

By an alum of UTAS with an association with the University lasting 35 years

## **UTAS and its Statement of Values (A summary)**

The University of Tasmania (UTAS) is facing significant scrutiny due to a range of issues, both positive and negative, but its achievements are being overshadowed by ongoing and troubling concerns. Each and every one of these concerns are symptoms of a university that is fundamentally flawed, a university in which senior management does not subscribe to the University's own Statement of Values.

The UTAS Statement of Values, (UTAS website) emphasizes honesty, integrity, responsibility, trust, respect and fairness and these values are at odds with the actions of a senior management who is failing to uphold these values.

Robert Hogan's investigations (The UTAS Papers) reveal instances of dishonesty, while John Lawrence (Tasfintalk) critiques misleading statements in communications about financial matters. The general sentiment is that UTAS management has lost the trust of its staff, students and the public due to poor management practices, lack of transparency and genuine consultation, and a lack of understanding and investment in the core functions of a university.

Management's perceived failure to adhere to its own values in its treatment of academics has contributed to a toxic workplace culture with low morale among academic staff (NTEU 2024). This seems to be compounded by a lack of respect for the University's core functions as evidenced by the disproportionate focus on sustainability in the 2023 Annual Report, rather than across-the-board research and teaching. The lack of respect is further demonstrated by the Chancellor's and Vice-Chancellor's very infrequent attendance at degree conferral ceremonies, ceremonies designed to recognise achievements and celebrate students and faculty. The Chancellor's infrequent attendance is an issue of integrity as conferring degrees is a major and stated duty of the role of Chancellor.

Management apparently neither trusts nor respects academics as leaders, thereby undervaluing the academic perspective in the making of key decisions. Changes are often implemented without adequate consultation with academics and students, those for whom the University exists. The absence of recent and rigorous academic backgrounds among UTAS senior management and Council reflects a disregard for academic input, arising from their own inexperience of academia.

Reports from the Law School (2022) and other schools highlight severe problems, such as high staff turnover, reduced resources and overworked staff, all of which contribute to a deteriorating institutional climate. Issues of fairness and justice are prevalent, with allegations of a harsh internal discipline system and underpayments totalling \$11 million. Accounts of bullying of individuals and schools are so frequent that there must be truth to them. Bullying and harassment are not part of the culture of an institution that subscribes to its Statement of Values.

Issues of management have contributed to a fractured university community despite UTAS's Statement of Values emphasizing the nurturing of a supportive community and valuing diversity. Recent UTAS engagement surveys (leaked to Save UTAS) reveal deep staff unhappiness, suggesting that the University's management does not effectively create a welcoming environment or support staff or student well-being. Intentional online learning models are not conducive to building community. Management practices have led to a lack of authentic communication and a failing sense of community, felt not only by staff, but students as well. Tasmanian students are choosing to go interstate. Between 2013 and 2023, the number of Tasmanian student enrolments at UTAS fell from 7 805 to 5 427 – a decline of 30.5 percent. In the same period, the number of Tasmanian students enrolling at mainland universities actually rose from 1 697 to 2 315 – an increase of 36.4 per cent. The corollary of these figures was that while only 17.9 percent of Tasmanian students were enrolled at mainland universities in 2013, the figure increased to 29.9 percent in 2023, meaning that nearly one in three Tasmanian students is now choosing to enroll at a mainland

university. (The UTAS Papers) These numbers are a poor reflection on UTAS leadership, highlighting the lack of respect that UTAS senior management has for the core function of teaching – in particular teaching Tasmanian students for the benefit of Tasmania.

The Statement of Values includes commitments to leadership by example and accountability. The approval of a contract for the Vice-Chancellor with no end date raises extremely serious questions about the integrity and accountability of the University's leadership. A contract with no end date is not common practice in any organisation in the present economic climate and therefore should have been a profoundly alarming wake-up call for those with a desire to see our University succeed into the future, quite apart from the fact that it does not in any way subscribe to the UTAS Statement of Values,

An alleged failure by UTAS's senior management to subscribe to UTAS's own Statement of Values is a fundamental flaw resulting in a University that can only decline in size and reputation. The remarkably diverse symptoms of this decline are continually being highlighted by state and national media, the NTEU, the Save UTAS group, Robert Hogan, John Lawrence, many community members and government inquiries. The overwhelming majority of the 151 submissions to an inquiry into the *University of Tasmania Act of 1992* by the Legislative Council of Tasmania, commencing in 2022, highlight the symptoms of this flawed institution. The Parliamentary Standing Committee of Public Accounts commenced a targeted inquiry into the UTAS financial position on August 22, 2024.

In light of these challenges there is a need for significant reform. The University requires an interim management team that understands and values academics while adhering to its Statement of Values. Following a fundamental reset by this team, a transparent and consultative process should be implemented for selecting a new Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, senior executives and Council. A complete reset of the management team and the University Council is necessary to restore unity and pride among staff and students and our Tasmanian community, and to save UTAS.