



UNIVERSITYof
TASMANIA

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University: Our processes did not protect people, we are sorry

The University of Tasmania today released its response to a review covering the period of former Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Rathjen.

The review was commissioned in August in the wake of an [ICAC South Australia investigation](#) which found Professor Rathjen engaged in serious misconduct with two female staff members while Vice-Chancellor at the University of Adelaide.

Alumna and respected barrister Maree Norton, who has experience dealing with similar reviews, was engaged to provide an independent review of the University of Tasmania's management of issues surrounding Peter Rathjen's leadership.

Ms Norton reviewed 11 complaints, 3 of which related directly to the former Vice-Chancellor.

The remaining 8 related to workplace culture more broadly and people's treatment within the University during Professor Rathjen's tenure as Vice-Chancellor.

Themes in the complaints include sexual misconduct, bullying, discrimination and failures in complaints systems and handling.

The University of Tasmania Council has issued a formal apology to victims and survivors from the period.

University Chancellor Michael Field AC said the University would accept and implement each of the recommendations arising from the Review by July 1, 2021.

"The University Council is ultimately responsible for the wellbeing of people of the University," Chancellor Field said.

"This Review has highlighted that as an institution we failed in these responsibilities. Our systems and processes in place at the time were not effective in protecting people.

"We are deeply sorry for all the distress these failures have caused. To each person affected: I am very sorry."

Chancellor Field said recommendations from the Review would result in changes including:

- Better protections for people who are vulnerable through situations, including power imbalances
- Targeted training for University Council and Executive Leaders to ensure they understand what constitutes unacceptable behaviour in the current setting and understand their obligation to intervene
- New governance arrangements to ensure people could feel safe in bypassing senior management to report concerns

University Chief People Officer Jill Bye said with the close of the Review, people who reported would be offered a supported pathway should they want to proceed with a formal complaint about their experience.

“We want to be clear this Review was not a formal investigation into individual complaints. This was an investigation into the University and its handling of issues that arose at the time. As a result, the specific complaints have not been put to anyone but should anyone who came forward wishes to pursue a complaint, they will be supported to do so.

“We are sorry for what has happened and we will demonstrate our respect by using their experiences to build a better organisation.”

The recommendations of the review include clearer pathways for complaints, and a review of behaviour policies and procedures.

The University of Tasmania review also considered the recommendations of the ICAC SA report in relation to its own systems and approaches to ensure any lessons from it could be incorporated into its response.

“This review makes clear that our systems were not sufficient and that we did not have clear processes in place, and people were let down,” Ms Bye said.

“We will use the work of Maree Norton and the experiences of those covered in this review to ensure we honour our intent to be a deeply people-centred, respectful organisation in which people can thrive.”

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