

Genevieve Bell ABC Radio Canberra Transcript

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All right, we've gone back to the old style of the telephone.-Chancellor I believe you've got me now good morning to you again.

Let's try that one more time we're feeling.

Yes wow modern technology hey now let's talk about the announcement yesterday so up to 37 jobs are going. Where are these job's going to go from?

Yeah, look, thanks for the question, Ross. As you know, we've been going through a whole series of changes here at ANU around financial sustainability. And so yesterday we announced that there would be proposals for change in two parts of the university in our planning and service performance group and in our IT group.

Are these jobs that are filled at the moment? I understand that some of them are actually vacant, is that right?

Yeah, that's correct. So the way we work through our consultation process, which is part of our enterprise agreement, but also good practise in the sector, is we put a proposal to the community, we, in the Those proposals in these instances talk about the ways we would like the organisation to be organised moving forward. So it's about changes in management structure, sometimes changes in function. In some cases, we identify positions that are vacant that we plan to effectively remove from the books. And then in some places, there are people whose roles we are proposing to make redundant.

And then what happens, which is where we are now, is that we give the community a period of time to respond to those proposals and to give us feedback. And then we look at that feedback and in the time that I've been Vice-Chancellor, modify the plans before they go to implementation when we seek feedback again and then they go into practise So are these jobs not important? Look, Ross, I don't think that's the way to think about it. The reality here is that we have been looking over the last, well, 16 months, 18 at how we deliver services at the university, about how we support our faculty and staff and our students to do their jobs.

And working out how to be best functioning means thinking differently about how we do stuff.

But in the end, you've identified or the team that are doing this have identified jobs that obviously you've got to draw the conclusion they're not that important you can afford to get rid of them look again i don't want to say that people aren't important and that the work people do is

but that's what we hearing their feeling this morning. I don't know whether you heard Lachlan Closey on drive with Georgia Steins yesterday. That was sort of the feeling they were getting, that they were being treated as though their jobs weren't important, that they were just, you know, something you could easily just do away with.

Look, the reality is that it's incredibly hard to be in a conversation where you're being told that your role is proposed to be made redundant. And I don't want to minimise that at all. But we also know that we can do work in different kind of ways and that we can be structured and organised in different kind of ways. And that's the journey that we're on.

So if you identify jobs, though, that you feel you can do away with, how do you cover the shortcomings thought for the because some of these are in it for example and yesterday we heard that your linkedin account had been hacked uh which would seem to be a bit of an it problem um i mean mean how can you do away with jobs in it well as someone who comes from the it sector you know that's always a good question for me too look the reality here is that we need to keep looking at each function in the university and as i'm sure lachlan talked about on radio yesterday and we've been talking about to our community for some time is there are lots of places in the university where we're going to look at how we do the work, what are the ways we have been thinking about doing the work, are there better ways of doing it. there is in each one of the places around the university we have those conversations we are going to find places that we can think about doing the work differently we can structure the work differently so identify inefficiencies identifying inefficiencies is that a fair way to describe it look i think it's about finding better ways of doing things and sometimes that is is about the way we've been structured isn't best practise and look if you look at the benchmark benchmarking data for our sector, Ross, it's clear that the ANU has been an outlier for a really long time. Most of the rest of the universities in Australia centralised or rationalised multiple forms of service and support nearly a decade ago, and we've Simply didn't. How will you cover the jobs that are going in? How will you continue to provide the services that I'm sure those people must have been providing before they got tapped on, before they're going to get tapped on the shoulder?

So again, we need to be really clear here. These are proposals for changes in jobs.

Yeah, but there will be people who go. So how are you going to cover their departures?

Who's going to do their jobs? In some places, it's not about who's going to do the job. In some places, it's about are there ways of delivering those services differently? Are there ways of using the technologies we have in better ways?

So using AI?

Stop doing things.

So using AI maybe to do some of the work that some of these people are doing now? Oh, look, you know, that's one of my areas of expertise and I think people bandy AI around a lot to mean many other things.

But there's absolutely cases where there will be places we can use use technology more effectively and efficiently. So you could use technology to replace some of the staff you have efficiently without losing any of the intelligence that you have at the university at the moment?

Oh, look, working out how to maintain institutional memory and core services is always hugely important in these processes and we think a lot about that too.

Yeah, so you could use AI to replace some of the staff?

I don't think this is about using AI to replace staff, Ross. I think this is about ensuring that we are building good structured ways of doing things.

I'm really looking at this stuff. I know, but from what you're saying, you mentioned you could use technology. It seems that you are saying you could use technology, you could use AI to do some of the work that some of the, I mean, look, it's a lot of workplaces doing it. I assume it's just something that people would expect. So it's something which you are looking at doing at the ANU replacing some of the staff with AI?

Ross, we are looking at all different kinds of ways of delivering better services to our our students and our staff.

Where are the next jobs going to go from? Do you know? Have you identified areas that they're going to go from?

We talked to our community nearly two weeks ago about the places that we are looking to think about change. We have spent the first half of, well, not the first half, what are we, in only June.

We spent the beginning of the year with our community working out what were the best ways to think about delivering services and support to our community.

And we consulted on a whole series of principles for that. And how many... Making sure we don't don't have redundancies, making sure that we are delivering support that let us deliver to our national mission. And so there are places in the organisation that now need to think about whether they're optimised properly. And how many more jobs do you think you need to cut to meet? Because we had people on this show last week saying you've already met your targets for the costs of Davies?

Yeah, look, I'm aware there's a lot of mis- and disinformation floating around about the finances of the university. The reality is we table our finances annually in Parliament. Before they get to Parliament, they've gone through our council and external auditor in the ANAO, and we've been

really clear about what our financial state is. We set a target in October of last year of reducing the recurring costs of the university by \$250 million. As you know, at that point, Ross, we've been spending more money than we've been earning for a really long time.

So more jobs will have to go?

We've been really clear we need to take \$100 million out of our salary spend. We were clear with the community about, I think, the end of last week that we've actually so far achieved about \$50 million worth of savings against that \$100 million target. But that means we still have more work to do.

Yeah, okay. The union is saying they've never sat down with you. They've never had a conversation with you. Why is that? Why have you not sat down with Lachlan Close? He seems to be, you know, out there calling for changes, calling for dialogue all the time. Why has that never happened?

So look, let's separate out the pieces here, right? The university sits down with the union weekly, Lachlan and Majan, who is the branch head inside the ANU. They meet with the chief people officer, the chief finance officer. We talk to them about the details of what's going on at the university. I have a meeting coming up with Mishan, who is the branch head locally. I think he and I are meeting next week to talk about First Nations staffing issues. And I was on council with Mishan. We've known each other, well, for a little time. He helped hire me. But the reality here is Lachlan's been really clear about his position on me. He stands outside the building and screams, I should rot in hell. He's made it clear I should lose my job. It's a little hard to think what a productive conversation with him would look like.

All right, we're coming up to the news. You mentioned there your background in IT and your knowledge in this area. A bit embarrassing that your LinkedIn account's been hacked then, Genevieve Bell?

Embarrassing and really distressing. Ross, it was. It's an extraordinary episode for me.

How did it happen?

We still don't know. It's been referred to the relevant authorities and I'm not really at liberty to talk about it any more than that.

Right, because there was some stuff there that your account liked regarding your Chancellor, which is pretty embarrassing. Have you had a conversation with the Chancellor since then just to reassure her that in fact you weren't liking these pretty horrific posts, to be honest?

She knew it wasn't me, I knew it wasn't me and like I said it's been a really distressing incident and I'm really grateful for all the people who've been supportive through it.

Alright and you're not planning to resign are you? Lachlan Closey says you should be the one that goes, that should be the number one job saving

Look, you and I get to discuss this every time we meet, Ross.

And every time we meet, I say, no, I'm still here because, Ross, this university is incredibly important. It's incredibly important to the community. It's incredibly important to the country. It has an extraordinary history of doing amazing work, and it's going to keep doing amazing work.

And that means we're going to make hard decisions and be on a hard journey, and I'm determined to steer us through that.

All right, Professor Genevieve Bell, I we got there in the end thank you for your time this morning you're very welcome ross have a good day that's a new vice chancellor genevieve bell on ABC canberra breakfast