



**Education and Employment Legislation Committee
2025-26 Supplementary Budget Estimates
10 October 2025**

Opening Statement

Professor Rebekah Brown FASSA

Interim Vice-Chancellor and President – The Australian National University

Thank you, Senators, for the opportunity to make an opening statement. My name is Professor Rebekah Brown, and as the Chancellor, the Hon Julie Bishop has just outlined, on 10 September, I was asked by the Australian National University Council to step into the role of Interim Vice-Chancellor. It is a privilege to serve the University in this capacity.

I am joined today by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic Professor Joan Leach, Professor Anthony Connolly, Chair of the Academic Board, Chief Operating Officer, Mr Jonathan Churchill and our Chief Financial Officer, Mr Michael Lonergan.

We are here this evening at a particular point in time - a moment of reflection, but also of resolve.

It has been an incredibly challenging period for the ANU community. In a very short space of time, some extraordinarily difficult decisions have been made and implemented. The Renew ANU program has been incredibly difficult, and I know it has taken a heavy toll. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge this openly. To those in our community who have been hurt, I want to say clearly: I am deeply sorry.

Acknowledging this is important, so too is recognising where we are headed. We are in the process of completing the Renew ANU program. We are on a rebuild pathway, determined to strengthen our foundations and chart a confident course forward.

That pathway is built on the extraordinary talent of ANU: the expertise and dedication of our staff, the calibre and ambition of our students, and the creativity and impact of our scholars.

Collectively, we have set three immediate goals:

- Creating stability.
- Rebuilding trust.
- Laying the groundwork for our next strategic plan.

I know trust cannot be rebuilt overnight, but I will do this by listening, by showing up, and by acting consistently.

In the four weeks I have been in this role, I have met with community members, political and government leaders, with industry, and with the media. What is clear to me is the depth of commitment, support, and concern that the broader community has for ANU. They, too, have felt the pain of recent times, and they share in the hope of renewal.

That is why I have committed to resetting relationships and returning us to steady operations and growth. At the same time, we will build on our enduring strengths: advancing peace, security and self-determination in our region; deepening our understanding of Australia's place in the world; and driving forward through the most advanced scientific research and instrumentation.

The expenditure controls we have implemented have not been easy, but they have been effective in restoring stability to the University's finances. With those foundations in place, our priority must now shift to rebuilding - focusing on growth, opportunity, and the generation of sustainable revenue.

Our academic reputation remains strong. ANU has more subjects ranked in the world's top 20 than any other Australian university and holds the nation's number one position across twelve disciplines. We are among Australia's leading universities for student satisfaction and lead the nation in retaining and graduating students from disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds.

ANU is also home to one of the strongest Indigenous student communities in the country, supported by some of the highest retention and completion rates nationally. In 2024, through the Kambri Scholars Program, 65 Indigenous students graduated from ANU - demonstrating our commitment to creating real pathways to success and leadership for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

That sense of belonging is reinforced on campus. Around 6500 students live here each year, in accommodation designed to foster community and provide a human-scale student experience. Living on campus is at the heart of the ANU experience - it builds friendships, networks and a sense of belonging that endures well beyond graduation.

At its core, ANU is a community - a community of scholars, students and professional staff united by a passion for teaching, for enriching the student experience, for advancing discovery, and for addressing the complex challenges of today and tomorrow. Equally, we are steadfast in our commitment to our mission as Australia's national university, to serve the nation through world-class research, education, and engagement.

Despite the challenges, we remain united. Our collective ambition is to restore ANU's place as Australia's leading university, and to strengthen our role as a national and global partner.