

1335th Ordinary General Meeting of the Royal Society of NSW

Minutes

The 1335th Ordinary General Meeting of the Royal Society of NSW took place at 6:00 pm on Wednesday 1 October 2025 in the **Michael Crouch Room, Mitchell Building, State Library of NSW**, followed by an open lecture.

1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The President, Em Prof Christina Slade FRSN presided at the meeting. She welcomed members and guests.

Apologies: Brynn Hibbert and Marian Hibbert

2. MINUTES OF THE 1333rd ORDINARY GENERAL MEETING

Minutes of the 1334th Ordinary General Meeting were reviewed and approved. There were no matters arising.

3. ANNOUNCEMENT OF NAMES OF CANDIDATES FOR FELLOWSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP

The Council has not met since the last OGM, so there were no candidates announced for Members' consideration at this meeting.

4. PRESENTATION OF FELLOWSHIP AND MEMBERSHIP CERTIFICATES

The President presented certificates to the following new Fellows who were present at the meeting:

FELLOWSHIP

Professor Elizelle Cilliers

Laudation – Jua Cilliers is a recognised leader in urban planning, advancing sustainable cities, green infrastructure, and inclusive design through global collaboration.

Professor David Carment

Laudation – David Carment has made a significant contribution to Australian history, though writing, teaching and community engagement.

Christopher Puplick

Laudation – Christopher Puplick has made significant contributions to Australian society as a politician and public intellectual, notably in the fields of public health and human rights.

5. REPORT FROM COUNCIL AND COMMITTEES OF COUNCIL

Reported progress against the Master Strategy, including outcomes of a special Executive Committee meeting focused on refining the Society's value proposition for current and prospective members.

New award introduced: **Herbert Huppert Medal**.

- Honours a distinguished Australian with a long career at Cambridge.
- Enables an Australian based in the UK to deliver a guest lecture (online or in-person if visiting) to the Society, strengthening Australia–UK academic links.
- Eligibility: Australian citizen or someone who has worked/studied in Australia for several years; recent research must be outstanding and of broad interest. Early–mid career applicants with active ties to Australia or plans to return are particularly encouraged.

6. OPEN LECTURE

“Have universities become too political?”

The Honourable Bill Shorten

Vice-Chancellor and President, University of Canberra

in conversation with

Professor Merlin Crossley AM FRSN

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality), UNSW Sydney

Public and government support for universities remains strong in many countries in Asia, but there are concerns in some Western countries. In some places, governments are clashing with universities, while in others, the rising costs of education and research have triggered questions about whether students and the public are getting value for money.

Faced with funding the rising costs of operation in a technologically complex, competitive, and globalised world, university leaders sometimes go beyond their traditional roles as experts in learning and teaching and make promises about solving the world's problems.

Is this working, and if not, how should public good, not-for-profit education and research institutions best communicate their missions and needs?

The accomplished political leader and now Vice-Chancellor of the University of Canberra, the Hon. Bill Shorten, will explore what universities are for and what they can do to best fulfil their important public roles. With perspectives from his time in politics, his time as a student, his knowledge of what Australians value, Bill Shorten is ideally placed to provide fresh insights into how we can ensure that Australian universities continue to be supported to deliver. In this event, Bill Shorten will converse with Merlin Crossley, an academic with decades of experience in leadership at Australian universities, as well as firsthand knowledge of teaching and research in the fast-moving field of molecular genetics.

About the speakers

Bill Shorten is well known in Australian public life for his leadership in politics, social reform, and now higher education. He served as the Leader of the Australian Labor Party and Opposition Leader from 2013 to 2019, contesting two federal elections. A key architect of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Bill Shorten held multiple ministerial roles across governments led by Julia Gillard, Kevin Rudd, and Anthony Albanese, including portfolios in education, financial services, employment, government services, and the NDIS.

Before entering Parliament in 2007, Mr Shorten was the National Secretary of the Australian Workers' Union, where he led Australia's oldest union and served as a director of Australian Super. He holds degrees in arts and law from Monash University and an MBA from the University of Melbourne.

In January 2025, Bill Shorten transitioned from politics to academia, becoming Vice-Chancellor and President of the University of Canberra (UC). His vision for UC centres on improving student experience, research impact, and community engagement to develop a modern Australian university that does not just react to society's demands but anticipates them. He believes that education is the most powerful force for equality and democratic resilience.

Merlin Crossley is Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality) at UNSW Sydney. His lab works on CRISPR gene editing to treat inherited blood diseases. He is known for characterising mutations that alter gene expression and cause Hemophilia B Leyden or the Hereditary Persistence of Fetal Hemoglobin, and for cloning new genes that modulate gene expression.

He has worked or studied at Melbourne, Monash, Oxford, Harvard, Sydney, and UNSW. He is an enthusiastic science communicator, Chair of the Editorial Board of The Conversation, Chair of UNSW Press, Deputy Director of the Australian Science Media Centre, an Honorary Associate of the Australian Museum, a member of the LifeBlood ethics committee, and a scientific advisor to Australian Sickle Cell Advocacy.

He has received multiple awards, including a Rhodes Scholarship, the 2020 NSW Premier's Award for Medical Biological Science, and, in 2021, a new species of iridescent butterfly bobtail squid was named in his honour – *Iridoteuthis merlini* – Merlin's bobtail squid.

7. VOTE OF THANKS

A vote of thanks was given by Em Prof Christina Slade FRSN.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

9. CLOSE

The President closed the meeting at 7:32 pm.

The minutes were recorded by the Secretary, Em. Prof Trevor Brown FRSN.

Signed as a true record
Em Prof Christina Slade FRSN
President