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Chief Executive Officer

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**Parliament of Victoria**  
Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Dear Committee,

### **Inquiry into enhancing Victorian university governance**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's important work on university governance. I am writing on behalf of Universities Australia, and while we are the national peak body for Australia's 38 comprehensive universities, in this instance I represent the interests of Victoria's eight public universities. These eight institutions are vitally important to the state, both economically and socially. They educate more than 430,000 students and employ over 38,000 staff, delivering the skills and innovation that drives Victoria's economy.

At the outset, let me state that good governance is crucial for good universities, and every opportunity to embrace best practice in the oversight of such complex organisations is to be welcomed. It's worth noting, for the Committee's benefit, that this inquiry follows several other recent processes that have looked at university governance, including:

- The Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee's inquiry into the quality of governance at Australian higher education providers (see our submission [here](#)), and
- The Expert Council on University Governance (which UA was a member of, along with unions and students).

The Expert Council handed down its final report and principles in October, with Education Ministers now actively progressing the findings through their formal meetings, and the Senate inquiry reported in December. Given the central role states play in the governance and operation of universities, these established intergovernmental processes are already driving implementation, and we encourage the Committee to recognise and rely on them rather than duplicating work underway.

We also encourage the Committee to engage with the Universities Chancellors Council (UCC) if it is not already doing so. Chancellors lead university councils, which are ultimately responsible for governance arrangements. The UCC is already doing proactive work in this space, including developing the following voluntary codes:

- Code of Governance Principles and Practice for Australia's Public Universities, and
- Code of Executive Remuneration Principles and Practice for Australia's Public Universities.

Returning to the work of the Expert Council, Victoria's universities are already actively engaging with the Council's recommendations and principles, implementing changes in the context of their enabling legislation, existing Victorian statutory requirements and proposed amendments to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) framework. Additionally, Victoria's universities maintain mature and robust governance arrangements that already align with the Expert Council's recommendations. This reflects a high degree of governance maturity.



The Victorian Government's Appointment and Remuneration Guidelines promote diversity and ensure that ministerial and gubernatorial appointments to university councils reflect appropriate skills, knowledge and experience, consistent with Principle 2. Public universities in Victoria are also required under the Financial Management Act 1994 (Vic) to disclose consultancy expenditure – an accountability measure shared only with Queensland – which aligns with Principle 4 and recommendations of the federal inquiry into university governance.

A key consideration in implementing the Expert Council's principles is the timing and interaction of proposed amendments to the TEQSA Act and the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021 (HESF). The Expert Council recommended expanding the regulator's role to include performance evaluation, additional guidance and enhanced reporting. Education Ministers have indicated that work is underway to embed these principles in the HESF, alongside consultation on amendments to the TEQSA Act. The Victorian Government should consider how any state-level legislative changes – such as reviewing governing body size under Recommendation 3 – intersect with forthcoming federal regulatory requirements.

Continued, substantive engagement between the Victorian Government and the Commonwealth will be essential to ensure alignment with existing state legislation and to manage any necessary reforms efficiently.

In our submission to the consultation on modernising and strengthening TEQSA's powers, we cautioned against creating an unnecessarily complex regulatory environment. Where Victorian university legislation already addresses the Expert Council's principles, duplicative requirements in the HESF would add limited value and risk overlapping oversight. Ensuring universities meet obligations under their enabling legislation would avoid unnecessary duplication by TEQSA. A comprehensive mapping of existing and proposed requirements would assist the committee in assessing the scope and impact of potential changes.

We look forward to further engagement with the committee to support effective implementation of the Expert Council's principles and to promote coordinated reform across state and federal frameworks, ensuring accountability, transparency and inclusivity remain central to governance reform.

**Luke Sheehy**

Chief Executive Officer, Universities Australia