

Swinburne University of Technology Accountability Framework

1. Overview and purpose of the Accountability Framework

This Accountability Framework is intended to set out how Swinburne University of Technology seeks to maintain and improve the quality of its activities and be assured that it meets its obligations under the [Higher Educational Standards Framework](#) (HESF), the Standards for [Registered Training Organisations](#) (RTO Standards) and other applicable legislation.

The foundation for the Accountability Framework is the [Swinburne University of Technology Act 2010](#) and the [Governance Framework](#) it enables. The Governance Framework describes, among other things, the functions, responsibilities and membership of the University's governing body, the Council and its committees, and of its academic governance body, the Academic Senate and its committees. It articulates the University's approach to delegations, the oversight of controlled entities, and the way in which the University's legislation, policies, procedures and guidelines provide the internal regulatory and administrative framework within which the operations of the University are conducted.

The Accountability Framework is represented schematically in Figure 1. It builds on the foundation of the Governance Framework by articulating:

- *Academic quality and standards.* The processes in place to assure the quality and standards of the University's academic activities, including its research, academic programs and students' experience and success.
- *Strategy, planning, budgeting and operational oversight.* The setting of the University strategy and the approach to planning, budgeting, financial management and monitoring of strategy implementation and University operations, including oversight of the University's performance through Key Performance Indicators.
- *Compliance and risk management.* The controls in place to ensure compliance with relevant legislation and policy and the effective management of risk, including regular compliance reporting, the framework supporting the ongoing appraisal and management of risk and the annual internal audit program.
- *Reporting and monitoring.* The approach to supporting oversight of the University's activities by Council and Academic Senate by ensuring that both bodies are sufficiently well informed to exercise their governance and quality oversight responsibilities, including through annual workplans and their review, and regular updates on the evolving tertiary education sector in Australia and overseas.
- *Role of management.* The role of management and management committees in the processes that enable, support and respond to the University's assurance processes.

In the following sections, these components of the Accountability Framework are described in more detail.

2. The governance framework

The governance framework (<https://www.swinburne.edu.au/about/policies-regulations/governance/>) sets out:

- the objects of the University and the roles and responsibilities assigned to the University's Council, the Academic Senate and Vice-Chancellor by the [Swinburne University of Technology Act 2010 \(legislation.vic.gov.au\)](#) (Sections 1-6);

- the participation of elected staff and student representatives in Council and the Academic Senate (Sections 7-8);
- the University's commitment to academic freedom and freedom of speech (Section 9);
- the University's statutes, regulations, policies, procedures and guidelines ([Policies and Regulations | Swinburne](#)), and their role in making provision for University-related matters that impose rights or confer obligations and in providing an internal regulatory and administrative framework to guide decision making and administration (Section 10);
- the arrangements for delegation of decision making by the Council and the Vice-Chancellor and the University's public register of delegations (Section 10.6);
- the commitments to integrity, compliance and the effective management of risk (Section 11); and
- the oversight of controlled entities (Section 12).

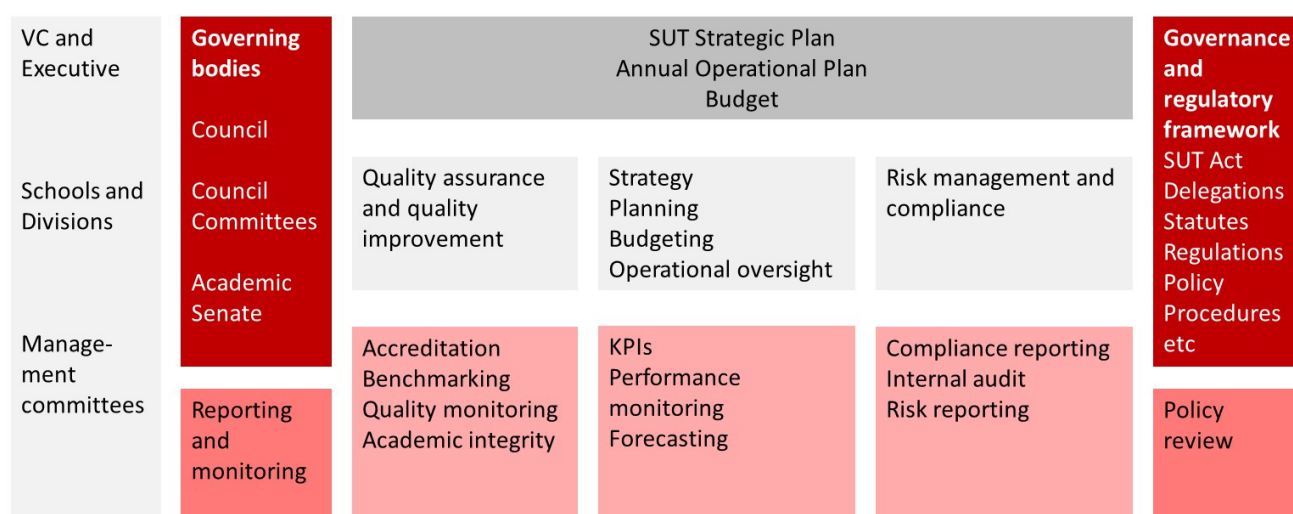


Figure 1. Schematic outline of the Accountability Framework

The governance framework is aligned to the *Voluntary Code of Best Practice for the Governance of Australian Public Universities* and has recently been updated as part of a program of work initiated by the Council to further strengthen its oversight of University activities.

As is best practice for Australian universities, the Council is responsible for corporate governance (including strategic oversight, overall effectiveness of management and financial and risk management). The Vice-Chancellor is responsible for executive management of the University. Responsibility for academic governance is shared between the Academic Senate and the Council, with the Academic Senate having a specified set of responsibilities set out in the 2014 [Academic Senate Regulations | Statutes and regulations | Swinburne](#) in relation to course accreditation and re-accreditation, academic quality assurance and the maintenance of academic standards, and Council having broad responsibility for oversight and monitoring of the University's academic activities.

The work of the Council is supported by a small number of committees in addition to the Academic Senate. These committees are:

- The Audit and Risk Committee (ARC), assisting Council to fulfil its governance and oversight responsibilities in relation to financial and annual reporting, enterprise risk management and internal controls, compliance and conduct, external audit, internal audit and assurance, enterprise technology and data, and environmental, social and governance matters;

- The Technology, Innovation and Value Creation Committee (TIVCC), providing strategic advice in relation to technology and innovation and assisting Council to fulfil its governance and oversight responsibilities in relation to research strategy and governance, value creation and commercialisation, and industry engagement, partnerships and collaboration; and
- The People, Nominations and Remuneration Committee (PNRC), assisting Council to fulfil its governance and oversight responsibilities in relation to governance and nominations, remuneration and performance, people and culture, diversity and inclusion; and other issues referred from time to time.

The Council and the Academic Senate are subject to an independent governance review against the requirements of the HESF at least every 7 years. In addition, the Council committees engage in an annual self-assessment process against their Terms of Reference.

Primary functions of the Academic Senate include: accrediting and re-accrediting courses; developing, reviewing and approving policies related to academic programs; and monitoring and assuring academic and research quality and standards. The Academic Senate is supported in these three core functions by the Academic Senate Courses Committee (ASCC), the Academic Policy and Quality Committee (APQC) and the Research Policy and Quality Committee (RPQC). The detailed responsibilities of the Academic Senate and its committees are set out in their Terms of Reference.

The University's three-tiered internal regulatory hierarchy of (a) University legislation, (b) policies, and (c) procedures, guidelines and supporting processes and work instructions (Section 10.2 of the Governance Framework) ensure a consistent framework guiding decision making and administration within the University. Each component of the hierarchy is the responsibility of Council, Academic Senate or the Vice-Chancellor. The University's policies, procedures and guidelines are reviewed at least every five years.

The SUT Act 2010 establishes the delegation powers of the Council and the Vice-Chancellor and the University's register of delegations is available publicly in Section 10.6.3 of the [Governance framework | Policies and regulations | Swinburne](#). The Academic Senate is not empowered by the Act to delegate. The updated Governance Framework commits to regular review of the delegations by Council.

The University's controlled entities ([Subsidiaries and entities | Swinburne](#)) are also subject to the Governance Framework, and each has a Board whose members are appointed to have the necessary knowledge, skills and experience for oversight of its activities. Each controlled entity reports regularly on its business and financial performance through the Audit and Risk Committee to Council and is, like the University itself, subject to audit by the Victorian Auditor General.

3. Academic quality and standards

All new academic programs are subject to the academic approval process described in the [Courses and Awards Policy | Policies | Swinburne](#). Proposals for coursework (research) programs proceed to Academic Senate through the Academic Senate Courses (Research Policy and Quality) Committee. All proposals require prior endorsement by a Course Advisory Committee that includes industry experts. New courses also require approval of a business case by management. Courses are accredited by the Academic Senate for a period of up to 5 years and then subject to a formal review as part of the course re-accreditation process. All (except minor) course revisions are subject to a similar academic approval process and, together with accreditation and re-accreditation outcomes, are captured in an Accreditation Annexure for each meeting of the Academic Senate, with outcomes captured in the regularly updated [register of accredited courses](#).

The Academic Senate also oversees a process of cyclical review of academic policy, consideration of the University's progress in ensuring academic integrity and biosafety, ethics and research integrity and annual review of an academic risk register. Its broader oversight activities of academic quality and standards are supported by an annual workplan for Academic Senate that includes regular quality reports as well as briefings on emerging risks and opportunities. These reports are described in more detail in Section 6 below. The Academic Senate also conducts an annual program of academic process audits to ensure compliance with academic policy (with follow-up of matters arising managed through the Academic Policy and Standards and Research Policy and Standards Committees).

4. University strategy, budgeting, planning and operational monitoring

The Council oversees the adoption and implementation of the University's strategy and, through systematic reporting against agreed Performance Indicators, monitors the University's operational performance and progress towards realisation of the University strategy. Swinburne's current strategic plan, [2025 Strategic Plan | Swinburne](#), Horizon 2025, is due to be delivered by the end of 2025 with the planning phase for the next strategy commencing in the second half of 2024.

An Operational Plan is developed each year to support the management of University operations including implementation of the University's strategy. The University's operations are also supported by a three-year budget, with the budget for the following three years approved annually by Council. Financial oversight by Council and the Audit and Risk Committee is supported by a regular Financial Management Report at each meeting which ensures that Council and ARC members have a clear and contemporary view of the University's financial performance and are well-placed to guide effective and sustainable operations. The Council also has oversight of the maintenance and development of the University's physical and digital infrastructure. The University's Urban Design Framework and Digital IT strategy frame the ongoing development of University infrastructure.

The Audit and Risk Committee receives a quarterly update on emerging risks and risk management and the effectiveness of the Risk Management Function is reviewed on a cyclical basis. The University maintains a list of Enterprise Key Risks that is informed by its Risk Appetite Statements.

Key Performance Indicators are set by Council and reported annually; the current KPIs and the most recent report against KPIs provide contemporary examples.

5. Compliance and risk management

The University regularly updates its Compliance Framework which sets out the governance arrangements, approach and roles and responsibilities that support the management of compliance obligations. The framework takes a risk-based approach to compliance management and is aligned with the ISO Standard for compliance management (ISO37301:2021). Council's Audit and Risk Committee oversees the Compliance Framework as well as compliance reporting and is supported by an annual Internal Audit program, with internal follow-up and tracking of actions arising. The most recent Compliance Report and the annual Internal Audit program exemplify compliance reporting.

The University's Enterprise Risk Management Framework sets out the University's approach to the management of risks and is also aligned to international standards (ISO31000:2018) as well as the Victorian Risk Management Framework. It sees risk management as an integral part of the University's culture and operations that is supported by (a) clear responsibilities for identifying, managing and mitigating risks across the University, (b) an expert risk management function and (c) the internal audit program.

The Audit and Risk Committee receives a quarterly update on emerging risks and risk management and the effectiveness of the Risk Management Function is reviewed on a cyclical basis. The University maintains a list of Enterprise Key Risks that is informed by its Risk Appetite Statements.

The annual process of determining the Council and Academic Senate workplans is used to ensure that high risk issues and the mitigation of risk are monitored regularly.

6. Reporting and monitoring

The oversight activities of the Council and the Academic Senate are supported by systematic reporting and review and by the internal audit program.

Key reporting to the Council is captured in the annual workplans of Council and Council Committees and in the Academic Senate Annual Workplan referred to earlier. This reporting enables systematic oversight of many of the requirements of the Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF), making the annual workplans an important component of the Accountability Framework. The workplans are updated annually, include reporting against agreed Performance Indicators and are structured to enable an at least annual review of the operating environment and early identification of emerging risks and issues and a systematic and comprehensive reporting on education and students. The Student Reporting Framework ensures that oversight of standards relating to education and students cover all student cohorts and all relevant aspects of the learning environment, the student experience and student outcomes.

The structured reporting embedded in the annual workplans of Council and Academic Senate is mapped to the Domain 6 standards of the HESF in Table 1.

Table 1. Mapping of key reports to Council and Academic Senate (AS) to the HESF Domain 6 and RTO Standards (ARC = Audit and Risk Committee, TIVCC = Technology, Innovation and Commercialisation Committee)

Governing body	Report	Relevant core HESF standards	Relevant RTO Standards (2015)
Council	Compliance report	6.2.1a, 6.2.1h, 6.2.1k	Clause 2.2
Council	University strategy, VC report (includes strategy update, sector update, report on KPIs), TIVCC report	6.2.1b	
Council	Financial management report, annual budget, operational plan, Annual Report, statutory accounts, capital plan, ARC report	6.2.1c, 6.2.1d	Clauses 7.2 and 8.1(c)
Council	Risk management framework, enterprise risk report, risk appetite statements, academic risk register (also AS)	6.2.1e	Clauses 7.1, and 8.5
Council	Academic Senate report	6.2.1 f	Clauses 1.1 and 7.2
Council	Reconciliation Action Plan	6.2.1g	Clause 1.7
Council	Business continuity management framework, plans	6.2.1i	Clause 7.5
Council	PNRC report, VC report	6.3.1c	Clauses 2.2(b) and 7.1

Council, AS	Complaints, reviews, appeals and misconduct (CRAM) report, academic integrity report, biosafety, ethics and research integrity report	6.2.1j 6.3.2d	Clause 6.1,6.2
AS	Academic performance report, academic courses report, transition and progression report, admissions report, admissions cohorts report, student experience report, education report, research training report, research quality report, staff training report, Academic Senate report	6.3.1a, 6.3.1b, 6.3.1d, 6.3.2a, 6.3.2b, 6.3.2e, 6.3.2f, 6.3.2h	Clauses 1.1, 1.16 and 2.2
AS	VC report	6.2.1g, 6.3.1c	
AS	Accreditation annexure	6.3.2c	Clauses 3.1-3.4

Evidence related to the University's alignment with Domain 6 standards that are not mentioned in Table 1 primarily comes from:

- Standards 6.1.1, 6.1.2: The SUT Act 2010, the Council Charter, the Governance Framework, Council membership and the minutes of Council and its committees;
- Standards 6.1.3, 6.1.4: The Council Charter, the Governance Framework, independent reviews of the Council and Academic Senate, the minutes of Council, Academic Senate and their committees;
- Standard 6.3.2g: independent reviews of the Council and Academic Senate; and
- Standard 6.3.3: the Governance Framework and the composition of Council and of Academic Senate.

The most recent (2024) independent review of Council against the Domain 6 standards demonstrates that the Council and recommended two changes to ensure full compliance with the Standards. Several suggestions to improve effective oversight were also made. The Council Action Plan in response to the review outlines the steps Council is taking in response to the review recommendations.

Likewise, the most recent (2024) independent review of the Academic Senate indicates that the Academic Senate is executing its academic governance responsibilities under the HESF with a high level of care and effectiveness. The two key recommendations of the review were to ensure sufficient independence of the Board and University management and to work towards a culture of robust critical and constructive inquiry at the Academic Senate. The Academic Senate Action Plan set out the response to the review recommendations.

In addition, each of Council and Academic Senate and each of its committees engage in an annual self-assessment process against its Terms of Reference.

7. Management and management committees

The Vice Chancellor has an executive team comprising the heads of portfolios (Academic; Education, Experience and Employability; Research; Innovation and Enterprise; External Engagement; and Operations) and the VC's Chief of Staff. The Academic portfolio includes the University's six academic schools and Vocational Education and Training. A suite of advisory committees support the VC and her executive team by ensuring informed advice from relevant academic and professional University units on reports, key decisions and proposed actions, including on issues referred to management by Council and Academic Senate.

These management committees play an important role in providing strategic oversight and in coordinating the University's operations across different organisational units, especially in areas that are related to student and staff wellbeing and safety, the promotion of diversity and inclusion, the development and realisation of the University's Reconciliation Action Plan and oversight of partnerships with other parties. Each committee is advisory to a member of the Executive Team and reports on appropriate matters through the relevant executive to VCAG and/or the Academic Senate. Each committee's membership is structured to enable advice from relevant experts, including from the University's academic units.

The Schools, Vocational Education and Training and professional units also maintain their own advisory committees where needed to ensure systematic and relevant advice.

Many of the management reports proceeding to Academic Senate or Council are also discussed at the relevant management committee(s) to ensure that the reports are appropriately contextualised and well-informed, that issues in need of consideration are identified and that relevant management actions are proposed to the governing bodies and then undertaken and monitored.

As described earlier, management committees also play a key role in supporting the effective oversight of a number of academic coursework and higher degree by research programs that are offered through arrangements with other parties.

The University has recently proposed some changes to its committee structure to enhance its effectiveness and contribution to overall accountability; the proposed new structure is captured in Attachment 1.

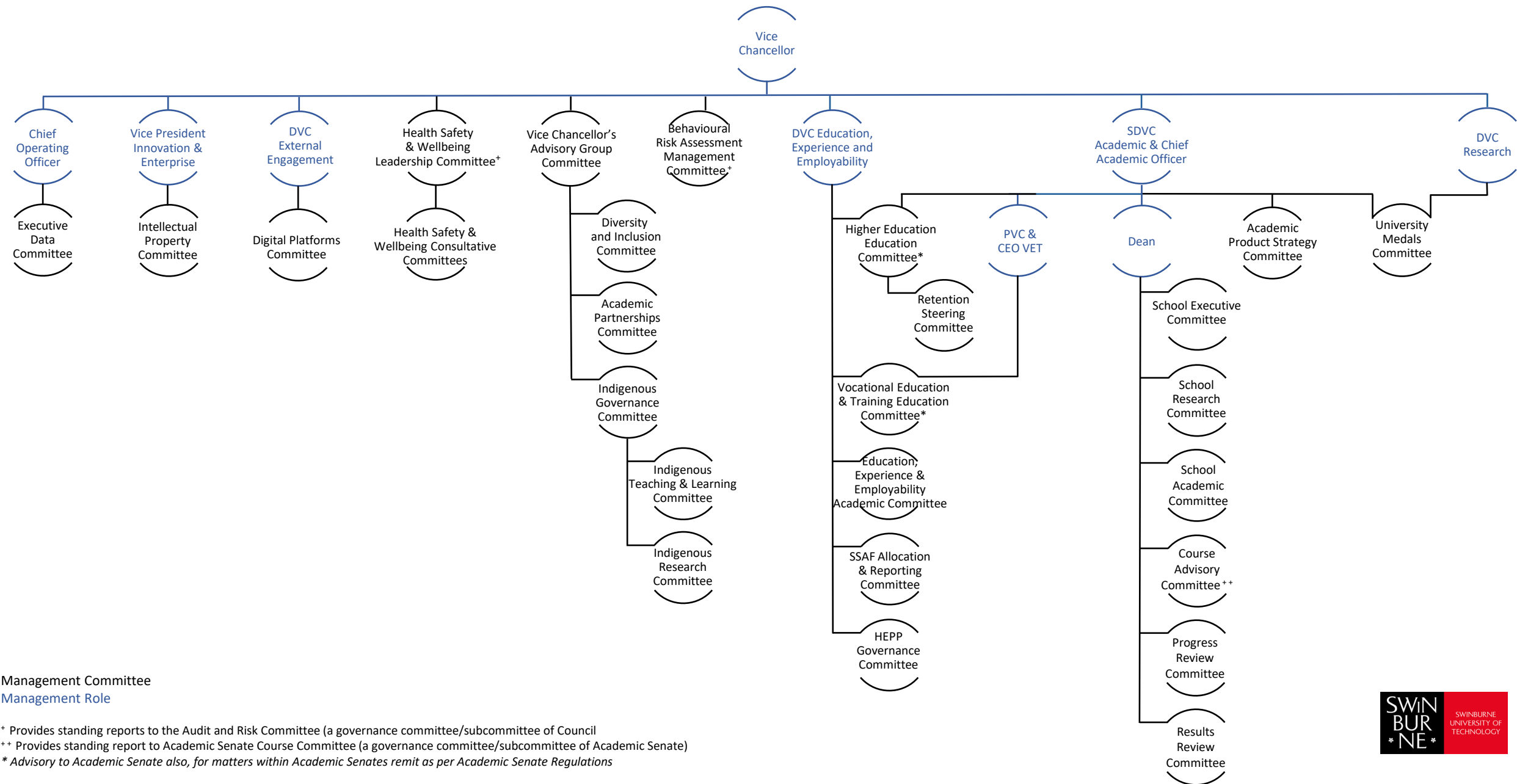
8. Material changes

A material change is an event, or likely event that will significantly affect the Universities ability to comply with the HESF and/or the RTO Standards. The University advises TEQSA and/or AQSA of any material changes and maintains a register of material notification.

Attachments

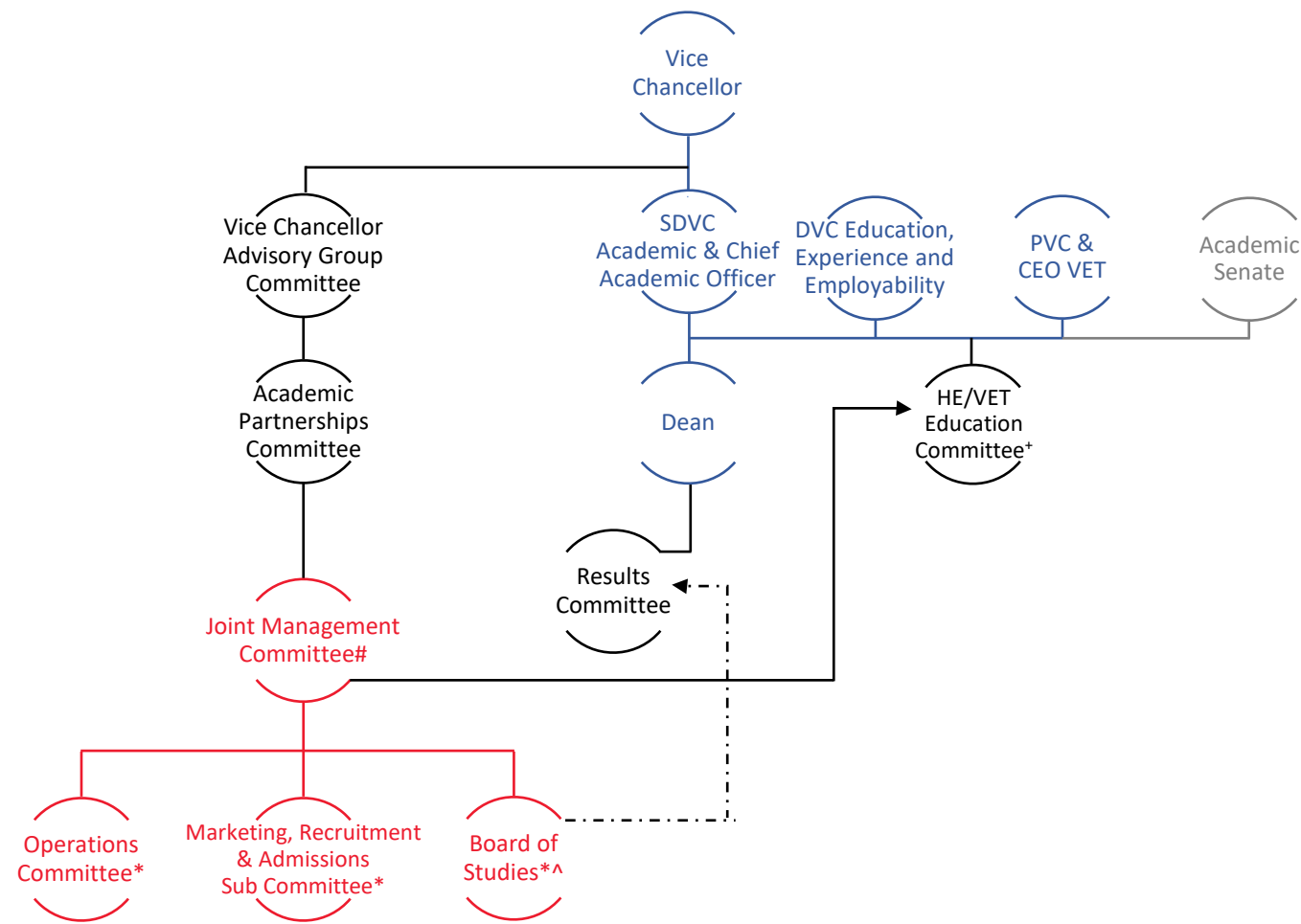
1. Management committees (October 2024)

Management Committee Structure



Management Committee Structure

(Teaching Partnerships: reporting line into SUT only)



Management Position

Management Committee

Teaching Partnership Management Committee

*Subject to size and scale of the partnership

^Where results are released by the partner, Board of Studies is known as the Academic Sub Committee

+As appropriate (HE and VET Education Committees are advisory to the SDVCA&CAO, DVCEEE, PVC & CEO VET within their scope of delegated authority and is advisory to Academic Senate within the remit of the Academic Senate Regulations)

