

ACDS Lite Meeting #1

Monday 15 June 2026

“Regulatory Burden and University Science”

Brief welcome

Professor Troy Farrell (Executive Dean, Faculty of Science, QUT) opened the ACDS meeting with a warm welcome and an acknowledgment of country. 22 people attended the zoom meeting, including a good number of Deans of science from around Australia.

Setting the scene

Discussion began by framing the growing, cumulative impact of regulation and compliance across multiple bodies, including TEQSA, the Department of Education, ARC, NHMRC, and emerging ATEC arrangements. Participants highlighted the “layering” effect of requirements, which is increasingly continuous and system-wide. Examples included tighter assessment verification requirements leading to more in-person assessments, and the anticipated impacts of mission-based compacts on student numbers and mobility. Overall, there was concern that regulatory expansion is materially affecting core teaching and research activities.

Where is the regulatory burden being felt?

Assessment requirements were identified as a key pressure point, particularly with integrity concerns and the rapid evolution of technologies such as AI-enabled tools. Foreign interference regulations were also prominent, creating uncertainty in collaborations and delays in hiring. Additional burdens include growth in administrative and reporting tasks, dual-sector misalignment, research costing requirements, and compliance with workplace regulations. Participants noted overlaps and duplication across agencies, contributing to inefficiency. Impacts include erosion of research time, increased reliance on central administration, reduced faculty-level support, and strain on teaching quality and innovation. Professional staff workloads are rising, while academic roles are fragmented by compliance demands. Broader consequences include constrained industry engagement and the emergence of a “two-speed” university system linked to funding pressures.

How could it be better?

Suggestions focused on improving coordination and proportionality. Greater alignment between agencies could reduce duplication, while clearer, risk-based approaches might limit unnecessary burden. There is scope to leverage technology to manage assessment integrity more efficiently. Participants stressed the need to stop or streamline low-value activities, not just add new requirements. Better communication and engagement with academic staff were seen as crucial for successful change. A more deliberate exploration of new teaching models and workload approaches was encouraged. Importantly, ATEC was seen as an opportunity to rationalise oversight if designed to complement, rather than add to, existing frameworks.

Key messages and next steps

Key themes included the unintended consequences of regulation, the need to rebalance towards core academic work, and the importance of articulating the value of university science. Advocacy should occur both externally and within institutions, supported by a coordinated position grounded in shared experience. Potential actions include developing a clear advocacy agenda, contributing to sector-wide discussions on teaching and learning, and identifying priorities for streamlining regulation and supporting sustainable academic practice.

The meeting ended after one hour. All agreed that the format of the meeting was very useful and allowed spirited discussion from a variety of science leaders from the broader ACDS membership. We are encouraged to repeat this format later in 2026.

Prof Troy Farrell (Executive Dean, QUT) and Brian Yates (ACDS Director, Strategic Communications and Engagement), 15 June 2026