



Queensland University of Technology

Queensland University of Technology Amendment Bill 2021

QUT Submission to the Parliamentary Education, Employment and Training Committee September 2021

QUT would like to thank the members of the Queensland Parliament Education, Employment and Training Committee for the opportunity to provide further feedback on the *Queensland University of Technology Amendment Bill 2021* (the Bill) to reduce the membership of the QUT Council from 22 members to 15 members.

As noted, when the Bill was introduced into the House, the process to streamline the QUT Council began in 2017 when the then Minister for Education, the Honourable Kate Jones, wrote to QUT noting the parameters set by State Government for governance reform at James Cook University and the option for other Queensland universities to consider implementation of a similar model.

QUT then began a process of review and consultation to identify the appropriate size of the Council to reflect modern governance practices. The proposed model to reduce the size of the Council from 22 to 15 members will enable an appropriate balance between the number of members and mix of necessary skills and expertise required for effective governance on the Council.

The review also noted that the QUT 22-member Council was one of the largest governing bodies of Queensland's public universities.

The proposed model fully complies with the parameters put forward by State Government (in relation to numbers and composition of elected members), with the Voluntary Code of Best Practice for the Governance of Australian Universities, which requires that the majority of Council members must be external to the University and desirably no more than 15 members. Of the 15 members proposed, eight (Chancellor, three Governor in Council appointed, and four additional members) would be external and satisfies Tertiary Education Quality Standards TEQSA's Higher Education Standards Framework guidance on governance.

The proposed Bill follows two rounds of consultation with the QUT community commissioned by the QUT Council and further consultation with all key stakeholder groups following the release of the draft Bill.

The first consultation (June-August 2019) invited feedback on an initial proposal for a 13-member Council and the second round (August-October 2020) consulted on a proposal for a 15-member Council.

The final consultation process was undertaken in 2021 to seek feedback and views on the draft Bill from QUT staff and students (and their representative organisations), and other members of the University community (approximately 65,000 people in total).

A total of 11 responses were provided in writing from four individual students, three from staff (across both academic and professional staff categories, including one joint submission), two Council members, another Queensland university (letter provided to the Vice-Chancellor) and one additional respondent who identified as alumni.

QUT has summarised the feedback in the attached Amendment A.

QUT has also noted submission from the National Tertiary Education Union opposing the Bill, and the questions from Committee members regarding student representation, and would like to respond to both issues here.

1. NTEU has opposed the reduction of University Councils across Australia in principle and refutes the advice of the UA governance report. QUT believes it has provided sufficient representation for staff (a reduction from 5 to 3) in line with the overall reduction from 22 to 15 members of the QUT Council.
2. There has been no change to the number of student representatives. The QUT Amendment Bill stipulated that one student representative should represent postgraduate students. This stipulation is to ensure this important sector of the student body is represented and not adversely impacted by having lower voting numbers than the undergraduate student sector.

QUT believes the Council should be representative of the diversity of the Queensland community and allow flexibility to ensure the very best governance of this complex organisation into the future. This means a Council which has a well-balanced membership in terms of skills and experience, incorporating gender balance and people representing diverse groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people with disability. QUT affirms that a reduced Council also reflects the reforms across corporate governance of listed and unlisted organisations, government and not-for-profit, for small, more agile and more representative Boards and Councils.

It is recognised that the Council needs to have enough members to fulfil its responsibilities and serve the interests of the University as a whole. For QUT, the University advocates that a smaller Council will improve the effectiveness, participation, and agility in Council meetings and operations, enabling it to continue to fulfil its public sector responsibilities without major disruption, in an increasingly changing and complex environment.

QUT believes the proposed structure will also ensure appropriate representation for the entire university community, importantly including students.

In summary, introducing a flexible membership model will:

- Achieve a well-balanced membership in terms of skills, experience, gender, and diversity;
- Facilitate efficient and effective governance and enable faster decision-making; and
- Improve the effectiveness of Council meetings and operations, while maintaining the University's key public sector responsibilities.

QUT again thanks the Committee for its dedication and commitment to reviewing this important piece of legislation.

Professor Margaret Sheil AO, Vice-Chancellor and President, and Ms Leanne Harvey, Vice-President (Administration) and University Registrar, will be available to answer questions from committee members at the Public Hearings into the Bill on September 30, 2021.

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Amendment A: Consultation

RESPONSES - Written feedback to councilreform@qut.edu.au, in response to emails distributed to the University community (Invitation to provide further feedback on the reform of QUT's governing Council).

Consultation period 7 July 2021 to 19 July 2021 through all staff, students, Council members, alumni, Student Guild, and staff unions emails.

Number of Emails Distributed

Group	Number of People
Staff	12,025*
Students	52,913**
Council members	20
Alumni Board	15
Student Guild	2
Staff Unions (NTEU and Together)	2
Total	64,977

*Email list members as at 12 July 2021

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Summary of the Feedback Received from the Consultation Period

Email #	Category	Summary comments	Supportive/ Unsupportive/ Impartial
1	Student	General enquiry in relation to the <i>Queensland University of Technology Act 1998</i> (the Act)	Impartial
2	Student	Allow for more students on Council given that they are the largest 'customer' group in the University and to ensure Council will be well served. One elected undergraduate student and one elected postgraduate student is insufficient. The numbers of elected staff and students should be more even	Impartial
3	Academic staff	Understand better the rationale for changing the Alumni representative as an elected member Give an authentic voice to our alumni on a comparable footing to other stakeholders	Supportive

		In addition to providing their views based on their professional skills, new alumni representatives also provide their views from an alumni perspective New alumni representatives form a connection with the current Alumni Board to ensure the currency of their information as the alumni voice in decision-making and strategy	
4	Student	Undermines any semblance of democracy and democratic representation	Unsupportive
5	Student	As a higher degree research (HDR) student I feel the amendments are appropriate	Supportive
6	Former academic staff, student, and member of alumni	Increase staff representation, especially casual and sessional staff, which carry a significant portion of the teaching functions of the University The proposed changes will significantly reduce democracy in the institution Alumni must have the right to choose their representatives. The proposed changes could enable the Council to appoint compliant alumni councillors that cannot be held to account by the association's members An untenable position currently exists where the Vice-Chancellor sits as a member of Council, which oversees the Chancellery and has the power to renew her/his contract Reducing the overall size of the Council and the number of appointed positions may be a good thing, but much more consultation is required to develop an acceptable model	Unsupportive
7	Council member	As a member of Council I support the reforms	Supportive
8	External stakeholder	Fully supportive of the proposal The proposed changes would allow QUT to have greater flexibility with regard to its Council membership	Supportive
9	Academic staff	To further the University's commitment to 'Indigenous Success, Empowerment and Engagement' as outlined in <i>Blueprint 6</i> , consider the creation of an identified, ongoing position for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person on the QUT Council as an additional member appointed by Council This proposal will not alter the overall Council size	Supportive
10	Council member	A more corporate structure does not seem fully relevant in relation to a publicly funded educational institution, accountable to its students, staff, and community. Representation from these constituents through elected positions seems appropriate Consider inclusion of a sessional staff member as an elected academic representative to ensure diversity in the Council's composition	Supportive
11	Former Student Guild member and professional staff	With a reduced number of Council members, the provision should remain for student representatives Consider inclusion of fixed-term/sessional academic staff, who have had mid- to long-term engagement with the University (perhaps staff who have been employed for more than 2 years)	Impartial