and issues with material impact. (#9)

* Full recommendations are detailed on Pages 17 and 18.

SECTION 4

Recommendations

There were many excellent suggestions provided by the highly engaged interviewees during the Senate Review process. The performance enhancement opportunities have been prioritised to best position the Senate moving forward. Recommendations are detailed below and overleaf.

Recommendations

1. Refresh the core principles underpinning UTAS's governance model to include a focus on proportionate fiscal and operational efficiency as well as academic quality, subsidiarity etc, and set some objectives for efficiency which become part of the Strategy and operational plan.

2. Change the Academic Standing Orders to have all members vote on key decisions and motions.

3. To deepen knowledge and create a shared understanding, hold formal induction session which all incoming Senate members must attend, this to encompass detail on the Senate's and the members' role and responsibilities, the key principles of good governance to be referenced in the operation of the Senate and in carrying out their duties (see #1 above), the resources at the members' disposal (e.g. coms support— see Recommendation below), key Senate processes and how they work, what is expected of them, and how this will be measured.

4. Develop additional tools to help Senate members disseminate information from Senate discussions, decisions and recommendations by preparing a standard briefing for members to use which synthesises the key messages and insights from each meeting and will help to maintain the consistency and democracy of the information coming out of Senate. Hold periodic reviews at Senate of the effectiveness of the communication program and related tools.

5. To deepen knowledge and enrich contributions, have minimum terms for all Senate members of two years.

6. To reduce Senate size to an effective level, instead of having all members of sub-groups (e.g. Ex Officio, Pro Vice Chancellors, Heas of Academic Units, Executive Deans, elected and appointed members) have two or three representatives from each group as Senate members. To ensure the voices of all levels of the university are characterised at the Senate, the representatives of sub-groups to include both senior and less senior members, management and academic staff (this also applies to Committees). This will require the representatives/members to hold discussions within their cohort on upcoming discussions or decisions to ensure all views are adequately represented. As the Senate publishes its agendas in advance, this gives members the opportunity to consult.

7. Further strengthen the consultation process by considering in advance what are likely to be the most difficult discussions to be had or critical decisions that will need be to made by Senate, when will they need to occur, and what will need to be socialised with the university communities before the discussion or decision, and build these into forward planning.

8. Have proposals and strategies come to Senate earlier in their formation to enable Senate's insight to be better leveraged, and achieve a more collaborative, and iterative process for developing strategy where it sits within the Senate's remit. Encourage the same at a holistic level across the university to achieve greater alignment and a more 'joined-up' 'whole of university' view on strategy.

9. Agendas to include fewer things in them by prioritising the matters and issues with material impact.

10. Senate and its Committees to lift their strategic focus by using their time on material and important matters and discarding or delegating other matters, noting operational reporting rather than having detailed operational updates, discussing only if there are exceptions, issues, or variances. This will enable increased time for reflection, discussion and 'blue sky'* thinking on key decisions, issues and opportunities.

*See *BOARDSGLOBALBETTERBOARDSGUIDES—The Power of Reflective Thinking* in the Appendix.

Recommendations continued

11. To help Senate remain at the strategic level, paper authors to emphasise strategy, context, trends, implications, insights, and outcomes in papers, rather than process, activities or detail. Greater use of exception, red flag/variance and incident reporting, key indicators and/or scorecards will help to reduce volume, and summaries on critical matters will also assist. (Training on writing effective papers may be helpful).

12. To strengthen key decisions at Senate and foster a more efficient process, develop a standard template for proposals to Senate, this to reference UTAS's overarching principles (these may be partially addressed in UTAS purpose, values, risk appetite etc.), identify the key points, key decision criteria and weightings, gates, assumptions, implications scenarios and potential impacts, and show how the proposition aligns with a specific UTAS strategic objective.

13. To strengthen alignment and reduce overlap across Committees, their Chairs to meet annually ahead of each year to discuss and plan meeting agendas and workplans.

14. To be more efficient and effective, Committees should have no more than ten members who, as with Senate members, both provide the appropriate skills and achieve diversity of seniority, role, and function within UTAS.

15. Committee Chairs need the necessary authority to be able to achieve the appropriate reporting to their Committee. This should be formalised within the university (Position Descriptions, Standing Orders, other?).

16. To improve efficiency and productivity, reduce overlaps and duplication, and make the work of the Senate better understood an d supported, undertake a holistic review of the Senate and its Committees in conjunction with other key governance bodies within UTAS to ensure each entity achieves a core purpose, fulfils a core need, and makes a meaningful contribution.

17. Agendas to include all strategic and critical matters early in the agenda to capitalise on the 'brains trust' while it is fresh, and give the important matters the appropriate attention and allocation of time. Matters which are operational, procedural or for noting can be held at the end of meetings.

APPENDIX

WHAT WE HEARD

"The Academic Senate in conjunction with the USF is a huge impost on our time."

"We have a strategic session at every meeting. The best ones are always with students. Students feel very much part of the Senate."

"The volume of items to consider at each meeting inhibits contributions."

"Workshops have enabled us to bring more junior people into the fold."

"I would like to know what gets passed to Council from the Senate."

"Some elected members rarely attend Senate, and when they do, are not involved in discussion. Some also don't communicate back to staff in my College, so I am unsure as to what their purpose really is."

"Committee Chairs need to feel empowered to ask for relevant papers to undertake monitoring functions."

"Internal management working groups that report to the Executive Team sit on five of them. They're good but there's duplication as we've have partly got the old model still in place. Colleges get frustrated that they have to send things through multiple committees and bodies to get approvals."

"We have to have to make it clear what everyone's role and reporting needs to be within our governance model."

"What is my role in dispersing Senate meeting information to my academic unit?"

"I would like to see more surveillance and conversation on what competitors in our sector are doing."

"We spend a lot of time on issues for noting that have been decided elsewhere and not enough time on more important issues that require a decision. This could be improved by educating Senate members on their role and designing enough time for discussion in agendas about issues that require a decision. Then we won't be rubber stamping important issues that we are accountable for, and we will be using our time well."

"The Chair's role is right as it is. Kristyn is doing a great job and Natalie was great. They understand their role and encourage debate."

"Having the different people as part of Senate means we are better at catching unintended consequences."

"The Senate activity which most adds value is engaging the academics in UTAS and communicating. Senate helps staff see the difference strategy can make and how we navigate some of the tricky political issues. It provides a forum for tricky issues."

"The Senate's large membership results in a lack of external questioning or a reticence to question from within."

"Sometimes we have major items at the end of agendas e.g. the opening of a new campus. When this happens things are often covered quickly and decisions or propositions are not properly considered or questioned."

"Having discussions in groups is much more engaging and productive than being presented to all the time. We could do more of these."

"It seems that the Senate mainly consists of senior academic staff (administrator professors) rather than a range of academic and professional staff."

"With the shift to subsidiarity, a key question is how do we help people at all levels make good decisions with the changed approach to governance and management in the university?"

"Our sector is changing so rapidly. We need to get ourselves prepared for delivering effectively to a diverse range of students. We could do more deep dives into universal design for learning and generative AI."

"MAC does a lot of the drilling down work. It's a very effective committee but it's a core Senate responsibility."

"I think elected members are absolutely necessary for a democratic process, but they need to understand their role and be more accountable for and take responsibility for representing and reporting back."

WHAT WE HEARD

"We know from our attrition data we could improve on completions. We could learn more about the early interventions that work – make data about these more visible."

"The strategic sessions and the increasing conversation where titles are left at the door and all speak around the table are so valuable. It really leverages the Senate's talents and skills."

"I'd like to see Level 1 and 2 staff be part of the Senate to give a better connection. The professionals who don't teach are often not connected to what is happening on the ground and issues that are arising like racism flaring up on campus."

"When things come to Senate there's a sense that decisions have already been taken. Decisions come through Committees first and the debates are had there. But non-Committee members don't see this so it might make them feel like its rubber stamped."

"Staff tend not to understand Senate. There is a lack of appreciation of what it is, what it does, and why. The governance workshops in 2023 were a good step. More things like this would be beneficial."

"We need to encourage members to share their thoughts more."

"Members' contribution is variable, some are extremely diligent."

"It is important that Committees are able to make recommendations to Senate that can precipitate action."

"At the moment the Senate has no oversight of what happens at UALT, so there's no continuity, no history, context, exposure to early thinking, awareness of early issues and when they've been addressed. There needs to be better controls through this process, otherwise it gives an opportunity for finger pointing and reduces accountability."

"The Senate needs an appreciation of data and analytics and knowledge of how to interrogate the data. We could do more training on this, how we think about monitoring, and how we think about the insights."

"The Senate is key to the vision to put delegations at an appropriate level and achieve subsidiarity, and it needs to show support for it. That way the Senate can better use its time to focus on the major decisions."

"I'd like to see things presented in their embryonic stage so Senate members have the opportunity to contribute early on. We'd get more buy in, have more awareness. Sometimes members feel they're rubber stamping. It's a collective brains trust and an expensive exercise so we might as well leverage them, have more of a process of codesign."

"The Chairs push to give everyone a voice."

"Committee membership mainly comprises of administrative academics, rather than a balanced composition of academic and professional staff. It means that there is a risk that Committees may not have sufficient input from a plurality of perspectives."

"The Senate is too large to be effective. People put forward a case for why they should be included – it looks good on their CV so some want to be there but don't want to do anything when they get there. Only a few read papers."

"I wonder why there's no questions or debate about certain things – perhaps it's because papers aren't read."

"The Senate could add more value through more focus on academic quality – we're conservative. We could change our culture and actively encourage more creative ideas and dissenting voices, ask how we can be creative while meeting our obligations, change our risk appetite. If we model conformity the whole university will operate this way."

"We see some great case studies and we could develop this more. E.g. Universal design for learning – look at where and how we are doing it and what is working."

"I'd like the strategic sessions to be more open 'blue sky' thinking, less narrowly defined."

"I would like to see Senate shift so it's more of a place where the debate takes place, rather than as much at Committees."

"We need more robust debate and enquiry but still constructive, non-blaming. We're constrained by the agenda design and the amount of time allocated for questioning. Also, how data is presented—it's around the old world for universities not how we should monitor ourselves for the future."

Making Time for 'Blue Sky' Thinking

We sometimes get asked, "Why should governance bodies such as boards or Academic Senates make time for 'blue sky' thinking sessions in the boardroom?"

It's simple really. One of the reasons both bodies exist is to bring their intellectual horsepower to their organisation, particularly their critical thinking and judgement.

Most often in the boardroom or management suite the key focus is on processing complex information and taking an action of some description in response to it, for example approving the budget.

We think of this as being productive. It can also be information overload and over-reliance on 'fast thinking'*.

Continuous mental processing, rapid data assimilation and time-sensitive requirements causes the quality of our thinking to suffer. This is where reflective thinking comes in.

Consider two of the most highly regarded business people in the world today – Warren Buffet and Bill Gates. What they have in common is not just that they are indescribably wealthy.

They also share a discipline to read and think extensively, safeguard time for personal development, and continuously seek new stimulus and perspectives. In other words, they make time for reflective thought.

Reflective thought is a powerful antidote to the predominantly mechanistic application of our intellect, which achieves more 'routine' task-oriented thinking but precludes less structured thinking such as reflection and learning.

Given the over-stimulation we are exposed to every day, different approaches to strategic thinking are not only appropriate, but they are also essential.

As with exercising a variety of muscles, so exercising different types of thinking strengthens all types of our thinking.

Why This Type of Thinking is Important?

Research on neuroscience has shown that with reflective, or 'slow thinking'*, an individual or group examines underlying assumptions, core objectives and knowledge while drawing connections between apparently disparate pieces of information.

Daniel Kahneman first coined the expression "Thinking Fast and Slow" in his book of the same name. He explains that there are two mental systems when it comes to exercising judgement and considering choices.

The first system is fast and automatic, almost unconscious, and is often driven by our biases and habits, while the second, being reflective thought, is slower and more deliberate.

In reflective thought, your intellect has the time and mental 'room' to improve your decision-making by achieving a more integrated and coherent world view. When done as part of a group such as a Board or Senate, the power is multiplied.

Reflective thought helps to solve complex problems. It is a way of extending the Academic Senate's thinking if it was to have habitual approaches to challenges and opportunities.

One of the most critical issues for an Academic Senate and its members today is to ensure the relevance of strategies in multi-dimensional and rapidly changing environments.

In using reflective thinking, they can deploy their full cognitive powers to address the increasingly complex challenges they face.

Leveraging Reflective Thinking in the boardroom

So how can we best leverage reflective thought in the boardroom? Ideas rarely simply appear to us. Even the most intuitive forms of thinking typically requires stimulus and inspiration.

In the context of critical thinking, a list of divergent questions can be a useful tool for elevating oneself and one's peers above more tactical considerations.

These can be adapted to resonate with each organisation's culture and strategic priorities, but would typically include questions pertaining to vision, strategy, leadership, the organisation, competitive environment, opportunities and challenges, key assets, competencies, and so on.

Some examples are below:

- What do we want UTAS to be known for? Now? In the future?
- What would we do differently if we could recreate UTAS from a blank state or there were no legacy constraints on our actions?
- What do we not know about our sector and the university?
- What unique value can we add in our roles as a Senate member?
- What imprint do we wish to create as leaders on staff and other stakeholders?
- What could/would we do if we removed one of our biggest constraints/challenges?
- How will UTAS need to look in the future?

* *'Thinking Fast' and 'slow' thinking are terms which arose from Nobel Memorial Prize winner (Economic Sciences) Laureate Daniel Kahneman's 2011 book, "Thinking, Fast and Slow".*

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