

SOME QUANTITATIVE DATA ON UTAS PERFORMANCE

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#1: A. HISTORICAL RANKINGS OF UTAS AGAINST OTHER INSTITUTIONS

2023	National Rank	27
	World Rank	300-350
2018	National Rank	22
	World Rank	351-400
2017	National Rank	17
	World Rank	301-350
2016	National Rank	19
	World Rank	301-350
2015	National Rank	10
	World Rank	251-300

Note: the higher the figure the lower the rank

Sources

Better Education, https://bettereducation.com.au/university/uni_rank_trends.aspx

Times Higher Education, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2023/world-ranking#!/page/1/length/25/locations/AUS/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/stats

The data show a consistent and marked decline. The Vice-Chancellor has claimed that rankings are 'irrelevant to who we are'. Unfortunately, the rest of the world, and even the rest of Australia, generally treat rankings as a highly relevant indication of reputation and quality. Thus, although rankings do have shortcomings, they cannot be entirely disregarded.

#2 UTAS RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS - COMPARISON OF 2018 PUBLICATIONS WITH 2021

2018		2021
2653	Journal articles	1335
204	Conference proceedings	43
28	Books	14
286	Chapters	122
2025	Other	682
5196	TOTAL	2008

Source

University of Tasmania research page,

https://rmdb.research.UTas.edu.au/public/rmdb/q/warp_home

These figures show a clear fall in publication between 2018 and 2021 of over 60%. Moreover, the downward trend evident here is consistent across every year from 2018 onwards (the current WARP site does not include cumulative data prior to 2018) which suggests that it may well fall further in years to come.

UTAS management may well argue that it has been actively fostering a policy of focussing publication on so-called A1 articles (articles in what are considered to be top-level journals) and books with top-ranked publishers. However, a survey of the actual publications themselves suggests there is still a wide variety of journals and publishers included even in the 2021 data (as one would expect since the emphasis on A1 journals only works, if at all, for some disciplines and discipline areas). The 60% plus decline itself suggests a much more serious decline in real research output.

#3 TOTAL VALUE OF UTAS AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH COUNCIL GRANTS (WITH NUMBERS OF SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS) AWARDED BY YEAR

YEAR	GRANT ALLOCATION	NUMBER
2003	\$8.4M	49
2004	\$9.4M	44
2005	\$33.2M	37
2006	\$8.9M	31
2007	\$8.4M	27
2008	\$6.5M	21
2009	\$9.5M	26
2010	\$10.7M	27
2011	\$9.6M	25
2012	\$18M	27
2013	\$17.8M	36
2014	\$43.4M	36
2015	\$13M	26
2016	\$11.6M	17
2017	\$6.4M	15
2018	\$13.1M	33
2019	\$14.3M	21
2020	\$31.8M	26
2021	\$8.6M	17
2022	\$5.5M	14
2023	\$4.8M	10

Source

Australian Research Council, NCGP Trends: Administering Organisations, www.arc.gov.au/funding-research/funding-outcome/grants-dataset/trend-visualisation/ncgp-trends-administering-organisations

The most obvious trend here is towards fewer projects although there is a tendency towards larger grant amounts per project. In the UTAS case, this probably reflects the increased concentration of grants in certain areas – notably Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies. The reduced number of projects and their likely concentration would seem to suggest a reduction in research activity across the institution as a whole and this seems consistent with anecdotal evidence from staff.

If the figures are considered in terms of the averages over each of three 7-year periods above, then there a pattern does emerge of increase and then decline together with the general shift to fewer projects already noted- the approximate averages per year over these three 7-year periods being as follows:

2003 -2009 \$12M - 33

2010 - 2016 \$17M - 28

2017- 2023 \$12M – 19

It is hard to predict whether the current downward trend will persist, but given that publication is the single most important indicator of research performance, and given the enormous decline in publication, one would expect to see this reflected in future grant outcomes (it may well be evident in outcomes already). The tendency for research across the University to decline and to concentrate research in particular areas is also a dangerous strategy not only in terms of reputational loss and in loss of capacity, but also because it concentrates the risk of research failure – a setback in one of those areas would be much more damaging than if research were more consistently spread across the institution.

#4 2021 STUDENT APPLICATIONS AND OFFERS: COMPARISONS BY STATE AND TERRITORY

Except Tasmania (-13.8 per cent), South Australia (-3.1 per cent) and Victoria (-0.6 per cent), all states and territories recorded an increase in applications. Queensland recorded the largest increase (10.6 per cent), followed by the ACT (6.3 per cent), NSW (4.1 per cent), Northern Territory (3.6 per cent) and Western Australia (3.1 per cent).

Compared to 2020, the following states and territories recorded a decrease in offers in 2021, Tasmania (-10.0 per cent), SA (-2.7 per cent), Victoria (-2.2 per cent), and WA (-2.0 per cent) and NT (-0.9 per cent). Queensland (10.7 per cent), the ACT (5.4 per cent) and NSW (2.9 per cent) recorded an increase in offers.

The offer rate in 2021 was 81.9 per cent, a decrease of 0.9 percentage points from the previous year. Tasmania recorded the highest offer rate, 93.4 per cent, while on the other hand WA recorded the lowest offer rate, 74.6 per cent, in 2021.

Offer rates decreased in WA (-3.9 percentage points), followed by Victoria (-1.2 percentage points), NSW (-1.0 percentage points) and the ACT (-0.7 percentage points) in 2021. On the other hand, Tasmania recorded the largest increase in offer rate (4.0 percentage points), followed by SA (0.4 percentage points) and Queensland (0.1 percentage points).

Source

Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Undergraduate applications, offers and acceptances 2021, p6., www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/undergraduate-applications-offers-and-acceptances-2021

#5 STUDENT COMPLETIONS AND ATTRITION

Attrition rates (numbers of students who fail to complete) have been extremely high especially considered relative to other institutions – only Charles Darwin in the Northern territory has a similar rate.

2015	33.64
2016	22.06
2017	25.94
2018	23.78
2019	21.51

Source:

Australian Government, Dept of Education, Higher Education Statistics,
www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2020-section-15-attrition-success-and-retention

The July 2021 the UTAS Senate Newsletter reported that “the University’s high attrition rate had led to TEQSA imposing a ‘Student Performance Monitoring’ condition on the renewal of the University’s registration, which requires more comprehensive reporting on attrition”. UTAS has identified the key factors that affect attrition as part-time and “distance” (ie online) study.

#6 UTAS Staff numbers, Academic and non-Academic and Staff-student ratios

EFTSL Onshore students

2009	13,860
2020:	22,471 (+62.1%)

All staff

2009	2,436
2020	3,058 (+25.5%)

FTE Academic Staff (including casual)

2009	871
2020	1,052 (+20.8%)

FTE Non-Academic Staff (including casual)

2009	1334
2020	1706 (+27.9%)

SSR (Academic staff)

2009	15.90
2020	21.36 (+34.3%)

SSR (Non-Academic staff)

2009	10.39
2020	13.17 (+26.8%)

Source

Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2020 Section 17 Student-staff ratios, www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics/resources/2020-section-17-studentstaff-ratios

These figures demonstrate the increased enrolment over recent years, but without any commensurate in academic staffing – academic staffing increased by 20.8% as against a 63% increase in enrolment. This could be taken to show an increase in staff productivity, except that it almost certainly indicates a decline in teaching quality. High staff-student ratios (from 15.9% in 2009 to 21.36 in 2020 in respect of academic staff) are generally seen as a negative indicator especially by students and this is reflected in the anecdotal evidence from students regarding, for instance, the lack of face-to-face teaching. Also significant is the disparate increase in non-academic staffing over academic staff – non-academic staffing increased by 27.9% over this same period.

#7 Staff satisfaction, morale, and confidence in UTAS management

Under Provost David Rich, UTAS management conducted two staff surveys - Your Voice@UTAS in 2009 under VC Darryl LeGrew and 2013 VC Peter Rathjen. The first was initiated as a result of concerns about low levels of staff satisfaction and morale. The results of both surveys, which are no longer readily available, were broadly similar, showing relatively high levels of dissatisfaction and unhappiness with the character of UTAS management and leadership. The results were worse than similar survey results for other comparable institutions. In both surveys, poor scores were received in relation to workload, cross unit collaboration, leadership, and entrepreneurship, with the scores worsening on the 2013 survey – only the broad results of the 2013 survey were released. Professor Rich had to argue for the 2013 survey against considerable opposition, and the process was discontinued following the departure of Professor Rich later in 2013.

It was not until 2022 (under VC Rufus Black) that another staff survey was undertaken. Some of the results of the 2022 survey have been released internally to the University but have not officially been made public. However, some of the results were the subject of an article in The Australian on November 15, 2022 under the headline, ‘University of Tasmania staff “has little confidence” in leadership’ (see <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/university-of-tasmania-staff-has-little-confidence-in-leadership/news-story/66030f7d6aa6eb8f6228cb33ceb78335>). Although the 2009 and 2013 results were indicative of serious problems, the 2022 results show a more serious and dramatic collapse in morale, satisfaction and overall confidence. To quote from The Australian article:

The survey shows 0 per cent of Law School staff believed UTAS leaders “demonstrate that employee wellbeing is important”, while only 6 per cent said UTAS – Tasmania’s only university – was “in a position to succeed over the next three years”. Underlying an apparent disconnect between some academic staff and senior management, only 6 per cent agreed that “our leaders demonstrate that people are critical to the university’s success”. Only 10 per cent expressed support for senior leaders, 20 per cent had confidence in UTAS and 11 per cent believed there was “open and honest two-way communication”.

It would be useful to have access to the complete data set for the survey, but this is unlikely ever to be publicly available. However, the information that is available confirms the picture already evident to the effect that UTAS has a serious problem in terms of its internal operations and the relations between management and staff. The results of the staff survey should also be read in conjunction with evidence of a very high level of staff turnover since the arrival of Professor Black as VC.