



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION**

(Reference: [Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2022–2023](#))

Members:

**MR M PETERSSON (Chair)
MS N LAWDER (Deputy Chair)**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 22 NOVEMBER 2023

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms K Langham (Ph: 620 75498)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.11 am.

Appearances:

University of Canberra

Johnston, Professor Lucy, Acting Vice-Chancellor

Auden, Ms Karma, Chief Financial Officer

Pheasant, Mr Jonathan, Chief Operating Officer and Vice-President, Operations

Lincoln, Professor Michelle, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic

Lad, Ms Nisha, Director, External Engagement

THE CHAIR: Good morning and welcome to the public hearing of the education and community inclusion committee inquiry into annual and financial reports for 2022-23. The committee will today hear from representatives of the University of Canberra.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of the city and this region. We would also like to acknowledge and welcome other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

The proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it will be useful if witnesses could use these words, "I will take that question on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

Today we welcome witnesses from the University of Canberra. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege statement on the desk. Witnesses must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered a contempt of the Assembly. Could I please get each of you to confirm that you understand the implications of the statement and that you agree to comply with it?

Ms Lad: Yes, I agree and accept the statement.

Prof Lincoln: I agree and accept the statement.

Prof Johnston: I agree and comply.

Mr Pheasant: I agree and accept the statement.

Ms Auden: I agree and accept the statement.

THE CHAIR: Thanks everybody. We do not have opening statements, so I will start off with a question. There is a lot of discussion in the community at the moment about the future of the AIS. What impact would the AIS leaving Canberra have on the University of Canberra?

Prof Johnston: The University of Canberra is a strong partner of the AIS. We have joint positions with the AIS. We undertake joint research with the AIS and we have facilities that we use in common.

Michelle was previously the Dean of Faculty of Health, which includes sport and exercise. Do you want to add anything, Michelle?

Prof Lincoln: We have a very close relationship with them. It would have a significant impact on us if the AIS left Canberra.

Ms Lad: I will add that, in terms of the independent inquiry being run out of the commonwealth, we have made a submission to the review panel. In that we have made a fairly firm statement that we would like to see the AIS remain in Canberra and be revitalised in its current place.

In that submission we have made commentary around, as the Acting Vice-Chancellor has mentioned, all of the shared undertakings and history between the university and the AIS. We have also been working with the ACT government around broad partnerships and ensuring that we are working in a sense that is complementary moving forward, with everything from educational partnerships to infrastructure development on campus.

THE CHAIR: Assuming that the AIS does stay in Canberra, can you speak in a bit more detail about what you would like to see the future of the north side sporting precinct look like?

Prof Lincoln: We meet regularly with the AIS to discuss that. We are in the process of doing the design on what we are calling sports hub 2, which is the indoor multisport arena on our campus. We are very committed, with the AIS, to making sure that those facilities are complementary with whatever happens on the AIS site and that we work together to lift the infrastructure that is available, both for professional and elite sport and for community sport on the north side of Canberra.

That is an ongoing discussion. I think that there is a real opportunity here to have something very special in north Canberra around sport, if we get this right. I am sure we will, if the opportunity is there. It is an ongoing, collaborative discussion at the moment.

The current situation, of course, is that our students learn on that campus. Our sports students go there for classes, which you can imagine is highly attractive to them. We share some laboratory spaces. We share a heat chamber, if you ever want to see that, and a few other facilities. Heating in sport is a big issue, with climate change. We have the ability to test people under extreme conditions and acclimatise them on our campus, and we share that with the AIS.

There is significant infrastructure enmeshment, and we hope there will be even more, actually, going forward.

MS LAWDER: Recently, we heard in the news significant developments relating to the sale of land by the University of Canberra to Peet Ltd. Can you tell us a bit more

about the plans, starting off with exactly where on your campus that particular site is?

Prof Johnston: I will hand over to Jonathan for that one.

Mr Pheasant: Thanks for the question. Yes, a settlement has occurred with the sale of land to Peet Holdings, a company that plan to build approximately 1,200 residences on what we describe as the north-western part of the campus. The campus is bounded by four major roads. If you orientate yourself around Ginninderra Drive and Aikman Drive, it comes to the peak at the top of what we call the north-western part of our campus. It extends pretty much down to and stops short of Belconnen Boulevard, which is a walkway. If you are walking from Belconnen, it runs all the way into the campus. It does not extend all of that way. We are still planning to have a significant part as what we are calling University park or University boulevard—quite a large open area. It sweeps in, if you orientate yourself around there. There will be 1,200 residences.

The deal is not just about land acquisition. Everything we do on campus or with the partners that we work with needs to have a very strong collaborative focus. As part of that deal there is funding for professorial chairs in some of our key areas of study, and a range of greater learning opportunities for our arts and design students, our construction management students et cetera. We see it as a really positive thing for the University of Canberra, in terms of not just the land itself but the collaboration opportunities that come with that.

Prof Johnston: We also have some controls built into the collaboration agreement around height, green spaces and so on. It is a sale of land but with a very strong collaborative agreement underpinning it.

MS LAWDER: Was the sale a competitive process or was it a single select—you found someone that you thought you might work with, and you came to an agreement? What was the process for the sale? How was Peet Holdings selected?

Mr Pheasant: This was before my time. I do not believe there was a request for proposal. I think there was an identified potential partner and then a negotiation. I can take that on notice in terms of the exact details of the relationship with Peet, if you do not mind?

MS LAWDER: Sure.

Prof Johnston: It is before the time of any of us.

MS LAWDER: In terms of density, you said 1,200?

Prof Johnston: Yes.

Mr Pheasant: Yes, approximately 1,200.

MS LAWDER: There are 1,600 in a standard suburb, I think; that is more generally the standard. How did you arrive at 1,200 residences?

Prof Johnston: It is a mixture of apartments and townhouses. Part of the deal involves a couple of requirements around road access and footpath access, particularly through to the hospital on campus. Again, there are those controls over height, particularly in the bits that directly bound the campus, rather than the road. There was then a discussion with the architects over what would fit in that space with those requirements. Although Jonathan mentioned University park and the boulevard, they are also building a green space within the development.

Mr Pheasant: We are very cognisant that this will still be seen as part of our campus. We do not want a great big fence going up and it being seen as, “That’s just not part of the university anymore.” Flow of traffic, and not just car traffic but pedestrian traffic, is really important. Part of the benefit to the university is the activation of our retail space and our gymnasium space that we have on campus. The development controls that Lucy talked about are really important for us. I would rather see fewer residences and greater open space and the ability for pedestrian and vehicle flow, rather than a higher density on that parcel of land.

MR HANSON: What was the sale price?

Mr Pheasant: It was \$66 million.

MR HANSON: What happens to that money?

Mr Pheasant: That \$66 million is transferred to the university over multiple periods of time. We see that as strategic investment money to fund education and research activity.

MR HANSON: Will it be put to a specific purpose or does it just go into general revenue?

Prof Johnston: There is one portion, which I think overall is \$6.5 million, which is part of the agreement to support research in our Faculty of Arts and Design. That involved the professorial appointments and related researchers to build up a research hub in that space. The rest of it has not been allocated to a specific purpose at this time.

Ms Auden: We receive the funds over an eight-year window, so the funds that we are receiving up-front, as part of the first payment, are split into different categories, as Lucy said. There are funds that are dedicated to supporting some of the collaboration activities, which we will flow through and treat similarly to what we do with other endowments and things.

With the money that is coming from the land sale, it will fall in our statements as part of general revenue; but, in terms of the cashflow perspective, it will be kept separate, in a separate endowment fund, and only utilised for strategic objectives upon agreement with the council.

MR HANSON: With the people who will be living there, is there a certain amount that will be student accommodation or is it just generally open to the public?

Mr Pheasant: There is no student accommodation included in the residences. Students could be free to purchase or rent the land, but it is not student accommodation like the other student accommodation we have on campus.

MR HANSON: There is talk about another 1,000, potentially, down the track. That is on the table. When does that decision come up? Is there a particular time frame for that?

Prof Johnston: I was talking to the Peet project lead yesterday, and he thought that that would be discussed in a three to five-year window, in terms of there being an option, and whether they wish to take up that option would be discussed in that time.

MR HANSON: In terms of revenue from land sales—things like stamp duty, rates—does that apply just as it would for any normal Canberra suburb?

Mr Pheasant: That is correct.

MR HANSON: Is there a name for this suburb? Is the UC giving it a name?

Mr Pheasant: I do not actually know that.

Prof Johnston: I have not heard any talk of that.

MR HANSON: When people say, “I live here,” where is it?

Ms Auden: We call it the campus community.

MR HANSON: The campus community; I am not sure that that will be the suburb name.

Ms Auden: No; exactly.

MR HANSON: I am just wondering if you are going to call it something.

Mr Pheasant: I was not sure whether it was going to be designated as its own separate suburb or whether it would fall within Bruce.

MR HANSON: Okay; Bruce UC or something.

Prof Johnston: Yes. I do not think there has been talk of a separate name.

MR HANSON: In terms of things like schooling, because it will probably attract a lot of younger families, will there be talk about a school or are they going to access existing facilities in Belconnen? Is that what happens?

Mr Pheasant: The consideration as part of the deal was that they would access existing facilities. We are in regular conversations with ACT Education around facilities on our campus for schooling. The relationship we have, given that we have the primary Faculty of Education here in the ACT—

MR HANSON: By the time you get down the track and there are several thousand people living there, and you have a whole bunch of staff accessing the site and living adjacently, I am wondering whether there is land being allocated or put aside to service that community.

Mr Pheasant: Not at this point, as part of our master plan.

THE CHAIR: Is there a reason that you did not pursue pure student accommodation instead of going down this path of selling off the land for general residential?

Mr Pheasant: As part of the campus master plan, we do have a significant amount of student accommodation already on campus, and off campus, in terms of the Weeden Lodge in Belconnen. There is a parcel of land in the south-west of the campus—again, running along Aikman Drive, but closer to the College Street end. It is the part of the campus that we call “campus west”. That is not as highly utilised, from an occupancy point of view, at the moment. Our focus is to increase the occupancy on that part of the campus, and then assess in the longer term whether we should do any further student accommodation development.

We are looking to increase our student accommodation in line with the growth of the university itself. We will never be a significantly large education institution. If we achieve our aims, there will be some additional increase in accommodation on campus, but we think that we can cover that within the existing footprint. There was not an impact on the consideration around the sale of land.

THE CHAIR: In terms of your on-campus student accommodation right now, what would the vacancy rate be?

Mr Pheasant: We have an occupancy rate of 80 per cent plus. In some of our newer areas, we are up into the high 80s and early 90 per cent occupancy. In some of the lower standard accommodation, it sits at 70 to 75 per cent. We take some overflow of ANU students there. We take an overflow of ADFA students at the moment because of the works going on in their student accommodation. But we are meeting the demand that is coming from our student population at the moment with the accommodation we have on campus.

THE CHAIR: Why is it that you think you cannot fill that student accommodation?

Mr Pheasant: I am not sure that I understand. I do not think it is a question of, “We don’t think we can fill it.”

THE CHAIR: The confusion I am experiencing is that, on one hand, I hear from constituents that we are in a housing crisis; rent is through the roof, and people cannot even find a rental in certain parts of the year. On the other hand you tell me that 30 per cent of certain accommodation stock is potentially sitting there empty. It does not make sense.

Mr Pheasant: The accommodation that is not fully occupied is older accommodation, 10 to 12 beds to a demountable block. It is lower standard and priced accordingly. Some students simply do not want to live in that standard of accommodation; whereas

our newer accommodation has occupancy that we are very comfortable with, in the 90s. It is impossible, I would say, to have 100 per cent accommodation given the flow of students and the nature of what our students are seeking. We have quite a significant mature-age cohort across our student population, and they are often seeking slightly different accommodation requirements—self-contained kitchens etcetera, often with families. We do not offer that at the moment, but that is certainly a plan for our student accommodation in the future.

THE CHAIR: Is it a question of the price that is being asked for that accommodation? Is it not necessarily in line with the market?

Mr Pheasant: Our price is significantly less than the market at the moment, so much so that we have ANU students coming and living in Belconnen or Bruce to access our accommodation because it is significantly cheaper than the Civic accommodation.

THE CHAIR: But you are still telling me that there are vacancies.

Mr Pheasant: Yes, absolutely.

Prof Johnston: We have, as you would be aware, ambitions to grow our student numbers. Over time we would expect that that would not be the case.

Mr Pheasant: For first year students, we guarantee student accommodation. Some students do not want to live on campus; in the second and third year, they want to branch out, and groups of mates live together across the region. We feel very comfortable with the occupancy of our accommodation and the demand, and our supply that is available for the student group.

Prof Lincoln: Post COVID, there is a preference for online learning, more than there was before, so more students are going to university but are not physically present with us. That has an impact on accommodation as well.

Prof Johnston: With our student residences, there are restrictions, and they are limited to students, be they University of Canberra, ADFA, ANU or presumably UNSW Canberra.

Mr Pheasant: We have ACU students; we have CSU.

Prof Johnston: But it is students. It is student accommodation only. At the moment that is a restriction, so non-students could not live there at the moment.

MR HANSON: With teacher education, could you tell me how many you will graduate in a year for primary or secondary education?

Prof Lincoln: I will have to take that on notice. This is my third day in the job. I have been at UC for 5½ years, but not in education.

MR HANSON: Okay. Could you get the numbers for me?

Prof Lincoln: Yes, absolutely.

MR HANSON: Could you also give me—you may have this or not—a sense of a HECS bill? If you graduate as a teacher, what is your likely HECS bill?

Prof Lincoln: Yes, we can take that on notice.

MR HANSON: Do you have that?

Prof Lincoln: Not off the top of my head, but we can take that on notice, too.

MR HANSON: You might have to take this on notice: there was a review that the federal education minister undertook called the Scott review, looking at all things education. As part of that—and I quote:

Education Ministers have agreed in principle to major reforms to how we train teachers, following the release of the report of the Teacher Education Expert Panel ...

The report notes that: “too many beginning teachers have reported that they felt they needed to be better equipped for the challenges they faced in the classroom on starting their teaching careers.”

There were a bunch of recommendations, and I am wondering whether you are aware of or can take on notice what UC is going to do with those recommendations and what action they are taking. Is there now a review of the education courses at UC? Are you just going to continue on or are there changes being made? What is happening?

Prof Lincoln: I can answer that in a general sense. I know we are deeply involved in those conversations. The Executive Dean of Education is part of the group that are looking at this. It is probably fair to say that our education faculty has been way ahead of the game in the way that we give students practical experience as part of our affiliated schools programs. They spend a significant amount of time learning in schools, unlike lots of other courses. We might in fact be a model for things going forward. We will be very involved in those conversations, but I can get a fuller explanation, if you like, from the dean.

MR HANSON: Anything you can provide would be good. The Assembly also agreed to conduct a review into literacy and numeracy in the ACT. Are you aware of that?

Prof Lincoln: Yes.

MR HANSON: Are you engaging with that review?

Prof Lincoln: Yes, we will have a significant role in that.

MR HANSON: I was talking to a school principal the other day and it is tough to get teachers. One of the concepts he raised with me was getting people in laterally. People leave school and go off to have other careers. There are a lot of people mid-career that might say, “I might give teaching a go.” They might not necessarily want to go back to ground zero, live in your lovely accommodation and become an undergraduate

student again. Is there a capacity for lateral students, and particularly in education, to be given some form of recognition of prior learning and life experience? I would contend that someone who has perhaps been a mother and is in their 40s knows a lot more about management of kids than someone coming straight out of school, and you could put them almost straight into a classroom, in a sense. Has that been looked at?

Prof Lincoln: Yes. You are actually describing a significant proportion of our students. We have that with nursing, for example; we have a lot of mature-age students in nursing, and education. We offer a Master of Education which allows people who have had any other kind of degree to train to be a teacher in a shorter time period. That course is offered flexibly, so you can do a large proportion of that online, after the kids are in bed at night, if you want to. We are trying to access those groups of people and help them to make a—

MR HANSON: How long does the masters take?

Prof Lincoln: It is a two-year program.

MR HANSON: Can you get these people on the job while they are doing that course or do you have to wait for them to be qualified and then registered?

Prof Lincoln: They do placements pretty much from the get-go; they are actually in our affiliated schools from the very beginning, working in classrooms with kids—under supervision, of course. I cannot tell you the specifics, but I do know that they can access employment towards the end of their degree—casual teaching positions in schools, for example—once they have a registration number.

MR HANSON: Is it a probationary-type registration?

Prof Lincoln: Yes. There are limitations around it until they have their degree.

MR HANSON: How much of the masters course do they need to have completed prior to being able to do that sort of—

Prof Lincoln: I will take that one on notice. I do know that, in the undergraduate degree, it is their final year when they can start to engage in that. In the masters, because it is truncated, it will be maybe the last six months, but I will double-check for you.

MR HANSON: With the undergraduate course, we are trying to get people out there as quickly as we can, but I am trying to think how to make it more attractive. If you are in another job, if you work in the public service and you want to become a teacher, you probably want to get in there sooner rather than later.

Prof Lincoln: Yes. Our experience is that they keep their public service jobs—keep working, sometimes full time, which we do not recommend, but part time, at least, and study part time with us to qualify themselves; or work part time and study full time, usually.

MR HANSON: What is the ATAR for a teacher? What is the requirement?

Prof Lincoln: For the undergraduate degree?

MR HANSON: Yes.

Prof Lincoln: I do not know. We will take that one on notice. Of course, at the postgrad level, it is having an undergraduate degree that is the qualification that is needed.

MR HANSON: You have to have one of those.

Prof Lincoln: Yes.

THE CHAIR: What is the university doing to tackle sexual violence on campus?

Prof Johnston: A lot. Obviously, we take it incredibly seriously. We have been engaging closely with Universities Australia across the sector to understand and implement best practice. We, along with the other universities, were part of that UA recent statement. We will continue to work with both the ACT government and the federal government because there are some intersections around that—the discussion of the Ombudsman, for example.

In 2017 we established the Respect.Now.Always Committee to ensure that commitments within that original report and the Broderick report were met and monitored. The committee meets four to six times a year and reports to the Vice-Chancellor and to the Audit and Risk Management Committee of the university's council, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic—although I do not think it has happened in the last two days—and co-chaired by our Director, Student Life.

The Audit and Risk Management Committee of the council receive de-identified information about incidences on campus, so there is awareness. Operationally, we have a student matters group, led by the Director, Student Life, and with participants from a wide range of student supports—Student Life, medical and counselling, wellbeing, widening participation, the university's legal office, and student accommodation providers.

We have policy and procedures on handling incidences of sexual misconduct, including an online reporting tool, with information feeding directly into Student Life. We have been working recently on the positive duty, the new legislation, to ensure for both staff and students that we are across our requirements. It is also very much driven by our duty of care and a zero tolerance. That is what is driving that, rather than compliance, from our point of view.

THE CHAIR: Does the university have a view on the need for an Ombudsman?

Prof Johnston: I do not think we have yet made a formal submission, but there is general support for the need.

THE CHAIR: With that, we are out of time. On behalf of the committee, I want to thank witnesses for their attendance today. We also thank broadcasting and Hansard

for their support, as always. If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload them to the parliament portal as soon as practicable, and no later than five business days after the hearing. This meeting is now adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 9.40 am.