

Selecting the Next ANU Chancellor

ANU Governance Project

This draft discussion paper is being circulated for community feedback. Please help us ensure this paper accurately reflects your – and the broader university community’s – views by reading it and completing this [feedback form](#) by 13 May 2026.

The appointment of the new ANU Chancellor is a matter of significant consequence at a time when Australian universities are facing heightened financial and policy pressures, and growing expectations for transparency and accountability. As the national university, the ANU has an important leadership role across the sector given its distinct responsibility to contribute to public policy, national debate, international engagement, and societal progress. The selection of the upcoming Chancellor should be based on attributes needed to uphold the University’s mission, ensure effective governance leadership, and represent the institution with credibility, transparency, and integrity.

In Parts 1 and 2, this paper summarises attributes expected of the ANU Chancellor – drawing on feedback gathered through the ANU Governance Project’s engagement with staff and students and established effective governance frameworks and sector practice (see Governance Project [final report](#) and visual below) and offers proposed selection criteria that align with those attributes. In Part 3, the paper advances recommendations for community involvement in the Chancellor selection process, with the aim of strengthening legitimacy, trust, and accountability and selection of the best candidate.



Fig 1: Participants at the ANU Governance workshop described good university governance in one word

Part 1: Proposed Selection Criteria

The list below offers eight proposed selection criteria that align with the attributes expected of the next ANU Chancellor (Part 2).

1. Commitment to ANU's statutory and public mission

Demonstrated commitment to ANU's role as Australia's national university – encompassing teaching, research, public policy, national debate, international engagement, and the long-term public interest – and a record of upholding institutional mission when it is under financial, political, or executive pressure.

2. Integrity, probity and independence

Demonstrated integrity, probity and independence from partisan, donor, commercial or other external interests that could reasonably compromise impartial judgement or public confidence in the institution.

3. Capacity to lead a complex governing body

Demonstrated capacity to chair a complex governing body: to foster rigorous deliberation, chair disagreement constructively, protect legitimate dissent, and exercise effective oversight. This includes a commitment to ensuring that Council receives high-quality, plural and independent sources of information – supporting well-informed governance informed by diverse and appropriately independent perspectives – while maintaining a clear and principled distinction between governance oversight and executive management.

4. Commitment to transparent, accountable and self-renewing governance

Demonstrated commitment to transparent and accountable governance, including reasoned decision-making, genuine consultation, financial and strategic openness, and visible follow-through on staff and student input in Council decisions. This includes support for open, merit-based governance and appointment processes that draw on broad expertise and perspectives.

5. Familiarity with public-interest institutions and the conditions of academic work

Direct experience of institutions whose primary purpose is public benefit rather than profit – whether in research, education, public administration, the law, the arts, or public health – sufficient to understand the distinctive conditions of academic work and the governance responsibilities of a public university.

6. Commitment to academic freedom and academic values

Demonstrated commitment to academic freedom, research integrity, teaching quality, academic standards, peer-based expertise, and institutional independence from improper political, commercial or managerial interference.

7. Recognition of staff and students as essential contributors to university governance

Demonstrated understanding that staff and students bring essential knowledge, experience and institutional commitment to university governance, and a record of creating conditions in which their expertise and interests meaningfully inform accountability, risk identification and strategic decision-making.

8. Capacity to build and sustain trust across the University community

Demonstrated capacity to build and sustain trust across the University community through respectful, sustained engagement with staff, students, academic governance bodies, unions, government, regulators and external stakeholders. The Project particularly values candidates who can demonstrate this capacity in circumstances of institutional difficulty or contested decisions, where the quality of leadership is most consequential.

Part 2. Attributes of the next ANU Chancellor

The list below focuses on the attributes most relevant to the Chancellor's role, drawing on consultations conducted by the ANU Governance Project, as well as established governance frameworks and sector practice. The attributes are not presented in order of priority.

- **Stewardship of ANU's national mission and public purpose**

The ability to provide effective stewardship of ANU's national mission and public purpose was identified as a key attribute, requiring a clear understanding of the University's role as a national institution, and as both an education and research university with a strong policy-facing orientation. The Chancellor must have the ability to position ANU effectively within Australia's public and policy landscape, contributing to national debate, informing public policy, and maintaining strong engagement with government, civil society, and international partners.

- **Integrity and independence**

Chancellors set the tone for universities. Both integrity and independence are cornerstones of good governance and foundations upon which trust and credibility rest. Integrity refers to ethical leadership and consistency of values in practice, including

acting in good faith, following established and transparent rules and procedures, and ensuring that governance practices are consistent with the values publicly espoused by the University. Independence requires clear separation from government influence, donors, and external interests, alongside a demonstrated willingness to exercise independent judgment. Respondents linked integrity to honesty, fairness, and merit-based decision-making, and argued that the Chancellor must embody these qualities if they are to represent the academic community credibly. Several also connected integrity to the idea of an ethical culture, where leadership models openness, respect, and ethical behaviour at every level of the institution.

- **Commitment to transparency and accountability**

Respondents consistently identified transparency and accountability as essential to credible governance. This includes clear communication of decision-making processes, openness about how and why decisions are made, and visible follow-through on consultation outcomes. Respondents stressed that accountability must be substantive rather than performative, requiring the Chancellor to demonstrate how staff and student input has shaped Council decision-making and to support transparency in financial and strategic matters.

'Clear communications about processes behind decisions – instead of throwing it under a blanket 'for operational needs.'

'Tough calls sometimes need to be made, but our leaders need to be prepared to be open & honest about what process was undertaken to arrive at that point. It might not always be popular but at least own it.'

- **Governance capability, public engagement, and strategic judgement**

The role of university Councils is changing. Increased regulatory oversight of the sector requires more active and engaged governance capable of steering ANU through structural challenges and responding to [governance shortcomings](#) identified both within the sector and at the University itself. Alongside stewardship of ANU's national mission, respondents emphasised the importance of strong governance capability and strategic judgement, together with the ability to engage effectively with government, partners, alumni, and the broader public. This includes experience leading complex organisations or boards, supporting effective oversight of the University Executive, and engaging with long-term strategy and institutional risk without overstepping into operational management. These capabilities are central to ensuring that Council decisions are robust, evidence-informed, and aligned with the University's mission.

- **Ability to build trust across the University community**

A major theme that emerged from the ANU Governance Project – and reinforced by both [internal](#) and [external](#) reports – was a perceived disconnect between senior university leadership and the broader staff and student community. The ability to rebuild trust and credibility across the University community therefore emerged as a critical expectation. Respondents highlighted the importance of ethical leadership that fosters a culture of respect, openness, and psychological safety, where staff and students feel able to contribute, challenge, and engage without fear of personal or professional reprisal. Rebuilding trust was closely linked to everyday experiences of governance, including how decisions are communicated, how people are treated, and whether diverse voices are genuinely heard.

'Respect, equitable access to leadership and to influence, non-hierarchical forms of leadership, ability to speak up and critique without fear of retaliation.'

'More than anything, I want to see ANU rebuild a culture where people feel safe to contribute. Right now, many do not. That needs to be acknowledged before anything can change.'

- **Academic credibility and commitment to academic values**

The leadership of the next ANU Chancellor should be grounded in an understanding of the University's academic mission, informed by the expertise of researchers and educators, and committed to academic freedom and institutional independence. Some respondents argued that the Chancellor should be appointed from within the institution and return to it afterwards, thereby remaining connected to the long-term consequences of governance decisions. Others stressed the importance of academic credibility itself, while many focused more broadly on commitments to academic values and protection of research and teaching from undue influence by political, commercial, or external influence.

'University leaders can only be credible leaders if they have credibility as researchers and teachers.'

'The process for appointing the Chancellor should include the university leader meeting criteria for nationally and internationally recognised academic and intellectual leadership and scholarship.'

'I believe good governance should be guided by collegiality and respect for academic freedom, ensuring decisions are informed by the expertise of our academic community.'

Part 3: Community participation in the selection of Chancellor process

The recruitment of the next Chancellor presents an opportunity to strengthen community confidence in university governance.

In April 2026, TEQSA and ANU announced in April 2026 a [voluntary undertaking](#) regarding the recruitment of the next Chancellor, following concerns about aspects of the University's governance, including Council culture, oversight, and decision-making. The undertaking establishes an independent Selection Advisory Panel - comprising members nominated by TEQSA and ANU Council - to define the selection criteria, oversee a rigorous recruitment process, and recommend a preferred candidate.

Why Community Participation is Important

A consistent and strongly held view across the community feedback is that staff, students, and other stakeholders should be active participants in the Chancellor selection process, not merely recipients of information about it. Community members expressed a clear desire to be involved in shaping the process itself - through representative committees, open engagement with candidates, and structured opportunities to provide input at each stage. Transparency was seen as a necessary condition of any credible process, but insufficient on its own; what the community sought was genuine participation in decision-making, not simply disclosure after the fact. As one respondent put it, the University requires "more democracy and staff input," while another called for "transparency in recruitment" to be accompanied by mechanisms that give the community a real voice in who is appointed.

'Staff should have a say in who is appointed chancellor and vice-chancellor.'

'Make clear that the search for the next Chancellor is being led by internal expertise'

On the question of selection criteria, community members were emphatic that the role must be grounded in genuine academic and intellectual distinction, and that the criteria themselves should be developed with community input rather than determined solely by Council. There was strong sentiment that past appointments had privileged political connections and corporate networks over scholarly credibility, and respondents were clear that this must change. One participant called for "the accountability of the Chancellor, VC and Council, academic expertise and credibility of the Chancellor, VC and Council" to be central to any reformed process, whilst another stressed that "the process for appointing the Chancellor should include the university leader meeting

criteria for nationally and internationally recognised academic and intellectual leadership and scholarship.”

Opportunities to Strengthen Community Participation in the Selection Process

Within the parameters established by the TEQSA undertaking, the Project respectfully submits that the following process commitments would strengthen the credibility and legitimacy of the appointment, while remaining achievable within a relatively short timeframe:

- 1. Structured consultation for staff and students to inform the attributes and selection criteria for the role.** This consultation paper, and [feedback form](#), is one example. Others could include an all-staff and all-student survey and/or a call for expressions of interest to participate in a representative workshop to refine and prioritise the attributes expected of the next Chancellor. The Governance Project is well placed to support this process.
- 2. The establishment of a representative staff and student reference group or stakeholder committee,** providing confidential input to the Selection Advisory Panel at key stages of the process. This group could help synthesise community perspectives and ensure continuity of input across the different phases of the selection process.
- 3. Structured opportunities for engagement with shortlisted candidates.** This could include presentations, forums, or other mechanisms that allow staff and students to provide input on shortlisted candidates in a way that maintains confidentiality and respects the integrity of the selection process. Such engagement could be conducted in a controlled and confidential setting, with participation limited to representative groups and feedback provided in a structured and non-attributable manner to inform the Panel’s deliberations.

These process commitments maintain the confidentiality needed to attract strong candidates, while ensuring the process is credible and commands confidence across the University community, government, TEQSA, and the broader public.

Community Views on Future Governance Reform

A further theme emerging from the consultation was the aspiration for more direct forms of community involvement in leadership selection.

'The main change needs to be the Chancellor being voted in by the academics. This is standard practice in the best institutions in the world.'

'Staff vote in Chancellor!'

The most consistently expressed aspiration was for the Chancellor to be directly elected by staff, and in many views, by students and alumni as well. Community members drew on international precedent to support this position, noting that direct election “is standard practice in the best institutions in the world.” Several proposed that an Academic Senate, an expanded Academic Board, or Convocation - analogous to models at Oxford and Cambridge - should play a formal role in the selection.

While direct election would require amendment of the ANU Act and is therefore not possible for the current selection process, it nevertheless represents a strongly held view within the University community and warrants consideration in future reviews of the ANU Act and broader governance arrangements.

Conclusion

Structured and meaningful involvement of staff, students, and other stakeholders – through the articulation of selection criteria, opportunities to engage with shortlisted candidates, and mechanisms for providing input – would distinguish this process from prior ANU Chancellor appointments. It would also signal the University’s commitment to transparency, accountability, and rebuilding trust, ensuring that the appointment of the next Chancellor is both rigorous, credible, and capable of rebuilding confidence across the University community and the broader public.

