

Draft Scan of Terms of Reference and Business Processes of NSW and ACT Academic Boards and Senates, 2018

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and Nick Reid

A sector scan of the terms of reference and business and meeting processes of academic boards and senates for the thirteen universities in NSW and the ACT was undertaken in 2018, repeating an earlier scan conducted in 2015. The differences in functions evident in three years suggests that academic governing bodies are moving quickly to institutionalise new responsibilities under the Higher Education Standards. The report provides the participating universities with a benchmarking comparator for academic governance monitoring and review purposes.

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NSW AND TERRITORIES COMMITTEE OF CHAIRS OF ACADEMIC BOARDS AND SENATES

BOARD/SENATE BUSINESS PROCESSES COMPARISON REPORT 2018

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Introduction

A business scan of the constitution, terms of reference and meeting procedures of the academic boards or academic senates¹ of all 13 New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory-based universities was conducted in 2018. The following universities contributed to the survey: (1) Australian Catholic University, (2) Australian National University, (3) University of Canberra, (4) Charles Sturt University, (5) Macquarie University, (6) University of New England, (7) University of New South Wales, (8) University of Newcastle, (9) Southern Cross University, (10) University of Sydney, (11) University Technology Sydney, (12) Western Sydney University and (13) University of Wollongong.

Methods

A spreadsheet template was developed to record comparative information concerning the academic governance and business processes of each board. The template was based on an earlier sector scan of NSW and ACT academic boards (St. John-Brown & Reid 2016),² and amended and updated through discussion and feedback at meetings of the Australian Chairs of Academic Boards and Senates in Newcastle and Canberra in 2017–18. The variables entered into the spreadsheet are recorded in Table 1. The template was completed by the chair or their delegates in the respective universities and ASJB compiled the data into a master spreadsheet. The draft report was presented to the NSW and Territories Committee of Chairs and Senates in August 2018 for their consideration.

The format of this report varies between the three sections (A. Constitution, B. Terms of Reference and C. Conduct of Meetings). Where appropriate, some narrative interpretation has been provided. Where responses are mostly Yes/No or similar, these sections do not usually contain additional narrative. The sections in **blue** are from the 2015 survey responses reported by St. John-Brown and Reid (2016). The italicised text in **red** summarises the comparison between the 2015 and 2018 findings.

Results

A. BOARD CONSTITUTIONS

1. Election or appointment of chair

Ten universities had elected chairs and three had appointed chairs in 2018. The universities that had appointed chairs operate wholly or partially on founding statutes from non-NSW jurisdictions, which may account for these universities having appointed chairs.

No change from the 2015 survey.

¹ The term *academic board or board* is used hereafter in the text for the university academic governing body.

² St. John-Brown A. & N. Reid (2016) Scan of terms of reference and business processes of NSW and ACT academic boards and senates. University of New England, Armidale.

Table 1. Variables relating to academic governance, quality assurance and operational matters, which were compared across the NSW and ACT university academic boards and senates in 2018. Acronyms: ABS = academic board/senate; ADR = academic delegations register; AOU = academic organisational unit; ARR = academic risk register; CAB = chair of academic board/senate; DCAB = deputy chair of academic board/senate; DVC = deputy vice-chancellor; EFT = equivalent full-time; HDR = higher degree research student; PVC = pro vice-chancellor; SO = standing orders; T&L = teaching and learning; TORs = terms of reference.

Data field	What was asked?
Elected or Appointed Chair?	Is chair of academic board/senate (CAB) elected, appointed or otherwise selected?
Number of Deputy Chairs	Self-evident
Size of Membership	Number of members as set out in terms of reference (TORs) or constitution of academic board/senate (ABS)
Chair Tenure (years)	Length of one term as CAB in years (Length of maximum no. of terms permissible as CAB in years)
Elected Members' Tenure (years)	Length of one term as elected member in years (Length of maximum number of terms permissible as elected member in years)
No. Elected/ <i>Ex Officio</i> Members	Number of elected members (including elected student members) and number of <i>ex officio</i> members (from TORs)
No. Student Members	Total number of student members on ABS, and breakdown into number of undergraduates, coursework postgraduates and higher degree research (HDR) student members
How Students Selected	Number appointed, number elected, number <i>ex officio</i>
Number of Ordinary Meeting	Number of scheduled ordinary meetings per year
Length of Ordinary Meeting (hours)	Scheduled length of business of ordinary meeting of ABS (in hours)
Number of Committees Reporting	Number of committees (not working parties) providing regular reports to ABS; number reporting to ABS as defined in TOR
Conflict of Interest Declaration Required	Is membership asked to declare any conflicts of interest at commencement of each meeting?
Filling Casual Vacancies	Does CAB or ABS executive have ability to fill casual vacancies without election; if so, for a maximum of how many months?
Temporary Replacements	Is there facility to appoint a temporary replacement for an elected or appointed member who seeks leave of absence (and, if so, is replacement appointed or nominated by member)?
Election Procedures in TORs/SO	Are procedures for election of members defined in TORs of ABS, standing orders (SO), or neither?
No. of Co-opted Appointees	Maximum permissible number of co-opted appointees
Reason for Co-opted Appointees	If co-opted appointees to ABS are permitted under TORs/constitution, for what reason: gender, expertise, both of these, neither, or other
CAB on Council/Snr Exec.	Is CAB a member of university governing body (council/senate) or a member of (or invited to regular meetings of) senior executive?
CAB EFT% Relief Paid by Centre	What percentage of an equivalent full-time (EFT) position does CAB role entail, and is CAB's academic organisational unit (AOU) reimbursed by centre for this time commitment?
DCAB EFT% Relief Paid by Centre	What percentage of an EFT position does deputy chair of academic board/senate (DCAB) role entail, and is DCAB's AOU reimbursed by centre for this time commitment?
CAB Reports to Council	Does CAB regularly report to university council/senate and, if so, is report written or oral?
CAB Hears Academic/Discipline Appeals	Does CAB chair an appeals committee for student academic or behavioural misconduct?

Quality and Standards	What functions does ABS have with respect to academic quality and standards?
Establishment of AOU's	What functions does ABS have with respect to establishment/dis-establishment of AOU's?
Academic Integrity	What functions does ABS have with respect to rules/policies/procedures for academic integrity?
Academic Risk	What functions does ABS have with respect to academic risk?
Academic Partnerships/Credit Agreements	What functions does ABS have with respect to formal academic partnerships and credit assessment agreements with third-party providers?
Academic Rules, Policies and Procedures	What functions does ABS have with respect to academic rules/policies/procedures?
Academic Merit Policies/Awards	What functions does ABS have with respect to prizes, medals or merit scholarships (including policies for same)?
HDR Supervision and Training	What functions does ABS have with respect to HDR student supervision and training (including policies for same)?
T&L/Education/Curriculum Plan	What functions does ABS have with respect to university's strategic planning around teaching, learning and curriculum?
Research and Research Training Plan	What functions does ABS have with respect to university's academic planning around research and research training?
Approval of Graduation Lists	What functions does ABS have with respect to approval of graduation lists?
Academic Staff Professional Development	What functions does ABS have with respect to professional development of academic staff?
Academic Staff Promotions	What functions does ABS have with respect to academic staff promotions?
Academic Staff Study Leave	What functions does ABS have with respect to academic staff study leave/sabbaticals?
Academic Management Matters	What functions does ABS have with respect to academic administration matters managed by DVCs, PVCs or Deans?
Resources	What functions does ABS have with respect to management of resources (if any, what resources)?
Student Support Services	What functions does ABS have with respect to student administration and support?
Course Approval	What functions does ABS have with respect to establishment, dis-establishment and major amendment of academic courses (i.e. awards or degrees)
Course Reviews	What functions does ABS have with respect to periodic review of academic courses (i.e. awards or degrees)
Unit (Subject) Approval	What functions does ABS have with respect to establishment, dis-establishment and major amendment of units (i.e. subjects) that comprise courses (i.e. awards or degrees)
ABS Annual Budget (AU\$)	What is annual budget managed by or on behalf of ABS?
Academic Delegations Register	What functions does ABS have with respect to university's academic delegations register (ADR)
ADR Review Frequency	If there is an ADR, with what frequency is it reviewed by ABS, if at all?
Academic Risk Register	What functions does ABS have with respect to university's academic risk register (ARR)?
ARR Risk Frequency	If there is an ARR, with what frequency is it reviewed by ABS, if at all?

2. Number of deputy chairs

Nine universities had one deputy chair and four had two deputy chairs.

No change from the 2015 survey.

3. Size of membership

	2018	2015
Smallest:	28	28
Largest:	161	123
Average:	56	55
Median:	47	49
25-40 members:	5	5
40-60 members:	5	5
60+ members:	3	3

No significant change from the 2015 survey.

4. Tenure of chair

	2018	2015
Two years:	9	9
Three years:	4	4

The maximum period of tenure (where reported) was typically six years (either three 2-year terms or two 3-year terms).

Most NSW and ACT universities now provide a term limit of six years, whereas in the previous survey two universities allowed four and eight years, respectively.

5. Percentage membership elected/*ex officio*

	2018	2015
Smallest elected:	44%	44%
Largest elected:	79%	75%
Smallest <i>ex officio</i> :	21%	25%
Largest <i>ex officio</i> :	60%	56%

The most frequent ratios of elected to *ex officio* members in eight universities were 65:35 or 60:40.

*Little significant change. Variances from 2015 can usually be accounted for by changes in senior executive positions, such as more or less deputy and pro vice-chancellor roles with an *ex officio* status.*

6. Elected student members

	2018	2015
One student member:	2	1
Two student members:	3	3
Four student members:	4	3
Four to six student members:	1	3
Six to eight student members:	1	2
More than eight student members:	2	1

Universities had varied representation for undergraduate, postgraduate and higher degree research students and gender balance among student representatives.

A slight but inconsistent tendency to fewer elected student representatives was evident between 2015 and 2018. Discussions with colleagues suggest this was partly due to a desire to reduce the workload associated with the frequent recurrence of elections to fill vacancies.

7. How student representatives are selected/appointed

	2018	No 2015 data
Elected	10	–
Appointed	0	–
<i>Ex officio</i>	1	–
Elected and <i>ex officio</i> mix	2	–

A large majority of student representatives are either entirely elected or comprise a mix of elected and ex officio student representatives. It appears ex officio members are typically representatives of the official student organisations (Students' Association, Students' Guild, for example).

8. Typical or scheduled length of ordinary meetings

	2018	No 2015 data
One to two hours	9	–
Two to three hours	2	–
Three to four hours	1	–
More than four hours	1	–

9. Number of ordinary meetings

Nine universities in 2018 (**nine in 2015**) typically had six meetings annually with some having five. One university had eight meetings annually.

No change from the 2015 survey.

10. Number of subordinate committees

Care is required in interpreting these data as some subordinate committees include faculty boards whose role may have functions similar to subordinate committees in other universities.

	2018	2015
Two committees:	0	1
Three committees	1	0
Four committees:	6	2
Six to seven committees:	3	5
Eight to ten committees:	2	3
More than ten committees:	1	2

A tendency towards a reduced number of subordinate committees was evident in 2018 compared to 2015.

11. Conflict of interest (COI) requirement

Eight universities in 2018 (**nine in 2015**) had a COI requirement either annually or at each meeting. Discussion with colleagues suggest that where COI is part of a generic university rule or policy, an additional COI declaration for meetings is unnecessary. The variation may be due to different legal interpretations by university In-house counsel officers and their guidance to chairs and secretaries.

A reduction of one in the number of universities requiring a COI at each board meeting in 2018 compared to 2015.

12. Filling of casual vacancies (permanent out-of-cycle vacancies)

Ten universities in 2018 (**nine in 2015**) had special arrangements for filling of casual vacancies, of which six had arrangements that allow filling of casual vacancies without a by-election (typically by co-option) where the remaining term of office is limited (nine to twelve months).

An increase of one in the number of universities with special arrangements for filling of casual vacancies in 2018 compared to the 2015 survey.

13. Temporary replacements (short-term vacancies where the original member is able to return)

Ten universities in 2018 (**nine in 2015**) had arrangements for the filling of short-term vacancies. The filling varied typically between the member finding an alternate or the chair exercising discretion to fill from the absent member's constituency. Other universities either applied the casual vacancy procedure to a temporary vacancy or disallowed temporary replacements.

No significant change from the 2015 survey.

14. Number of co-options

Seven universities indicated they allowed co-options to the board. Of these seven, the average number of co-options permissible was five although one university had a significantly higher number, which skewed the average slightly. Not including this university brought the average to four.

No comparable data available from 2015.

15. Purpose of co-options

Expertise	7
Gender representation	3
Indigenous representation	2

No comparable data available from 2015.

16. Location of the election procedures

Nine universities in 2018 (**11 in 2015**) indicated that their election procedures were located in the statutes, terms of reference or standing orders. Four universities indicated that their election procedures were part of a campus-wide rule or policy on the conduct of elections.

A shift towards campus-wide election rules or policies rather than specific to the board was evident in 2018 compared to 2015.

17. Chair sits on the university council or senior executive committee

Nine universities in 2018 (**six in 2015**) indicated that the chair attends council meetings. Of these universities, three (**three in 2015**) indicated that the chair also attends senior executive meetings.

An increase in the number of chairs being members of university councils was evident in 2018 compared to 2015. There was no change in the number of chairs having membership of senior executive committees.

18. Chair's time release

Twelve universities in 2018 (**12 in 2015**) indicated that the chair's absence from teaching and research duties was compensated for by time release (one university reported this was confidential).

	2018	2015
Time release of 35-40%:	2	0
Time release of 50%:	4	5
Time release of 60%:	1	1
Time release of 70%:	1	1
Time release of 80%:	1	3
Time release of 100%:	3	2
Nil response	1	0

Nine universities indicated that the cost of the compensation was met centrally (i.e. not by the chair's own school, department or faculty).

No significant change was evident in 2018 compared to the 2015 survey. There was insufficient data in 2015 about the source of time-release compensation to draw a valid comparison.

19. Deputy chair's time release

Six universities in 2018 (**nine in 2015**) indicated that the deputy chair's absence from teaching and research duties was compensated for by time release.

	2018	2015
Time release of 0%:	5	0
Time release of 10%:	0	1
Time release of 20%:	4	2
Time release of 25%:	2	1
Time release of 30%:	0	3
Time release of 40%:	0	2
Time release of 50%:	0	1
Time release of 60%:	1	0
Nil response:	1	0

Three universities indicated that the cost of compensation for time release was met centrally.

A shift to providing nil time release to deputy chairs was evident in 2018 compared to 2015.

20. Chair makes regular reports to the university council

Twelve universities in 2018 (**ten in 2015**) indicated a regular report was made to the university council by the chair. The other university indicated that the chair presented an annual report to council.

All universities required the chair to report to council (almost always a written report).

21. Chair hears academic or disciplinary appeals

Ten universities in 2018 (**ten in 2015**) indicated that the chair does not hear appeals.

No change from the 2015 survey.

B. TERMS OF REFERENCE

A number of contributors indicated that their boards had multiple roles in its terms of reference (e.g. both Approval and Monitoring roles). Accordingly, the tallies below reflect the responses for each role and will not sum to 13 for each section.

22. Quality and standards role

	2018	2015
Approval role:	7	6
Advisory role:	9	7
Delegated role:*	4	2
Endorsement role:	4	1
Monitor role:	10	9
Note role:	2	0
Promote role:	6	1
Nil answer:	1 university	

* to subordinate committee

A slight increase in explicit approval, advisory and monitoring roles was noted in 2018 in comparison with 2015. There was also a slight increase in specific quality and standards committees.

23. Academic organisation unit (AOU) establishment (new institutes, centres, schools, etc.)

	2018	2015
Approval role:	1	0
Advisory role:	1	4
Delegated role:*	0	0
Endorsement role:	2	0
Monitor role:	2	0
Note role:	0	2
Promote role:	0	0
No role:	9	7

* to subordinate committee

Most boards have a limited role in AOU establishment issues with evidence of a decreasing role since 2015.

24. Academic integrity

	2018	2015
Approval role:	10	10
Advisory role:	11	6
Delegated role:*	3	2
Endorsement role:	5	2
Monitor role:	10	6
Note role:	2	0
Promote role:	5	0
No role:	0	0

* to subordinate committee

The explicit roles of boards in academic integrity have expanded since 2015.

25. Partnerships and credit agreements

	2018	2015
Approval role:	4	4
Advisory role:	4	2
Delegated role:*	5	1
Endorsement role:	2	1
Monitor role:	3	4
Note role:	4	0
Promote role:	1	0
No role:	2	5

* to subordinate committee

The roles of boards in the oversight of partnership and credit agreements have become more explicit since 2015, increasingly through a delegated expert committee.

26. Rules, policies and procedures

	2018	2015
Approval role:	11	11
Advisory role:	5	5
Delegated role:*	2	0
Endorsement role:	8	3
Monitor role:	6	3
Note role:	3	0
Promote role:	3	0
No role:	0	0

* to subordinate committee

While the approval role remains as it was in 2015, the growth in the endorsement and monitoring roles suggests greater work is being conducted by subordinate committees with boards increasingly having an oversight role.

27. Academic merit policies and awards

	2018	2015
Approval role:	6	7
Advisory role:	6	3
Delegated role:*	2	0
Endorsement role:	4	1
Monitor role:	4	0
Note role:	3	0
Promote role:	2	0
No role:	1	2

* to subordinate committee

There has been a significant increase in boards' roles in the oversight of academic merit policies and awards since 2015.

28. Approval of graduation lists

	2018	2015
Approval role:	4	4
Advisory role:	3	1
Delegated role:*	0	1
Endorsement role:	3	3
Monitor role:	1	1
Note role:	1	1
Promote role:	1	0
No role:	5	3

* to subordinate committee

While there has been an increase in board's oversight of graduation lists, there has also been an increase in boards no longer having a role in graduation list approvals.

29. Teaching and learning planning

	2018	No 2015 data
Approval role:	5	—
Advisory role:	9	—
Delegated role:*	2	—
Endorsement role:	6	—
Monitor role:	5	—
Note role:	6	—
Promote role:	1	—
No role:	0	—

* to subordinate committee

Boards have significant roles in the advisory, endorsement and monitoring roles regarding teaching and learning plans, the development of which are commonly a senior executive function (such as a pro vice-chancellor teaching and learning).

30. Research and research training planning

	2018	No 2015 data
Approval role:	3	–
Advisory role:	8	–
Delegated role:*	2	–
Endorsement role:	7	–
Monitor role:	4	–
Note role:	6	–
Promote role:	1	–
No role:	0	–

* to subordinate committee

As for teaching and learning. The slightly lower numbers in approval and advisory functions may reflect some universities' lower research profile.

31. Academic staff development

	2018	2015 (and promotions)
Approval role:	1	0
Advisory role:	7	5
Delegated role:*	0	1
Endorsement role:	1	0
Monitor role:	1	2
Note role:	7	1
Promote role:	0	0
No role:	3	5

* to subordinate committee

The role of boards in advising on, and being notified of, academic staff development plans and policies has evidently increased over the past three years.

32. Academic staff promotions

	2018	2015 (and promotions)
Approval role:	2	0
Advisory role:	5	5
Delegated role:*	0	1
Endorsement role:	2	0
Monitor role:	2	2
Note role:	4	1
Promote role:	0	0
No role:	3	5

* to subordinate committee

There has been some growth in the role of boards in endorsement, monitoring and being notified of academic staff promotions policies and procedures since 2015. It should be noted that approval/ advisory roles at some universities may be derived from board chairs attending or chairing academic promotion committees rather than boards making formal determinations.

33. Study leave

	2018	2015
Approval role:	1	1
Advisory role:	1	3
Delegated role:*	0	0
Endorsement role:	2	0
Monitor role:	0	1

Note role:	0	2
Promote role:	0	0
No role:	10	5

* to subordinate committee

The role of boards in study leave issues has reduced significantly since 2015.

34. Academic management matters

	2018	2015
Approval role:	2	1
Advisory role:	10	10
Delegated role:*	0	0
Endorsement role:	4	0
Monitor role:	2	1
Note role:	5	1
Promote role:	0	0
No role:	2	2

* to subordinate committee

There has been some growth in engagements by boards in academic management issues since 2015, particularly in the endorsement or notification of proposals and reports.

35. HDR supervision and training

	2018	2015
Approval role:	9	7
Advisory role:	7	5
Delegated role:*	5	0
Endorsement role:	4	1
Monitor role:	9	3
Note role:	1	0
Promote role:	2	0
No role:	0	1

* to subordinate committee

The role of boards in HDR supervision and training has increased significantly since 2015, particularly in monitoring these activities.

36. Resources

	2018	2015
Approval role:	0	0
Advisory role:	6	4
Delegated role:*	0	0
Endorsement role:	0	0
Monitor role:	0	0
Note role:	2	1
Promote role:	0	0
No role:	5	8
Under development:	1	0

* to subordinate committee

There has been a slight shift towards greater engagement by boards in the oversight of management of university resources.

37. Student support services

	2018	2015
Approval role:	0	0
Advisory role:	3	5
Delegated role:*	2	1
Endorsement role:	1	1
Monitor role:	1	1
Note role:	2	1
Promote role:	0	0
No role:	7	6

* to subordinate committee

There has been little change in engagement by boards with the oversight of student support services.

38. Course approvals

	2018	2015
Approval role:	9	9
Advisory role:	3	1
Delegated role:*	3	2
Endorsement role:	3	0
Monitor role:	3	0
Note role:	2	0
Promote role:	2	0
No role:	1	1

* to subordinate committee

There has been a shift towards greater engagement by boards in overseeing course approval policies and processes, although the number approving courses remains the same.

39. Course reviews

	2018	No 2015 data
Approval role:	7	—
Advisory role:	2	—
Delegated role:*	4	—
Endorsement role:	0	—
Monitor role:	8	—
Note role:	2	—
Promote role:	1	—
No role:	0	—

* to subordinate committee

All universities have either an approval or an oversight role in the conduct and reporting of course reviews.

40. Annual budget

	2018	No 2015 data
<\$50K	1	—
\$50K-\$200K	3	—
\$200K-\$500	2	—
>\$500K	1	—
No response	6	—
Average of seven universities	\$277K	—

Reported board budgets are relatively modest.

41. Academic delegations register

	2018	No 2015 data
Approval role:	3	—
Advisory role:	6	—
Delegated role:*	0	—
Endorsement role:	2	—
Monitor role:	3	—
Note role:	4	—
Promote role:	1	—
No role:	1	—
Under development:	2	—
To be determined:	1	—

* to subordinate committee

Approximately one third of NSW and ACT universities are still developing their board's role in the development of an academic delegations register, while approximately half of the universities are well advanced or have established formal oversight of their registers.

42. Academic delegations register review frequency

	2018	No 2015 data
Annual:	7	—
Triennial:	1	—
To be determined:	2	—
Nil response:	3	—

Most universities are planning an annual review of academic delegations.

43. Academic risk

	2018	2015
Approval role:	3	2
Advisory role:	7	3
Delegated role:*	7	3
Endorsement role:	2	0
Monitor role:	7	3
Note role:	1	0
Promote role:	3	0
No role:	0	5
Under development:	2	0
To be determined:	2	0

* to subordinate committee

The role of boards in the management of academic risk has increased markedly since 2015.

44. Academic risk register

	2018	No 2015 data
Approval role:	2	—
Advisory role:	2	—
Delegated role:*	0	—
Endorsement role:	1	—
Monitor role:	2	—
Note role:	1	—
Promote role:	1	—
No role:	0	—
Under development:	7	—
To be determined:	1	—

* to subordinate committee

While the roles of boards in academic risk identification, management and oversight is growing, there remains considerable work to finalise academic risk registers.

45. Academic risk register review frequency

	2018	No 2015 data
Annual:	3	–
To be determined:	5	–
Under development:	2	–
Nil:	1	–
Nil response:	2	–

Most NSW and ACT universities have yet to develop a mature process for the development and maintenance of academic risk registers.

C. CONDUCT OF MEETINGS

46. Acknowledgment of country

	2018	2015
Yes:	11	8
Yes (annual):	1	2
No:	1	3

47. Minutes with agenda or predistributed

	2018	2015
With:	7	10
Predistributed:	5	3
Both:	1	0

48. Apologies

	2018	2015
Yes:	13	13

49. List of attendees

	2018	2015
Yes:	13	13

50. Chair's report

	2018	2015
Yes:	13	13
Oral:	5	0
Written:	6	0
Both:	2	0

51. Vice-chancellor's report

	2018	2015
Yes:	13	13
Oral:	4	0
Written:	6	0
Both:	3	0

52. 'Questions on Notice' standing item on agenda

	2018	2015
Yes:	5	3
No:	8	7
Open Q&A:	0	3

53. 'Student Representatives Report' standing item on agenda

	2018	2015
Yes:	3	3
Oral:	1	0
Written:	2	0
No:	9	10
To be determined:	1	0

54. Other or 'General Business' standing item on agenda (business not specified on the agenda)

	2018	2015
Yes:	13	12
No:	0	1

55. 'Priority Business' standing item of agenda (first priority for discussion/decision)

	2018	2015
Yes:	8	6
No:	5	7

56. 'Confidential Business' standing item on agenda (separate agenda item or some members required to leave for these items)

	2018	2015
Yes:	6	8
No:	6	5
As required:	1	0

57. Notice of agenda

	2018	2015
Up to 7 days:	12	9
Up to 14 days:	1	1
Up to 28 days:	0	1
Insufficient data:	0	2

58. Right of attendance by observers

	2018	2015
Yes:	12	12
No:	1	1

59. Notice of motions

	2018	2015
Up to 7 days:	3	1
Up to 10 days:	0	2*
Up to 14/15 days:	9*	4*
Up to 21 days:	1	1
No notice required:	0	3
Insufficient data:	0	3

* may be the same: 10 working days = 14 calendar days

Discussion

Despite the short period of time since the last sector scan of NSW and ACT academic board functions and business processes in 2015, the 2018 scan revealed evidence of the changing roles and practices of boards. By 2015, Australian universities had fully grasped the ramifications of the [Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011](#) and the associated [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2011](#) (subsequently replaced by the [2015 Standards](#)). This comparison of board functions between 2015 and 2018 demonstrates how the governing bodies of NSW and ACT universities have been moving to align the governance requirements of the Higher Education Standards with the terms of reference of their academic boards. Academic risk is a case in point, with risk being mentioned three times in the 2011 Standards and seven times in the 2015 Standards. In 2015, five universities reported that their academic boards had no role in considering academic risk (Results #43). This had declined to zero universities by 2018, with the number of boards having an advisory, monitoring and oversight role increasing from three to seven, and the role of the board in academic risk under consideration at a further two universities.

Another trend evident between 2015 and 2018 was that the number of universities where the chair of academic board attends meetings of the governing body (council/senate) increased from six to nine (Results #17). This shift recognises the responsibility of the governing body for academic governance under the Standards, and possibly the removal of the need for 'a clear and discernible separation between corporate and academic governance' in the 2011 Standards from the 2015 version. In like manner, the number of universities where the chair makes regular reports to the university governing body increased from ten to twelve (Results #20). In line with the requirement under the Standards for boards to be the arbiter of an institution's academic standards, the number of boards with explicit approval, advisory or monitoring roles for academic quality and standards (Results #22) and for higher degree research student supervision and training (Results #35) increased.

In terms of rules, policies and procedures (Results #26), the increase in the number of boards that endorse and monitor policy between 2015 and 2018 suggests greater work is being conducted by subordinate committees, with the boards themselves having increasingly an oversight role. Examples of this would appear to be academic integrity (Results #24) where the number of boards with an approval role remained at ten, but advisory, monitoring and promotional roles increased markedly; (ii) course approvals (Results #38); (iii) monitoring, advising and endorsing of academic merit policies, prizes and scholarships (Results #27), and (iv) partnerships and credit agreements with external providers (Results #25).

There were minor shifts in the role of academic boards in management as opposed to governance between 2015 and 2018. Although the number of boards advising their university about academic management matters was invariant, the number of boards endorsing management matters increased slightly (Results #34), and the number with a role in resourcing increased from five to eight universities (Results #36). On the other hand, the number of boards with a role in the establishment of academic organisational units (Results #23) declined.

Several new questions about board functions with respect to academic planning, course reviews and academic delegations were introduced in the 2018 scan. Most boards have an advisory role in formulating the teaching and learning plan (nine universities; Results #29) and research and research training plan (eight universities; Results #30) although relatively few approve these key institutional academic plans (five and three universities, respectively). Course reviews are arguably the centre-point of the Higher Education Standards for ensuring the continuous improvement of a university's educational programs (Section 5.3, 'Monitoring, Review and Improvement', in the 2015 Standards). Eight boards monitor the outcomes of course reviews (Results #39). The 2011 Standards require that

all delegations of authority '(including financial, academic and managerial) are appropriate, documented, observed and regularly reviewed' and the 2015 Standards require that academic governance assures 'that delegations of academic authority are implemented'. Accordingly, boards at eight universities monitor their institutions' academic delegations on a yearly or triennial basis (Results #42).

The 2011 Standards required effective professional development and promotion processes for staff, and although the requirements under the 2015 Standards are less explicit, the number of university boards with a role in academic staff development and academic promotions increased from five to seven and from three to five, respectively, between 2015 and 2018. Curiously, however, the number of boards professing no role in study leave increased from five to ten universities, despite the fact that academic sabbaticals are a feature of academic staff development at Australian universities.

Formal time release for deputy chairs of academic board declined from a modal percentage of 30% time release at three universities in 2015 to 0% time release at five universities in 2018. This possibly reflects the trend for senior executives and associate deans to chair standing committees reporting to academic board, replacing elected deputy chairs, with a concomitant reduction in the amount of time release required by deputy chairs. The modal number of subordinate standing committees (those formally reporting to academic board) declined from six or seven in 2015 to four in 2018, presumably for reasons of improved business efficiency. The number of student representatives on boards declined at four universities versus an increase at one, despite growing interest in student partnerships and the 'Student Voice' at Australian universities (<http://studentvoiceaustralia.com/>).

In terms of business processes, shifts were evident between 2015 in 2018 in the increased number of boards formally acknowledging country at each meeting (Results #46), in line with the sector's commitment to the [Guiding Principles for Developing Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities](#). Presumably for reasons of business efficiency, the number of boards:

- declined from eleven to nine with membership election procedures embedded in the statutes or terms of reference or standing orders of the board (Results #16)
- increased from three to six with circulation of draft meeting minutes out of session (Results #47)
- increased from six to eight with priority business as the first item for discussion or decision making (Results #55).

The number of boards with an open Q&A item in the agenda declined from three to nil universities between 2015 and 2018 (Results #52).

In conclusion, this sector scan and the comparison of the results with the earlier 2015 scan reveal evidence of steady change in the functions and business processes of NSW and ACT academic boards as universities respond to the requirements of the TEQSA Act and the Higher Education Standards, and evolving concepts of university and shared governance. It provides a useful reference against which universities may benchmark their academic governance, quality assurance and business processes.