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ANUSA Renew ANU Report

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Published October 2026

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Overview of Renew ANU	3
Methodology	4
Design and distribution	4
Sample size and demographics	5
Data collection method	5
Scope and limitations	6
Findings and analysis	6
Overall sentiment and trust in ANU	7
Overall satisfaction with Renew ANU's restructuring	7
Trust in ANU's decision-making and governance processes	8
Likelihood of recommending ANU	9
Academic experience and educational quality	9
Renew ANU's impact on student experience	10
Renew ANU's impact on quality of education	10
Presence of effective pathways	11
How Renew ANU shaped academic outcomes	12
Lingering academic impacts in 2026	14
Wellbeing, mental health & student support services	14
Renew ANU's impact on mental health and wellbeing	15
How Renew ANU affects students' mental health	16
Lingering wellbeing impacts in 2026	16
Engagement and participation	17
Autonomous department insights	17
Student opt-in discussion forum findings	20
Our Context in 2026	22
Report Recommendations	23
Final Note	24

Introduction

From the beginning of 2025 to the time you read this report, the Australian National University (ANU) has experienced some of the most drastic restructuring ever seen in the Australian higher education sector. As Australia's only federally legislated university, the ANU is unique in its doctrine and purpose; it innovates, leads, and sets the standard for tertiary education. It's why thousands of students travel internationally and domestically to attend our national university, and why so many students take pride in attending this institution. The cost-cutting restructure of our university, labelled under the guise of 'renewal', continues to have far reaching impact on students today.

Evolution is integral to the longevity of any institution; good pedagogy and the education we pride ourselves on offering must adapt to changing circumstances with innovation, rather than simply reacting. However, last year's restructuring did not reflect this. Cost-cutting efficiency, the transactional approach to genuine engagement and learning, and treating students as secondary have eroded trust in our university and its governance processes.

This report aims to centre the voices of those who make up the most of any university. Our student community – undergraduate, postgraduate, HDR, domestic, and international – are the ones who experience the damage of restructuring, which translates into our direct student experience, mental health and wellbeing, and the quality of education.

Cuts to our education, cuts to our support services, and cuts to quality have ongoing impacts and do not end when a proposal becomes a plan. A comprehensive understanding of how damaging this period was in practice is integral to moving forward as a cohesive university community; one where student voice is actively valued, rather than treated as an afterthought.

Overview of Renew ANU

The Australian National Audit Office's (ANAO) report on the ANU's financial management lays out a clear overview of Renew ANU and its trajectory. Among ANU's expenditures and key milestones, ANU Council's approval of the Renew ANU \$250 million savings target marks the beginning of the period that affected so many in our community.¹

Renew ANU was announced in October of 2024 after ANU Council approved the savings target, with the first Renew ANU implementation plans released in November of 2024. Soon after, ANU implemented the Voluntary Separation Scheme (VSS) for

¹ Australian National Audit Office, *Australian National University Financial Management* (Canberra: ANAO, 2023), 46, <https://www.anao.gov.au/work/other/australian-national-university-financial-management>.

ANU staff in February 2025, which led to forced redundancies that had an immense impact on the ANU community, especially students and their experience.

The release of further change proposals in August 2025 likely marked the moment most students became aware of what Renew ANU was, and that the ongoing process was not temporary; its proposals would result in material changes to every student's education. The whirlwind of media, particularly following the resignation of the former ANU Vice-Chancellor in September 2025,² and the eventual ANU Council approval to cease work on reaching the original \$250 million savings target, has contributed to the sentiment that Renew ANU is a chapter of the past.

Recent publications have asserted that the baseline \$250 million savings target was unfounded before approval, resulting in immense distrust in the ANU among the student community after enduring the unpredictability and stress of the past two years.³ Whilst there is a broad desire for the events of the past two years to be left behind and move forward, it is integral that we examine and understand what the impacts were on students – beyond those of academic restructuring, but also wellbeing and mental health – so that the extent of damage can be protected against through systemic change.

Methodology

In order to gather information about the impacts of Renew ANU on student experience, we conducted a student survey. The survey was open to any ANU student, regardless of level of study or demographic; responses remained anonymous, as students were not required to provide their u-numbers unless they wanted to take part in follow-up discussions in early Semester 2, 2026. A variety of academics were also consulted when designing the survey and its distribution.

Design and distribution

The survey opened on 18 May and closed on 25 June 2026. It included a mix of question types, none of which were compulsory; students could opt out at any stage, and all responses were anonymous. The intention behind this design was to maximise engagement in a considerate way, because responses often drew on personal experiences and past hurt.

A combination of qualitative (with the option to write as much/as little as desired) and quantitative (simple numeric-based ratings) optimised a survey tailored to every respondent's capacity and level of engagement. The survey was distributed primarily

² Australian National University, "Message from the Chancellor," *Australian National University*, September 11, 2025, <https://www.anu.edu.au/news/all-news/message-from-the-chancellor>.

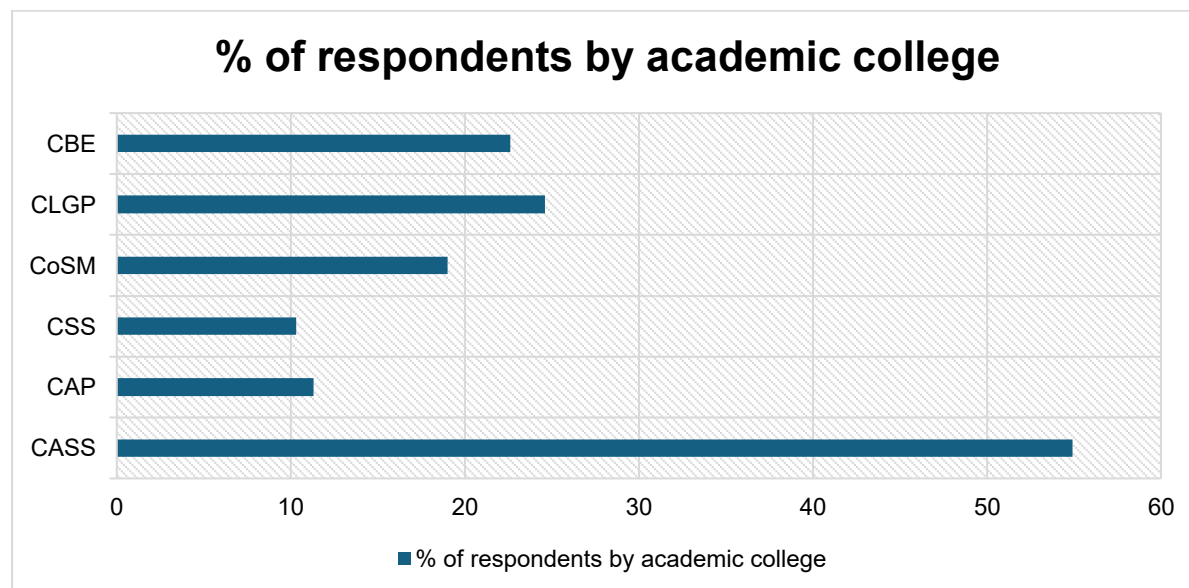
³ "ANU Council's \$250m Cuts Unnecessary, Rules Top Audit Body," *Australian Financial Review*, June 4, 2026, <https://www.afr.com/policy/health-and-education/anu-council-s-250m-cuts-unnecessary-rules-top-audit-body-20260604-p603su>.

through social media platforms, alongside physical media and student representation to drive engagement. ANUSA social media channels promoted the survey through videos and posts each week it was open to renew engagement periodically; posters were designed, printed, and distributed across ANU campus in accordance with the ANU's poster policy to reach a broader audience; student email lists and outreach to clubs and societies were also utilised as a method of survey distribution.

Sample size and demographics

The ANUSA survey garnered a strong response, with over 200 responses across level of study, discipline, and student type. By level of study, most respondents (66.8%) were undergraduate students, with 10.7% identifying as HDR students and 22.4% as postgraduate students. Considering ANU's most recent breakdown of student study levels,⁴ our sample's recorded study-level demographics are relatively representative of the broader ANU student cohort, where around 59% of students are undergraduates. Most respondents were domestic students (75.5%), while 24.5% identified as international students.

The final demographic we collected was the academic college(s) each student was located in, with the option to select multiple to reflect interdisciplinary study. 54.9% of student respondents identified as students within the College of Arts and Social Sciences, with the College of Law, Governance and Policy and the College of Business and Economics as the next largest response bases.



Data collection method

This report draws on survey data, opt-in hybrid student discussion sessions, and autonomous department consultations; it is informed by a diverse set of data. The survey involved quantitative questions, including multiple-choice and numerical scale-

⁴ Australian National University, "Facts About ANU," *Australian National University*, <https://www.anu.edu.au/about/facts-about-anu>.

based rankings. It also included qualitative questions that invited respondents to share their experiences and thoughts. We collated data from the student survey in Google Forms and exported it to an Excel spreadsheet, where we analysed and sorted it methodically.

The opt-in student discussion sessions resulted from an optional question at the end of our survey, which gave respondents the option to voluntarily provide their university email, which would then (only) be used for the purpose of reaching out and inviting them to further discussion following the survey. A note-taker separate from the session facilitator collated data from the hybrid discussion session, confidentially, with no student names recorded to maintain anonymity and a safe environment for open discussion.

Autonomous department consultations were also conducted as a method of gaining targeted insight into the impacts Renew ANU had on autonomous communities (i.e., female, intersex, and gender diverse students, Indigenous students, disabled students, BIPOC students, queer students, international students, and students who are parents and/or carers).

Scope and limitations

This report is informed by data, which has potential limitations. For example, the initial survey's sample size is relatively small compared with the general population of ANU students; whilst the demographic breakdown of our sample size aligns with the population, it is important to acknowledge that responses may not be representative of all students. Furthermore, some student groups may be under-represented due to the survey's reach or barriers such as language or accessibility.

We aimed to mitigate these potential limitations by making the survey as accessible as possible and giving students the chance to opt out at any stage, meaning they could choose their desired level of engagement, avoiding survey fatigue and maximising responses. Consultation with every single autonomous department officer also aimed to address the experiences of those who may have been underrepresented in the survey.

Findings and analysis

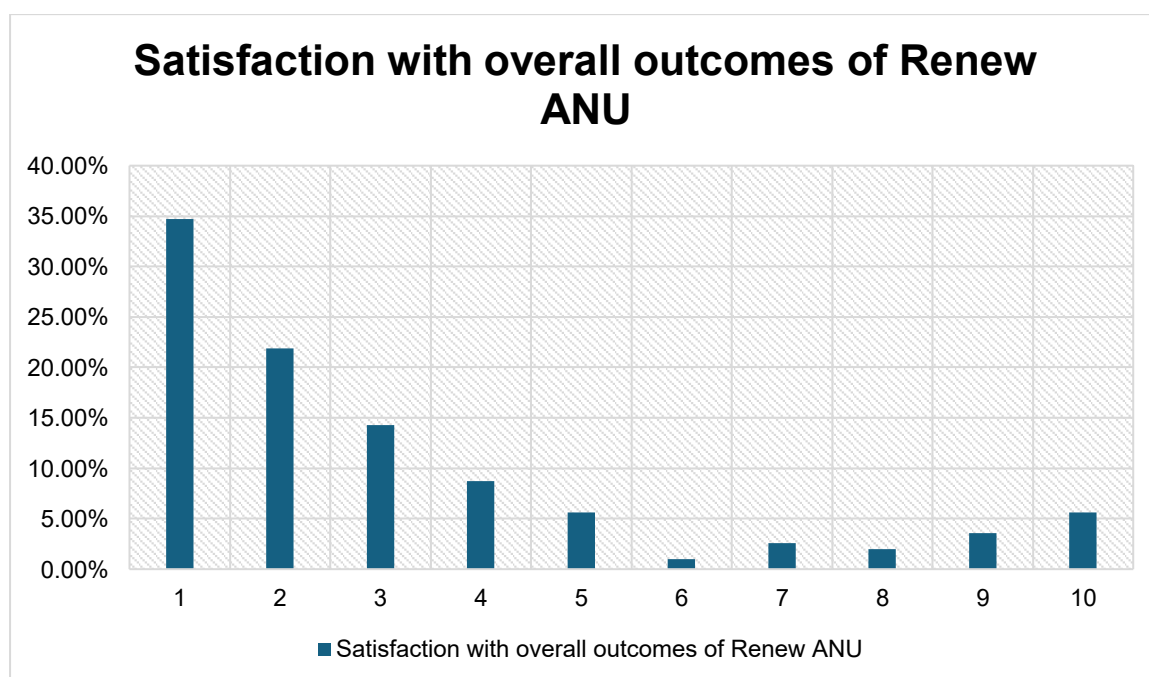
The following section will go into detail on the student responses and data gathered across ANUSA's student survey, consultations with autonomous departments and student groups, and student-led discussions. Findings are grouped by overarching topics and themes.

Overall sentiment and trust in ANU

What we gathered from our data is a tangible decrease in trust in the ANU – trust in the institution doing what’s best for the student community, and trust in repairing the damage felt over the last two years. Overall sentiment is an imperative starting point to launch the following analysis from, as it provides a baseline measure of where we are right now, at the start of Semester 2, 2026. Understanding how low trust, dissatisfaction with restructuring processes, and reputational costs following Renew ANU establishes where we are currently, and why structural change in governance is vital to moving forward.

Overall satisfaction with Renew ANU’s restructuring

The first question in the survey asked students to rate their satisfaction with the overall outcomes of Renew ANU’s restructuring on a scale from 1-10, where 1 equated with ‘extremely negative’ and 10 equated with ‘extremely positive’. A significant portion of the university’s messaging and justification for restructuring came under the banner of renewing our institution’s processes to become “more efficient and effective”.⁵ Given this, we thought it imperative to survey whether this effectiveness eventuated in student experience post-Renew ANU; what we found emphasised low satisfaction with Renew ANU’s restructuring and its results.



34.7% of students who responded reported the lowest satisfaction (i.e., selecting a ‘1’ out of 10) level with the overall outcomes of Renew ANU restructuring. Only 14.8% of

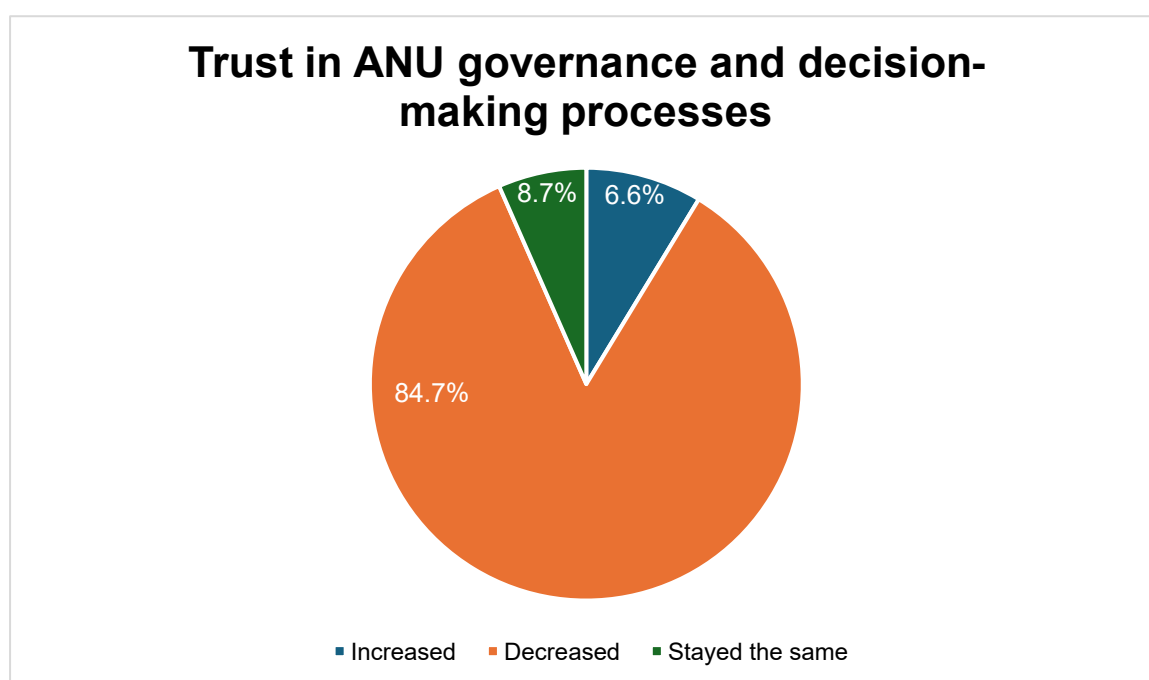
⁵ Australian National University, “Renew ANU,” *Australian National University*, <https://www.anu.edu.au/about/renew-anu>.

respondents reported a level of satisfaction beyond negative or neutral, meaning the majority identified with lower levels of satisfaction with the results of Renew ANU.

The word ‘satisfaction’ by no means encapsulates a student’s holistic experience of the past two years; however, we use it as a starting point to illustrate overall sentiment and judgement of Renew ANU’s effectiveness from a student perspective. The results being so skewed towards ‘extremely negative’ levels of satisfaction prelude the in-depth testimonies and experiences the report will highlight going forward.

Trust in ANU’s decision-making and governance processes

We asked students whether, compared to before Renew ANU, their levels of trust in ANU’s decision-making and governance processes had increased, decreased, or stayed the same. An overwhelming majority, 84.7% of students who responded, reported that their trust in ANU’s decision-making and governance processes decreased, with only 8.7% reporting an increase in trust.



Many of the qualitative testimonies received via the survey reinforced this lack of trust that our quantitative data indicated. Common themes of reduced faith and eroded trust ran through almost every survey question’s response section.

“...no amount of leadership reshuffles and walking things back will earn back any of that trust.”

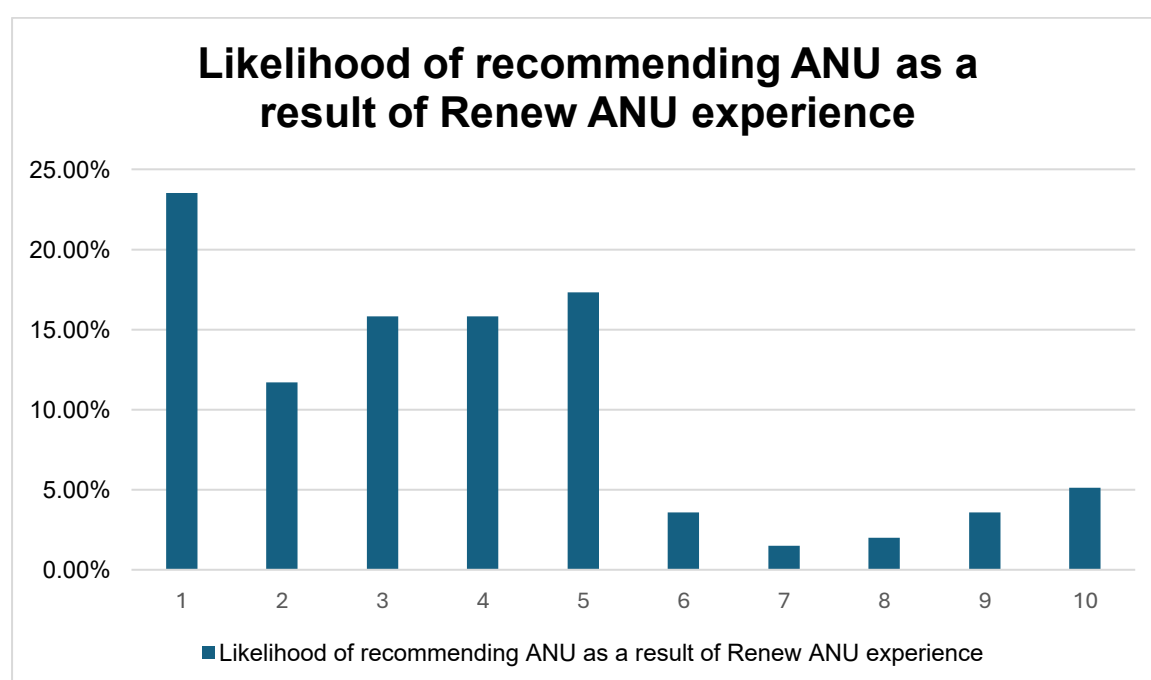
“I will never forgive RenewANU for monetizing off of my compromised education.”

So much of student experience is founded in trust. Students place an immense amount of trust in the university they choose to attend; trust that it will keep their interests at heart, trust that they are going to receive a quality education. When this

trust is broken, repair goes beyond community consultation; it requires a cultural shift in which students become active partners and co-designers of our university.

Likelihood of recommending ANU

Only 5.1% of student respondents said they would be highly likely to recommend ANU to others following their experience of Renew ANU, compared to the 23.5% of students who said they were highly unlikely to. These figures show the extent to which reputational costs continue to affect our university and campus culture; following Renew ANU, faith and satisfaction in the university have evidently dropped, which directly translates into reputational costs. Efforts to boost enrolments and attraction domestically and internationally after the past two years require acknowledging the harm done to our community and making tangible efforts to repair relations. Reputational harm for what the ANU symbolises and stands for will endure (long after Renew ANU's restructuring is, in practice, over) unless there are steps taken to rebuild relationships strained over the past few years. It is in the university's best interest to pursue a path of reconciliation with our student community, as we make up the heart of the institution.



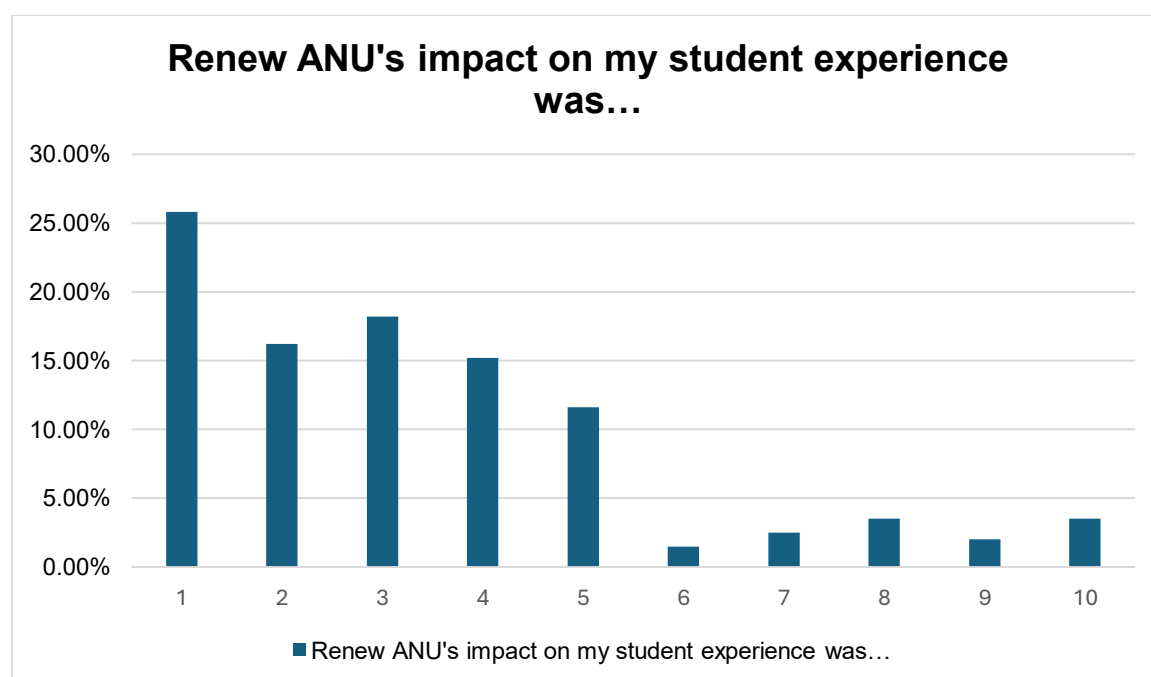
Academic experience and educational quality

Much of the reporting on Renew ANU's restructuring focused on decisions affecting the academic colleges, educational supports, and course cuts; the extent to which these impacted hundreds of students' academic experience, future pathways, and trajectory at ANU was unprecedented. Our survey gathered specific insight as to the

ramifications of academic restructuring on student experience, the quality of education offered at the ANU, and the presence of effective pathways to express concern.

Renew ANU's impact on student experience

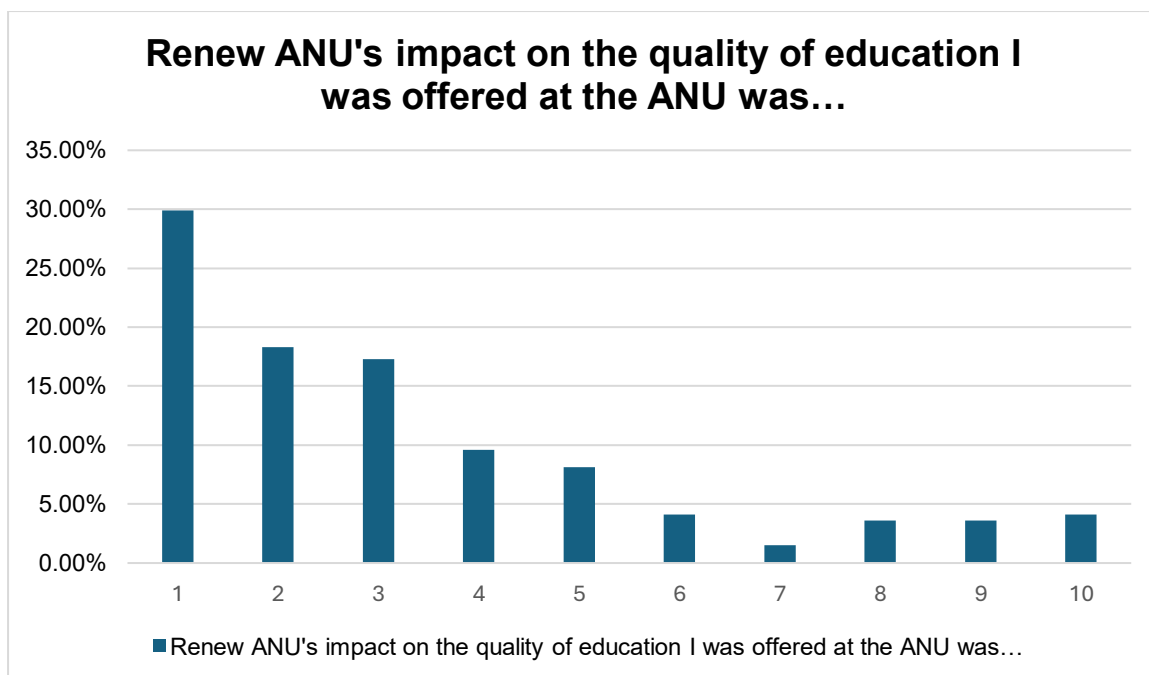
When 25.8% of students - essentially a quarter of all respondents – report that Renew ANU's impact on student experience was 'extremely negative', it raises concerns as to how effective the restructuring was in improving experiences at the ANU. Only 13% of respondents reported anything beyond an extremely negative to neutral experience.



The phrase “staff working conditions are student learning conditions” is often used in higher education; it rings true when we observe the steady decline in student experience as a direct result of restructuring and staff redundancies. Forced redundancies, cuts to admin and support worker roles, and widespread feelings of fear and anxiety all manifest in student outcomes, particularly the mental health and wellbeing of students. Student experience is, of course, important for attracting prospective students; however, it is equally important for understanding how current students feel supported and for retention rates. The extremely negative experience for many during and after Renew ANU matters not only for understanding reputational costs and future students' caution about enrolling, but also for understanding a decline in culture and morale across the student community.

Renew ANU's impact on quality of education

Most responses to the question of Renew ANU's impact on quality of education clustered at the 1/2/3 ratings; 29.9% of student respondents selected the lowest option, indicating a decline in the quality of education offered during this damaging restructuring.



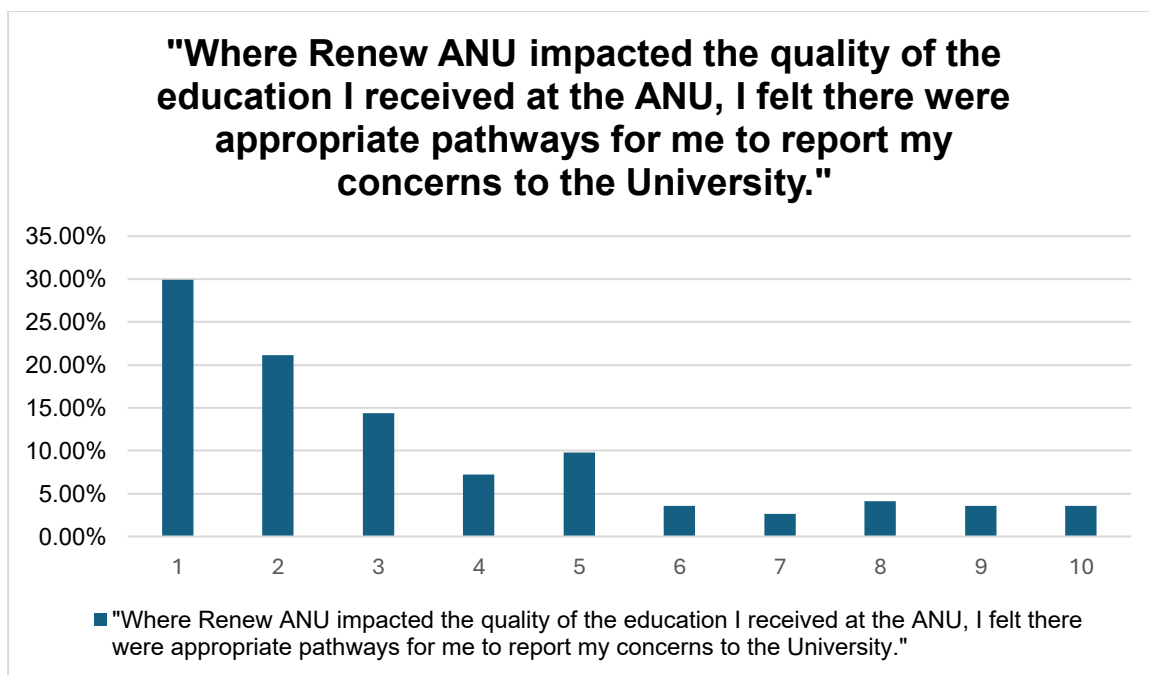
ANU prides itself on being a world leader and innovator; this year, the institution ranked 9th globally in the 2027 QS World University Rankings, placing it in the top two percent of universities worldwide and fourth nationally.⁶ Whilst climbing the QS rankings is to be celebrated, it is worth noting that student learning experience only constitutes 10% of the weighting for assessing a university's ranking. Through this survey, we have learnt that for many students, the learning experience at ANU has not tangibly improved; rather, the quality of education has declined over the past two years. As an institution that prides itself on being the best of the best and a national leader, quality education should be the standard, and applicable to any student who walks through our door. Rather than basing success and quality of an institution predominantly on output, employability, and research outcomes⁷ – all of which are still important – an emphasis on student experience and quality education should be prioritised.

Presence of effective pathways

One of the consistent threads throughout all data received for this report was a lack of a) consultation with students and b) presence of pathways to report concerns about the Renew ANU process. Results show that 29.9% of students did not feel that there were appropriate pathways to report concerns to the University.

⁶ Australian National University, "ANU Climbs in QS World University Rankings," *Australian National University*, June 18, 2026, <https://www.anu.edu.au/news/all-news/anu-climbs-in-qz-world-university-rankings>.

⁷ "World University Rankings Methodology," *QS TopUniversities*, June 12, 2025, <https://www.topuniversities.com/world-university-rankings/methodology>.



These results point to real governance and structural deficiencies at our university, with students feeling the impact.

"The fact that ANU boasts about being a 'campus university', but communicated all major decisions via online channels (if at all) was appalling."

Student testimonies and data show that many feared their academic pathway or future could be abruptly cut through an email or a 'consultation plan', reflecting the widespread anxiety felt across our community over the past two years. If the university had provided effective pathways to report concerns about the restructuring, it might have mitigated the impact of uncertainty on student mental health and wellbeing.

How Renew ANU shaped academic outcomes

We believe Renew ANU materially weakened the everyday conditions for learning by shrinking the staff and resources that make teaching effective. Students report that professors and tutors were overwhelmed;

"My professors were under massive pressures and stress, without tutors to support them...this meant students had a lot less support in class."

That strain translated into concrete losses: larger cohorts, reduced feedback, and cancelled or cut labs meant core components of courses disappeared or were diluted. Practical consequences included tutorials and seminars so overfilled that students sat on the floor in tutorials to complete quizzes because class sizes exceeded room capacity, and entire classes being reclassified as requirements and ballooning from dozens to hundreds of students, which destroyed the small-group learning many subjects depend on. Course cuts also blocked progression; students could not complete majors or minors, were forced to extend degrees, or were compelled to consider leaving the university when required units were removed. These changes

show a shift from discipline-specific, scaffolded learning toward a one-size-fits-all model that cannot deliver the same depth or quality of education.

The restructuring's centralisation of services and removal of school-level supports further eroded students' ability to navigate study pathways and access timely help. Multiple students described losing school-specific admin teams and support as services moved into centralised units. Centralisation compounded delays and friction with Student Central, while overworked academic staff had less time for formative feedback and mentoring. For research and practice-based students, team changes also disrupted the academic experience. Further, removing labs and specialised facilities in STEM courses removed essential learning environments, not mere conveniences, undermining assessment integrity and the practical competencies graduates are expected to acquire. Beyond pedagogy, Renew ANU produced a pervasive sense of instability that directly harmed student wellbeing and academic performance. Uncertainty about the university's future left students extremely stressed.

“Not knowing for a full semester whether or not I would have a university to return to in 2026 was extremely stressful for my wellbeing, and it directly impacted my academic performance.”

Anxiety about staff retention and a university environment described as fearful by students and staff alike fed into disengagement and reduced trust. Many felt their degrees were devalued;

“I felt cheated out of half of my degree for the same price.”

In the past few months, this feeling has been exacerbated due to the inconsistent and ineffective rollout of ANU's 'Student Hubs' – only one of which is currently in operation, at the time of writing, as a result of insufficient staffing, training, and communication. The centralisation of these essential support services has caused confusion, anxiety, and a lack of support among hundreds of students. This issue, observed both in the data collected for this report and in the broader advocacy and casework ANUSA has conducted this year, highlights that a seamless and transparent transition was crucial. Moreover, such a transition was an institutional obligation that was not met.

Centralisation continues to shape student experience in 2026, particularly through reduced access to personalised support and specialised services. Students emphasise that dedicated student support across the colleges helped create a sense of home and belonging. At the same time, centralisation removed the proximity and familiarity that once made academic and administrative support accessible. This shift has had practical consequences, including delays in feedback, inconsistent information about degree requirements, and difficulty accessing career support.

“The inability to access career support in my final year left me directionless after graduating and underemployed today.”

When rising fees and shrinking services coincide, the result is not only poorer learning outcomes but also a breakdown in the social contract between students and the institution: students pay more while receiving less. That perceived breach amplifies stress, undermines retention, and damages the university's reputation for delivering a high-quality education.

Lingering academic impacts in 2026

In 2026, students describe an academic landscape still shaped by the disruptions of Renew ANU, even though many proposed changes were never fully implemented. The most consistent theme is ongoing instability in course availability and academic structures, which continues to undermine students' ability to progress through their degrees with any sense of agency or autonomy similar to a pre-Renew ANU period.

"...the damage caused by RenewANU still permeates throughout the school. Staff that were the lifeblood of the school have left due to how they were treated."

The loss of experienced academics has had ongoing effects on teaching quality, course continuity, and program viability. Students report long delays in feedback and difficulty accessing lecturers and consultation time, mirroring earlier concerns about overwork and reduced academic support. These experiences reinforce a broader sentiment that course availability is unpredictable, and students must navigate a system that no longer provides clear or reliable academic progression.

HDR students reported diminished opportunities, with grants and tutoring roles cut, leaving them surviving on basic income without the academic or financial safety net previously available. The cumulative effect is a university environment that feels more bureaucratic and less supportive, where students feel disconnected from the college-level expertise that once anchored their learning. For many, this has also damaged the perceived value of their degree, with multiple respondents reporting concern surrounding the impact of public scandal on the legitimacy of their degree and choice to study at ANU. These accounts show that the impacts of Renew ANU did not end with the restructuring itself - they continue to shape academic experience through reduced opportunities, weakened support systems, and a diminished sense of trust in the institution.

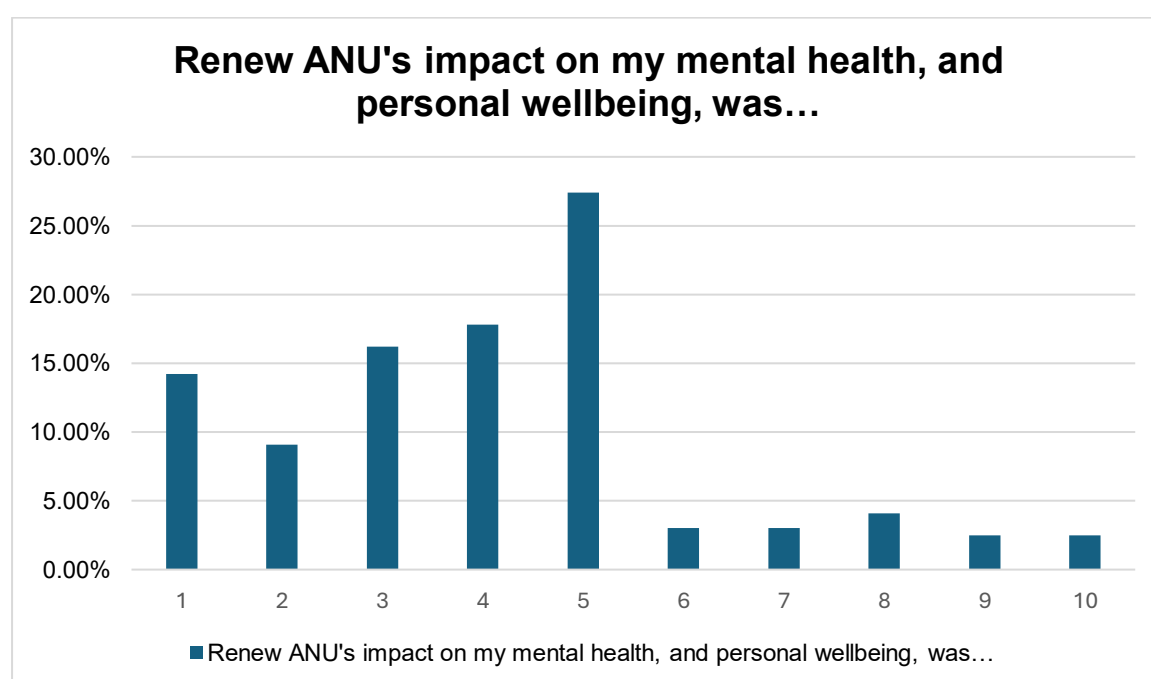
Wellbeing, mental health & student support services

A large majority of institutional and media discussion during the period of Renew ANU focused on the academic restructuring that ensued; with this, there was a considerable neglect of the mental health and wellbeing impacts of this period, particularly on students. When change plans are shelved, and we enter a new academic year, the personal wellbeing ramifications of such a significant period of

prolonged anxiety and trauma do not end. In light of this, the next half of the report will take a focus on these intangible impacts of damaging restructuring, how they have manifested across student experience in 2026, and where the university can go from here.

Renew ANU's impact on mental health and wellbeing

The fact that 14.2% of students reported “extremely negative” impacts on their mental health and personal wellbeing, compared to only 2.5% reporting extremely positive impacts, demonstrates a profound imbalance in how the restructuring was felt across the community. More significantly, when 84.7% of respondents place themselves on the negative end of the scale, it signals not just dissatisfaction but a systemic failure to provide the stability, clarity, and support students require to learn effectively.



Across qualitative responses, students described mental health impacts emerging from multiple fronts of the restructuring: academic instability, diminished support services, and prolonged uncertainty about the future of their degrees and the university itself. Many students linked their stress to academic disruptions – including course cuts, inconsistent information about program requirements, and difficulty accessing lecturers or feedback – highlighting how academic structures themselves became sources of anxiety. Others pointed to the centralisation of support services and the restructuring of residential halls, which removed familiar, college-level anchors that previously provided continuity and care. Students felt directionless, unsupported, and unsure whether the university could meet its obligations. This prolonged uncertainty created a feedback loop where academic challenges worsened wellbeing, and declining wellbeing further undermined academic performance. In 2026, these lingering effects demonstrate that Renew ANU's impacts were not confined to the

period of restructuring – they continue to shape student experience, academic confidence, and mental health in ways the university must urgently address.

How Renew ANU affects students' mental health

The mental health impacts described by respondents reflect the emotional toll of Renew ANU's instability, uncertainty, and perceived disregard for student voice. A recurring theme across responses is a profound sense of dismissal by institutional leadership; students repeatedly articulated feeling "mistrusted and misheard by staff" and betrayed. When students are treated, as one respondent put it, as "mitigated risks rather than an addition," the result is not only individual distress but also broader cultural harm: a learning environment in which students feel devalued, unwelcome, and unable to rely on the institution for support. This erosion of trust manifested in acute anxiety, with students reporting they were "highly anxious that my degree would even be completed," or "unable to focus, and concerned" about whether their supervisors or programs would remain intact. These experiences show that the restructuring destabilised the psychological foundations students need to feel secure, respected, and able to learn.

Compounding this emotional strain was the breakdown of the support systems students expected to protect them during periods of institutional change. Respondents described systems that "were supposed to be in place... [but] didn't work," leaving them without reliable avenues to raise concerns or seek help.

"I didn't feel like I could reach out to anyone about concerns."

The cultural environment on campus also shifted: students reported that simply entering campus meant confronting the tension and fear surrounding Renew ANU's cuts.

"My mental health suffered as I lost passion in education."

This atmosphere – combined with reduced course availability, unclear graduation pathways, and diminished college-level support – created a prolonged period of anxiety that extended well beyond the restructuring itself. For some, this led to a loss of passion for their studies, illustrating how academic disruption and declining wellbeing reinforced each other.

Lingering wellbeing impacts in 2026

Renew ANU destabilised the broader system of care that students should be able to rely on to feel safe, supported, and able to learn. Students repeatedly described confusion and disorientation when trying to access basic wellbeing services, with one noting that in 2026 there is mass confusion about where to send inquiries after "the university has chopped and changed so much." This confusion is not just a minor administrative inconvenience; it reflects a system where pathways to support have become inconsistent and difficult to navigate. Students expressed a profound lack of trust in institutional wellbeing structures, including counselling services – "I have no

faith in the confidentiality of counselling services offered by ANU... and have no confidence reporting incidents that are of concern to student wellbeing.”

When students cannot trust the systems designed to protect them, the result is isolation, fear, and disengagement. Even those who sought help described judgemental interactions and a loss of dignity. These experiences show how centralisation and service cuts have created emotional barriers, leaving students reluctant or unable to seek support when they need it most.

The cultural impacts of Renew ANU on wellbeing also remain deeply felt. Students described a campus environment marked by shame and a sense of collective harm – “survivor’s guilt. The damage has been done.” This emotional landscape is reinforced by structural decisions that continue to affect students’ daily lives, such as the reduction of RM scholarships, which “significantly impacts the accessibility of living on campus... and ultimately impacts the culture of halls.” The loss of later-year students from residential communities weakens peer support networks that are critical for wellbeing, especially during periods of academic stress.

Students also emphasised the lack of visible, accessible staff who could address concerns, noting that students often don’t know how or where to seek support. The wellbeing impacts of Renew ANU are not confined to individual distress; they instead reflect a broader cultural shift in which students feel less valued, less supported, and less able to rely on the institution for care. In 2026, these lingering effects continue to shape the student experience, demanding meaningful institutional repair and reinvestment in student-centred wellbeing structures.

Engagement and participation

Autonomous department insights

Throughout the process of writing this report, each autonomous ANUSA Department Officer was consulted and interviewed to offer their insights about Renew ANU and its impacts on the autonomous group of students they were elected to represent. The restructuring surrounding Renew ANU made a system that was already hard to navigate for marginalised students more inaccessible; this was reflected in the experiences discussed in each conversation with ANUSA’s Women, Intersex, and Gender Diverse Officer, Indigenous Officer, Disabilities Co-Officer, BIPOC Officer, International Officer, Queer Officer, and Parents and Carers Officer.

Renew ANU’s restructuring had immense impacts on student wellbeing services and trust towards institutional support systems; this was particularly evident when it came to discussions around Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment and pathways for supporting students who’d experienced harm. Discussions with ANUSA’s Women, Intersex, and Gender Diverse Department Officer, Katie Jakab, revealed these impacts. The restructuring and cuts that were seen across the university particularly

impacted the wellbeing space, and it was students most in need of support who suffered from these decisions. When administrative staff are cut, there are flow-on effects, and the impacts of diluted capacity across wellbeing spaces accumulate to create a system that is fundamentally not equipped to help students. If a system is not equipped to adequately support the community it claims to at every stage, then it is not an effective prevention response. Residential halls were among the most negatively affected by Renew ANU, particularly through the introduction of RED and the reduction of RM scholarships. These changes created major losses in student support across the university, and where support has been removed, there's been no adequate or effective adjustment. For example, many students report concerns that CSOs have not adapted their training to compensate for the loss of RM expertise. Talking with the Women, Intersex, and Gender Diverse Officer pointed to the fact that it is no surprise that there have been so many negative impacts on the student community following Renew ANU, as working to make changes with students and staff "was not the ANU's priority from the start."

"ANU has a lot of work to do to build an intersectional system that is culturally safe; Renew ANU was a huge harm to any work that the ANU was doing towards achieving that."

This idea of intersectionality and the important role of student consultation was mirrored by other discussions. Queer* Department Officer, Connor Winfield, opined that "if there was any effective form of student consultation, [Renew ANU] wouldn't have happened"; many students see the university's consultation process as after the fact and disingenuous from the beginning. Real co-design and consultation that centred the people who were most impacted by these changes would have meant such damaging restructuring never would have been approved.

BIPOC Officer, Anenya Kale also alluded to this, arguing that "if we don't remember what consultation looked like, how useful was it?" Every student surveyed and department officer consulted was asked about how they remembered/viewed student consultation efforts and pathways to share concerns and feedback throughout Renew ANU – not one student reported feeling confident in or heard via these pathways. The fact that not one out of hundreds of students who responded to the survey could recall or speak positively about consultation indicates a serious failure in this area of our institution. For marginalised and underrepresented communities in particular, trust in university systems is often already low. The lack of meaningful communication throughout Renew ANU's restructuring reinforced existing distrust and showed how far ANU still has to go to repair relationships with its student community.

The lack of communication and how this in particular impacts students from diverse backgrounds was elaborated on by ANUSA International Students Officer, Anuva Rai. International students already face significant uncertainty around degree progression, transfer credits, and the rising costs associated with temporary graduate and study visas. Renew ANU became a clear example of a decision-making process that

systematically disregarded student experience – especially the concerns, circumstances, and financial pressures unique to international students. As our International Students' Officer highlighted, international students often face particular vulnerabilities in which everything else can be overshadowed; when major changes are communicated poorly, high uncertainty can quickly turn into the feeling that negative experiences are tied to their status as international students. For many students, these issues are deeply intersectional. Without sufficient or genuine communication, uncertainty escalates. When students – particularly those from marginalised backgrounds – are excluded from critical processes, they are left uninformed and unable to meaningfully respond to decisions that shape their education.

“In the whole chain of command in receiving information, students are down at the bottom.”

This has only been exacerbated in 2026 by the inconsistent and confusing rollout of Student Hubs across campus, marketed as supports students can use for degree planning, graduation checks, and anything else; a lack of communication surrounding this transition, a lack of student co-design, and a significant impact on international students continue this year. This is a poignant example of how past decisions continue to affect students today, especially when the core issue of student consultation is not addressed or remedied.

Alongside the importance of clear and accessible communication, wellbeing and service provision were highlighted as particularly poignant areas for First Nations students by the ANUSA Indigenous Officer, Tom Hughes. When analysing Renew ANU and the support services affected, it's important to look to areas within our institution that either withstood the events of this restructuring or stayed strong; an example of this is the ANU Tjabal Centre. The Tjabal Centre has its own identity that isn't tied to university management, meaning students who engage with it have a much more personal relationship with it than with university-run supports. As highlighted by our Indigenous Officer, when students have to turn to ANU processes, that's when the impacts of Renew ANU are felt – the number of students who feel this only increases when more community-centred support centres (like Tjabal) become overloaded.

“If ANU processes are being gutted, students have less of an incentive to go and get support from the general ANU services providers. This means more students start to rely on Tjabal for academic and pastoral support services, which may lead to the centre becoming overburdened”.

Finally, the role of Accessibility extends to the student-facing services that were affected by Renew ANU, and the areas that remain in flux or impacted in 2026, highlighted by the ANUSA Disabilities Co-Officer, Taryn Lee, as well as the Parents and Carers Officer, Ankith Arun Aswath. The impacts of restructuring under the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) portfolio entailed all that was related to Accessibility – the impacts linger in 2026, beginning the year with month-long wait times for students

trying to reach Accessibility, get Education Access Plan adjustments, or Special Exam Arrangements in time for exams, delays in replies, and increasing gaps in support for many disabled students as a result of resourcing and understaffing. DSA Co-Officer Taryn Lee hit the nail on the head, when they noted that “it’s hard to trust systems when you don’t have proper information about them or about changes occurring to them.” A differing perspective was brought by ANUSA’s Parents and Carers Officer, who noted the importance of adequate staffing and human oversight in instances of accessibility, in particular for students who are parents and/or carers; a lot of adjustments for these students don’t come in the form of EAPs, instead in alternate forms of documentation, which means it’s a) not as black and white, and b) requires human oversight. As a result of staff cuts and growing uncertainty, there was a lack of response from staff in relation to supporting parents and carers across our institution, and as “caring is something hard to quantify or prove,” this resulted in a higher rate of these students dropping out due to the lack of support received. Ankith also spoke to the point that whilst parents and carers is a solitary body itself, it is often overlooked that many in this community are also disabled, or vulnerable in another way – systems have been structured so there is minimal communication between different areas, which is something that was significantly exacerbated during and after Renew ANU.

Across these conversations, the overarching theme was that students from marginalised backgrounds more often than not bear the burden of navigating a system that is not designed for them and that systematically excludes them. When instances of restructuring, informed by no consultation with these autonomous groups of students and followed by insufficient communication, occur, it significantly impacts the ability of these students to engage in our university community in a meaningful manner. Action should be proactive, not reactive. For the national university to genuinely advocate for, serve, and represent its diverse student cohort, it must address these structural issues immediately, not when instances like Renew ANU exacerbate existing gaps.

Student opt-in discussion forum findings

Alongside department consultations and the student survey, we also ran an opt-in student discussion forum, where we invited survey participants to join an additional hybrid discussion to further inform the report and provide an opportunity to engage. The discussion centred around three points: 1) where Renew ANU has placed us today, 2) what the main student priorities should be going forward, and 3) what ANU can do from here. The effects of Renew ANU in 2026 were similar to those mentioned throughout the report, with an emphasis on student wellbeing through residential hall supports and support for teaching staff. One student said they were more likely to refer students to non-ANU supports because students are more likely to receive support there. Participants also noted cuts to the Centre for Learning and Teaching as a significant hit to supports for teaching and academic staff, acknowledging the intersectional role HDR students play as often holding the dual role of student and teaching staff, many of whom feel their perspectives are invaluable. In 2026, a lack of

case-by-case support on both the student wellbeing and academic support sides has resulted in systems that place the burden of self-advocacy on those who need support most.

When discussing primary student priorities moving forward, accessibility was noted as one of the key points of concern in the short term, in terms of a lack of support and training for both students and staff. The accessibility of education to all must be treated as a priority by our institution, rather than being seen as something that is invisible or optional. It was raised in the discussion, that ANU's method of addressing systemic issues has been reactive and focused largely on protecting against reputational costs. The educational experience and content at ANU need to be more accessible. Another central student priority related to the university's investments and broader mission scope: the student community raised concerns about the growing connection between ANU and militarism. Investments and research ties with weapons and arms manufacturers reflect a broader sector problem: universities are consistently underfunded by the federal government, so they source private funding in areas considered highly profitable (i.e., defence and militaristic industries). Funnelling student money into areas that lie in opposition to ANU's mission – advancing quality learning, research, and innovation as the national university of Australia – symbolises a loss of institutional identity. Many view the ANU as a place where ideas are contested, but it has begun to morph into a business model where profits are prioritised over our mission. Revisiting what ANU stands for, what we want to pursue, and how the institution reflects its community on a domestic and international stage is an integral student priority.

Embedded within the mission of ANU is an inherent value of the community our institution is made up of – students and staff. The overarching top student priority, encompassing all other concerns, is the rebuilding of trust and the relationship between this community and the ANU itself. For many in our student community, the last two years have felt like nothing less than a betrayal by the ANU, as indicated throughout this report. This leads into the question of where the ANU should go from here; after all, new leadership is a step in the right direction, however not sufficient on its own. Going forward, key steps for the ANU include structural governance changes through the ANU Act, as well as recognition of the harm that has ensued over the past two years. A public apology and acknowledgement of the damage caused by restructuring is a core step to rebuilding the relationship of trust between our community and the institution – this social capital cannot be overstated.

Most importantly, it was shared in agreement that there is a lot of good remaining at the ANU – many students stayed throughout Renew ANU because they care about the institution, alongside staff and those who lead us. Many are proud to be an ANU student and want the university to be better; the key to ensuring this is to view students as active partners in the co-design process, and to hear the real concerns and experiences of our diverse cohort to inform the ANU's future pathway.

Our Context in 2026

As we approach the end of 2026, it is important to note the context in which we find ourselves in. Whilst the structural change and reform that we push for at ANU has a sense of urgency behind it, the timing also works in the favour of our institution – there has never been a more appropriate or suitable time to implement these changes. We are seeing student experience and voice be platformed across the nation and increasingly valued as foundational to the longevity and quality of tertiary education institutions.

Established in February 2025, following the passing of the Australian Universities Accord, the National Student Ombudsman is a huge step towards addressing complaints from students about the actions or behaviours of their higher education provider, and empowering student voice, particularly as it relates to student safety and welfare, racism, teaching provisions, gender-based violence, and disciplinary processes.⁸ This furthered the national mission to promote and excel every student's equitable access to an accessible and high-quality educational experience.

Further to this, in 2026 ANUSA has platformed student voices and our community at a federal level on governance and the standard of higher education across our nation. We've pushed for greater transparency and representation within governance structures within our institution,⁹ pushed for meaningful reforms to the ANU Act and ANU Council,¹⁰ as well as for greater funding for the higher education sector, and abandonment of restrictive policies like the Job-Ready Graduates Scheme.¹¹ We know that staff teaching conditions are students' learning conditions – this notion extends to governance. When governance fails, student experience across wellbeing and academic spheres is most affected; we know this better than ever following Renew ANU and the rapid changes to ANU Council over the past 12 months.

It is also worth narrowing the scope to examine student experience at ANU and how our services are currently being used. ANUSA's Student Assistance Team quarterly reports indicate a sharp rise in cases across the past year, assisting 234 students in Q2 (April-June) 2025, 777 students in Q3 (July-September) 2025, and 741 students in Q4 (October-December) 2025.¹² This high volume of students – let alone case numbers, which are significantly higher – indicates a) a tangible increase in the

⁸ National Student Ombudsman, "About Us," *National Student Ombudsman*, <https://www.nso.gov.au/about-us>.

⁹ Australian National University Students' Association, "Advocacy Statements," *ANUSA*, <https://anusa.com.au/advocacy/advocacy-statements/>.

¹⁰ Australian National University Students' Association, "The Australian National University Students' Association (ANUSA) Submission to proposed changes to the *Australian National University Act 1991*", September 1, 2026.

¹¹ Australian National University Students' Association, "ANUSA Submission to the Senate Education and Employment Legislation Committee inquiry into the Higher Education Support Amendment (Reverse Job-Ready Graduates Fee Hikes and End 50k Arts Degrees) Bill 2025", April 2026.

¹² Australian National University Students' Association, "Governance," *ANUSA* <https://anusa.com.au/about/governance/>.

demand for student support across our institution irrespective of degree or study level, and b) a failure in use of the ANU's existing support systems, indicating there is a gap with the current system to support students through crisis. These numbers have not decreased in 2026, despite there being a generally accepted attitude that Renew ANU is over – evidently, its ramifications continue. In Q1 (Jan-March) of 2026, ANUSA's Student Assistance Team dealt with 858 cases, and in the most recent Q2, there were 756 students who sought assistance.¹³ The work ANUSA does to ensure students are supported whilst at the ANU, whether it relates to academic guidance, legal support, or safety and wellbeing on and off campus, is foundational to our community; however, the rise in casework and increased number of students in need of assistance since the onset of Renew ANU suggests there is significant room for improvement with the ANU's own support services, and an urgent need to investigate the deeply structural and lingering impacts of this restructuring on student wellbeing and experience.

Finally, ANU itself has articulated a vision for the future in its most recent 'ANU by 2030' Strategy launch from August this year. As ANU's Interim Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Rebekah Brown, stated, ANU's strategy is about "the restoration of trust and the embedding of a culture of care for our people."¹⁴ The time for co-design and addressing harms of the past to ensure a sustainable and hopeful future is now – if not because students have been crying out for it, then because the ANU itself has committed to it.

Report Recommendations

1. Embed genuine co-design in governance, ensuring transparent decision-making and meaningful student involvement.
 - a. This should go beyond the role elected student representatives have on established boards and committees, extending the opportunity to engage to the general student population through an established co-design body that platforms student voice.
 - b. Students should be engaged from the outset as partners, rather than student input being tokenistic and having little bearing on the final outcome.
 - c. A student co-design framework must be one that occurs early in design processes, one that is diverse, resourced, and accountable.
2. Publicly acknowledge the harm caused by Renew ANU and its impacts on the student community in 2026.
3. Strengthen communication systems across the University, especially during major structural changes.

¹³ Australian National University Students' Association, *Student Assistance Team Q2 Summary* (Canberra: ANUSA, July 2026), <https://anusa.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/New-Q2-report.pdf>.

¹⁴ Australian National University, "ANU by 2030," *Australian National University*, <https://www.anu.edu.au/about/strategic-planning/anu-by-2030>.

- a. This strengthening should start with central communications but also extend to college and school-level communications to staff and students.
 - b. Communication must not only be online – opportunity for genuine conversation and consultation should exist (i.e., through periodic roundtables, drop-in sessions, or recorded Q&As) alongside electronic communication and updates.
- 4. Establish dedicated and ongoing working groups with marginalised and underrepresented students (women and gender diverse, queer, international, BIPOC, Indigenous, disabled, and parent and/or carer students) to inform policy and governance.
- 5. Create consistent, accessible pathways for reporting concerns, complementing SELT reviews with broader mechanisms for course/system-level feedback.
- 6. Conduct a comprehensive investigation into the mental health and wellbeing impacts of Renew ANU, including ANU's duty of care during restructuring.
- 7. Maintain and continue implementing transparency reforms to Academic Board and ANU Council, including open meetings accessible to all students.
- 8. Re-resource and redesign academic support services, such as Student Hubs, with longer hours, college-specific advice, and reliable communication channels.
- 9. Provide comprehensive and mandatory mental health, sexual assault and sexual harassment, and accessibility training for all staff, especially those in student-facing roles.
- 10. Reform the ANU Act to guarantee genuine student representation across governing bodies, ensuring undergraduate, postgraduate, HDR, domestic, and international students all have a seat at the table.
 - a. A student representative on all Committees of Council.
 - b. ANUSA President as an ex-officio voting member of Council in addition to the two elected undergraduate and postgraduate members on Council.

Final Note

Thank you to all those individuals who contributed to this report through your conversations, time, dedication, and willingness to share; it wouldn't have been written without it. The way forward is through learning and understanding the past, so thank you to all those who helped take a step towards this.