



Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2023–2024

Answer to question taken on notice

Asked by: Ms Chiaka Barry MLA

Addressed to: The Hon Bill Shorten, Vice-Chancellor

In relation to: International student numbers

Hearing: 21 February 2025

Uncorrected Proof Transcript pp 10-12

Transcript provided: 26 February 2025

Answer Due: 5 March 2025 5:00:00 PM

Mr Shorten took on notice the following question(s):

MS BARRY: We all have a supp. So just going back to what you said around the cause of the problem, so you did indicate that you started building or preparing for this future of a bigger university. When did this growth start? So when did you start planning for this growth? At what time? 2022, 2023? And what is the reduction in students numbers from that time of growth to date? The international student numbers?

Mr Shorten: I just cannot tell you about 22-23, but I might—

Ms Lincoln: But I can. So we started late '22 with an online strategy for the university, where we realised we were losing students to online competitors from around Australia. So we had a project to get a number of both new courses online and existing courses to place them fully online; fully asynchronous, online. And so there was work throughout 2023 to do that.

We launched 20 new courses at the beginning of 2024 and the impact that that had actually was to maintain our current student numbers. Given the environment that we were operating in then, without those courses we would have been in a much worse position than we are, and so it effectively maintained the level that we were at. We have very similar numbers between the two years.

But we had predicted growth, but you may recall that the new arrangements around international students actually came in in November of 2023, which was very late in the year. We had already done our planning, our budgeting, all of our financial work before that. And so, you know, that really turned things on its head quite a bit.

MS BARRY: So, sorry, just one more supplementary. So 2022 to 2024 you had predicted that there will be international students growth in 2024, not from the start of the planning so 2020 to 2023.

Ms Lincoln: We have been on a growth trajectory with international students for some time.

MS BARRY: Okay, and how has that number changed between 2022 to 2023 and 2023 to 2024?

Ms Lincoln: We had 4,401 international students in 2023 compared to 3,940 in 2022.

MS BARRY: Okay, so it has essentially gone down by a few hundreds.

Ms Lincoln: No, it went up between 2022 and 2023.

MS BARRY: It went up? Yes.

Ms Lincoln: And then has sort of levelled off from there, and we had been projecting growth.

MS BARRY: Okay, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson?

Mr Pheasant: Perhaps if I could just add a point to that? So I think it is important to note, so our student numbers actually—our actual score, whether it is undergraduate, postgraduate, domestic or international, have not actually gone down, but Michelle is correct. We budget to target. We budget to projection and when you think you are on a growth trajectory, so you budget accordingly, when those numbers do not come through, that is why we saw the significant shortfall in revenue from last year which caused the major challenges.

THE CHAIR: Mr Hanson?

MR HANSON: Yes, thanks. You mentioned what could be described as an imbalance in the academic profile, the staff profile, where you have got a lot more professors than perhaps other universities. My understanding is the University of Canberra has a policy whereby you come in at the low levels, As and Bs, and move up and if you do not achieve the next level within a certain timeframe, you are out.

And that then drives people, I guess, towards, you know, trying to get up the greasy pole, for want of another term. And so everyone ends up as a professor, where otherwise, in other universities perhaps, people are quite comfortable remaining at a C or a B or whatever level it is. Are you looking at that policy which seems to be sort of forcing that imbalance?

Mr Shorten: I might ask Professor Lincoln to start and I might supplement at the end.

Ms Lincoln: Sure. Yes, so you are referring to the assistant professor scheme, which we have had since 2015, and the university used that as a strategy to lift our research profile, bring in people super keen, fast track them to associate professor. We have not appointed anyone to that scheme for two years now. And in fact, under the new work workplace legislation, it is not a legal scheme, so we are not using that scheme in the system. But some of what we are seeing, you are absolutely right, is, I guess, an unintended consequence of that, that we had a lot of people who worked very hard and were fast tracked through to associate professor level and—

MR HANSON: Right, so it is more of a legacy, and moving forward, it will not be a feature?

Ms Lincoln: Yes, correct.

Mr Shorten: As I understand it, the arrangement, the assistant professor program to fast track people, it is quite novel to UC. I think there was probably some assumption when it was introduced

that some of the people would get to professor status and then spread out and work at other universities. UC is a nice place to work, so they did not spread.

MR HANSON: Stayed.

Ms Lincoln: Stayed.

Mr Shorten: They stayed. And that is a feature of the—so that is an issue, and you can see how it has happened. A good idea ten years ago, perhaps, but it has now led to some consequences where there is some grouping of people at the higher levels, who are all good people.

Ms Lincoln: Great people.

Mr Shorten: And just to—I am not sure how to refer to you all. Minister, members. We can probably show you and get some of that data about the number of students, 21, 22, 23. You know, reasonably, I think, again, it is the benefit of hindsight, and I was not there, but you can see how the council and the university said, "We have had growth each year trending upwards. Assume that continues in 2024." And there was some growth, but it was not at the dimension, but the hirings had already got underway for the extra growth.

The Hon Bill Shorten: The answer to the Member's question is as follows.

A snapshot of the University's student enrolment numbers for the period FY 2021 to FY 2024 is as below.

	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024**
Students				
EFTSL	11,370	11,277	11,518	11,996
Enrolments	16,356	16,849	17,147	17,676
Overseas Enrolments	3,578	3,940	4,401	4,574
O/s % of Enrolments*	22%	23%	26%	26%

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Social Policy



Signature:

Date:

By the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canberra, the Hon Bill Shorten

