

SENATE DIGEST FOR MEETING OF 4 DECEMBER 2025

1. Welcome and Apologies

The Chancellor welcomed Senators and attendees and noted the recorded apologies. The Chancellor also acknowledged the final Senate meeting of the Student Member, Ella Birt.

2. Report from Chancellor

The Chancellor reported on meetings and events attended and advised that Archbishop Shane Mackinlay had commenced his role as Corporation President. The Chancellor outlined a proposal to improve communication with Corporation Members through circulation of the Senate Digest and monthly Vice-Chancellor updates. Senators supported the proposal and requested that State Chapters also receive these updates.

3. Report from Vice-Chancellor and President

The Vice-Chancellor presented the Report and highlighted the following:

- ACU's engagement with the Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities (SACRU), including the presentation of a publication on artificial intelligence and care for the common good to the Holy Father.
- International engagements with senior Vatican officials, diplomats and alumni, with discussions focused on opportunities and challenges facing Catholic universities.
- Visits to six ACU campuses to discuss the University's future direction with staff.
- ACU achieved record enrolments, was recognised as Australia's leading university for graduate quality, retained its position as Australia's leader in research quality, and improved its global research rankings.
- Higher Degree Research (HDR) enrolments exceeded the 2025 target by 10%, representing significant growth over recent years.
- The impact of government-imposed international student caps, including a reduction in overseas student commencements and an estimated \$40 million revenue impact.
- Commemoration of the 60th anniversary of Nostra Aetate and the successful Federal Parliamentary Interfaith Breakfast.
- Extensive preparations to ensure compliance with the National Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence ahead of its commencement on 1 January 2026.
- Introduction of legislation to establish the Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC).

Senators discussed:

- Cyber security preparedness, including ACU's incident response capability and lessons learned from sector incidents.
- Delegations and contingency arrangements to support continuity of critical operations.
- Positive relationships across the higher education sector, including engagement with the University of Notre Dame Australia.

4. Budget 2026

The Vice-Chancellor and President, together with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Corporate), presented the proposed 2026 Budget and highlighted the following:

- A forecast surplus exceeding \$45 million for 2025 and a proposed 1% surplus target for 2026 to support long-term sustainability and strategic investment.

- Development of a Long-Term Business Planning Framework aligned to Vision 2033.
- Continued investment in technology, governance, people capability and organisational infrastructure.
- Planning to respond to reduced international student commencements and increasing compliance obligations.
- Assurance from external stakeholders that the proposed budget would not adversely affect ACU's credit profile or refinancing capability.

Senators discussed accountability, technology investment, financial sustainability, the Risk Appetite Statement, and the need for transparent decision-making. Senate approved the 2026 Budget and requested a report on student attrition at the February 2026 meeting.

5. Pro Vice-Chancellor, Global

Senate approved the appointment of Mr Richard Dobek as Pro Vice-Chancellor, Global, for a five-year term commencing in 2026.

6. Artificial Intelligence Presentation

The Provost presented a report on the impact of generative artificial intelligence on students and the implications for ACU. Key themes included:

- Widespread student use of AI tools for study, assessment preparation and wellbeing support.
- Opportunities to enhance productivity, learning and teaching quality.
- The importance of maintaining academic integrity, human interaction and ACU's mission-centred approach to education.
- Emerging work in AI literacy, assessment redesign and AI-enabled pedagogy.

Senators discussed the implications of AI across disciplines, the future of assessment, responsible use of AI, and ensuring graduates continue to develop critical thinking and professional capability.

7. Mission and Identity

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Catholic Mission) presented an update on the Catholic Mission Portfolio. Senate also received amendments to the Thematic Review of Identity and Mission and discussed the Management Response.

The Vice-Chancellor highlighted:

- A five-year implementation program addressing mission leadership, formation, Church partnerships and mission practice.
- The establishment of governance and accountability mechanisms to oversee implementation.
- The review's 13 commendations and 20 recommendations.

Senators discussed measures of success, resource allocation, mission evaluation, Catholic identity, inclusivity and the proposed Mission Committee. The Chancellor noted the significance of Senate assuming greater responsibility for oversight of the University's Catholic mission.

8. Report from Corporation Secretary

The Corporation Secretary provided updates regarding:

- Deeds of Access, Indemnity and Insurance.
- The Final Report and Principles of the Expert Council on University Governance and ACU's preliminary gap analysis.
- Independent reviews of academic governance processes and governing body effectiveness.
- The Contract Execution Register.
- The 2025 Conferral Report.

The Corporation Secretary advised that the Expert Council's principles would be subject to a transition period before institutions are expected to justify any areas of non-compliance. Senators were encouraged to review the report in detail.

9. Report of the Academic Board

The Chair of Academic Board provided an update on the November meeting, encouraged Senators to engage with Academic Board activities and highlighted upcoming governance and academic governance events.

10. Report of the Senate Standing Committee

Senate:

- Approved the establishment of the Mission Committee, effective 1 January 2026.
- Approved amendments to Statute 2.2 (Finance and Resources Committee) and Statute 2.3 (Audit and Risk Committee) to strengthen committee appointments and governance arrangements.
- Approved amendments to Statute 2.5 (Academic Board), including a revised process for appointment of the Chair of Academic Board.
- Approved amendments to Statute 2.6 (The Faculties).

Senators discussed governance principles, committee appointments, skills-based selection processes, academic governance independence and alignment with the Expert Council's Governance Principles.

11. Report of the Finance and Resources Committee

Senate discussed and noted the report of the Finance and Resources Committee. Senators noted the introduction of remuneration reporting for staff not covered by the Enterprise Agreement.

12. Report of the Audit and Risk Committee

Senate:

- Noted the report of the Audit and Risk Committee.
- Approved the External Audit Plan.
- Approved the Draft ACU Whole of Organisation Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response Plan and Outcomes Framework for submission to the Commonwealth Department of Education.
- Noted the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Q3 2025 Report.

- Noted progress regarding wage compliance activities.
- Noted the Cyber Security Update.

Senators acknowledged the significant work undertaken to ensure compliance with the National Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence and discussed the impact of the requirements on students, staff and institutional accountability.

13. Reports from State Chapters

Senate noted the reports of:

- ACT State Chapter meeting of 14 October 2025; and
- NSW State Chapter meeting of 17 November 2025.

14. General Business

Senators discussed current pressures across the higher education sector, including financial challenges facing universities and the potential implications of future sector consolidation. It was suggested that these issues be considered as part of future strategic planning discussions.

15. Senate Annual Work Plan

Senate noted the 2026 Senate Annual Work Plan and the planned Senate Planning Day in August 2026.