

Priority Action 5:

Australian governments should work together to strengthen university governing boards by rebalancing their composition to put greater emphasis on higher education expertise. Governing bodies must as a priority do more to improve student and staff wellbeing and become exemplary employers.

This is a critical priority for universities in Australia. In most universities, the governing boards/University Council members seem to consist of members with limited education sector experience. Most often, the members are from privileged backgrounds and individuals who belong to majority groups. Very few members of the Council are working on the ground level as teaching academic staff. Unless most members have lived experiences managing students and experiencing daily challenges, they are unlikely to make decisions that reflect the needs of the ground-level students and staff.

We also require governing body members to come from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. The students and staff of universities come from diverse cultural and other minority backgrounds. However, the members of the Councils may not be representing the diversity of the student/staff population and, therefore, are less likely to represent the minority group/community interests.

What measures of success could the panel recommend to track the outcomes of Accord recommendations?

1. A proportion of membership is committed to staff who are at ground-level teaching and living within the locality of the university.
2. A proportion of membership is allocated to members with diverse lived experiences, particularly minority community experiences (cultural diversity /socio-economic), to ensure intersectional perspectives are considered in decision-making and resource allocation.