Australian Government

Department of Education

2024 Mission-Based Compact Between the Commonwealth of Australia and The University of Sydney

Purpose:

This compact is an agreement between the Commonwealth and the University. Entering into a Compact is one of the quality and accountability requirements, which a higher education provider must meet under the *Higher Education Support Act* 2003 (HESA) as a condition of receiving a grant. Specifically, subsection 19-110(1) of HESA requires that Table A and Table B providers must, in respect of each year for which a grant is paid to the provider under HESA, enter into a Mission--Based Compact with the Commonwealth for a period that includes that year.

All strategies should provide qualitative and/or quantitative measures of assessment.

Mission and Strategic Planning:

Our Sydney in 2032 strategy articulates the University's vision: "Building on the First Nations knowledge of these lands, we are Australia's first university, Sydney's university and a great global university."

2024 is the second year of work to deliver on our priority aspirations for the decade. Those aspirations are for:

- our student-focused education to be transformational
- our community to thrive through diversity
- our research to be excellent, tackle the greatest challenges and contribute to the common good
- the University to be "a better place to work, and a place that works better".

We report regularly to our Senate and annually to the NSW Parliament on progress towards our strategic goals.

Approach to national and sector priorities
Workforce and skill needs
Our graduates are sought after globally for their knowledge, qualities, and transferable skills. By focusing on industry engagement in teaching and learning, responsible leadership in the innovative use of generative Artificial Intelligence, and high-quality research training, we are addressing national priorities in agriculture, clean energy, defence, engineering, computer science, data analysis, teaching, veterinary sciences, the health workforce and many other areas.

We are equipping our graduates to be lifelong learners, and are creating short courses to support this. We will continue to report annually on our progress through the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF) scheme.

Ensuring student and staff safety
Our commitment to protecting the mental and physical safety and wellbeing of our students and staff includes a robust Support for Students policy framework and related student services. We are committed to publishing annually a report on sexual misconduct.

Cyber and data security
Our rigorous, standards-based approach to managing cyber security risks is fundamental to our ability to excel in research and education. All members of our community share a responsibility to help protect the community from cyber security threats, therefore we provide mandatory training to all staff and deliver extensive cyber security education, training, and research.

Upholding freedom of speech and academic freedom
Our Charter of Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom underpins our approach to fostering free inquiry and academic debate. As a member of the Australia Section of Scholars at Risk we provide fellowships for foreign academics or higher degree by research students facing persecution or other threats. In 2023, we launched online training for students covering the University's values and expectations regarding behaviour in different contexts. We report annually to the NSW Parliament on our actions to protect and uphold freedom of speech and academic freedom.

Countering foreign interference
International collaborations are fundamental to our mission and we provide a range of supporting material to our staff, guided by all relevant Australian laws, the government's latest Guidelines to Counter Foreign Interference in the Australian University Sector and our own International collaboration principles. We refresh annually an integrated foreign interference plan, which complies or aligns with the various relevant federal laws and guidelines. We report regularly on our mitigation priorities, approach, incidents and emerging issues to the University's Senate Performance and Risk Committee.

Strategies for Improving Equality of Opportunity in Higher Education:

Equity is a key element of the University's overarching institutional strategic agenda. We are committed to enabling more students from under-represented backgrounds to enrol at the University and succeed.

Our support for identified groups starts with early outreach. In partnership with schools and community organisations, we deliver an extensive range of programs targeting prospective students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, regional and remote, and low-socioeconomic status (low-SES) backgrounds through residentials, on-campus experiences, school and community visits, webinars and 1:1 consultations.

We offer entry schemes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, regional and remote, and low-SES prospective students that provide admission at a lower ATAR, with duration-degree scholarships provided to all low-SES students. Other equity cohorts can access scholarships through a dedicated, centralised scholarship application.

We offer holistic support for all enrolled students from under-represented backgrounds, with a focus on enabling student success through transition programs, social connections and networks, specialised staff support, mentoring, financial support, and dedicated spaces.

The Gadigal Centre provides pastoral and academic support for current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The centre's MOBS cultural enrichment and peer mentoring program supports cultural identity, leadership, and sense of belonging in the community – ensuring students succeed in their academic goals and future careers.

Our new MySydney Scholars Program aligns with the government's plans to expand access. It provides dedicated support for students from low-SES backgrounds to succeed in their studies, through connection with peers, supporting costs of living and studying, enabling academic success, and developing professional skills and confidence. Under MySydney, we have seen a 30 per cent increase in students enrolling from low-SES areas. Those students have reported feeling supported by the University and feeling a sense of belonging.

The University is committed to providing an accessible and supportive environment where students with disability can succeed. Each student receives a personalised academic plan, detailing course requirements and recommended adjustments and learning supports to assist students with disability and student carers. This plan is used to formally communicate to staff the adjustments that the student is eligible to access and is reviewed each semester.

Given intersectionality between identities, many students are part of multiple under-represented groups, and there is a predominance of students who are also from rural/remote areas or first in family to attend university. We provide financial and accommodation support to these students, many of whom are moving to Sydney for the first time.

We use the guiding principles of the Student Equity in Higher Education Evaluation Framework to evaluate our outreach activities. We measure all programs based on participant surveys and focus group responses in relation to objective-based outcomes, attendance rates, and offer, enrolment and retention data. We evaluate the student experience by measuring belonging, adjusting, satisfaction, skills development, confidence, support, and wellbeing, and engage students as partners to co-design future support initiatives and iterative improvement of programs.

In 2024, we anticipate our enrolment of Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP) to be such that we won't receive a Higher Education Continuity Guarantee (HECG) Grant. We will continue to work closely with the Department to ensure our provision of a HECG Equity Plan as required and as our enrolment profile for 2024 is confirmed.

Strategies for Improving Teaching and Learning:

The University's 2032 Strategy aspires to deliver a transformational education that puts students at the centre so that a greater diversity of students succeed at Sydney.

Our Teaching and Learning Strategy 2023–2025 (developed through extensive consultation with students and faculties) sets the vision and provides a roadmap, committing us to:

- involve students as partners in their own lifelong learning journey
- deliver effective blended learning experiences to maximise engagement and outcomes
- recognise, support and reward colleagues for student-centred teaching innovation
- transform assessment and feedback practices
- use data and insights meaningfully to enhance student learning
- become an in-demand provider of dynamic lifelong learning.

In 2023, we commenced work on the Sydney Curriculum program, which will deliver transformative initiatives and curriculum reform to ensure a high-quality educational experience for our students and the sustainability of the University's course profile, teaching delivery and associated administration.

Our education-focused staff play a pivotal role in realising our strategic aspirations, including through transforming our curriculum and our students' learning experience. Our recruitment of more than 300 new academic staff will enable us to accelerate our transformation.

In 2023, we released a new resource, co-created with students, to help students and staff improve their understanding of generative AI in a principled and safe way. The University's proactive and agile leadership in embracing generative AI as an educational tool has established us at the forefront of this space internationally.

To implement changes to the *Higher Education Support Act*, in 2023 we introduced a new Support for Students Policy that sets out our processes for identifying and supporting students at risk of not successfully completing their studies. Cohort-specific support is provided for students new to Sydney, such as international students, Indigenous students, or students from low-SES backgrounds. We will review implementation of this policy annually, including resources required to maintain effective support to students and lessons learned. Outcomes of the annual review will be reported to and discussed by the University Executive and Academic Board.

Our graduates are already much in demand, and we are working to further enhance how we support their employability and work-integrated learning (WIL). In 2023, we started work to better align a number of key internal services and functions to maximise their impact, including integration with government priorities such as under the National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund (NPILF). We also continue to grow our program of Industry and Community Project Units, which create an impactful WIL opportunity for every University of Sydney student, significantly increasing student participation and partner engagement by addressing authentic and challenging problems confronting industry, government, and community organisations.

Our performance in teaching, learning and graduate outcomes is measured through various external ranking surveys (e.g. QILT Student Experience, QILT Graduate Outcomes, and the AFR Best Universities Ranking). We also monitor internal Unit of Study surveys, University performance metrics linked to our strategic plan, and an enterprise risk matrix to measure progress against our strategies to improve teaching and learning; reporting regularly to the University Senate.

Strategies for Improving Research, Research Training, and Innovation:

Under our 2032 Strategy, we aspire to enable research that is excellent, tackles the greatest challenges and contributes to the common good. Our key research priorities are to:

- foster a culture where our Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students and academics can excel, engage, and have impact
- focus investment on research with an excellent track record, or the strongest potential to deliver excellence
- leverage our comprehensiveness and partnerships to drive multidisciplinary problem-solving.

The University has embarked upon a suite of complementary strategic initiatives designed to together improve research, research training and innovation in support of these priorities, which are overseen by dedicated executive steering committees. The first of these initiatives, launched in 2023, is the new Sydney Horizon Fellowships scheme.

Designed to have real-world impact on our most challenging societal problems, the scheme empowers up to 40 of the world's most talented emerging academics to undertake innovative research that will build our understanding of, and resilience to, climate change; improve health outcomes; and create a more sustainable world.

Other initiatives in development include:

- a comprehensive training and development program supporting early and mid-career researchers to thrive in academia
- the creation of a Graduate Research School, to be launched in 2025, to support higher degree by research students by providing an improved student experience, outstanding supervision, and researcher training. We will leverage our strong external partnerships to upscale industry engagement ensuring HDR research has impact for end users and preparing our alumni for a range of clear career pathways in which they can take leadership roles
- establishing new whole-of-university multidisciplinary initiatives (MDIs) in identified areas of research strength and national need (the Net Zero Initiative will be launched as the Sydney Net Zero Institute MDI in 2024 and a second MDI will be developed during 2024)
- new programs to support an institutional focus on increasing research commercialisation and translation (including social enterprise) – these include an expanded Research Impact Proof-of-Concept Fund, the PERIscope Commercialisation Awards and engagement events such as an annual 'lab to market' showcase of research impact through commercialisation
- major digital and physical research infrastructure projects, including myResearchSydney (a new research management system that enables greater efficiency) and a roadmap for the University's high performance computing infrastructure, which is crucial for empowering researchers
- the Sydney Biomedical Accelerator, a visionary partnership between the University and Sydney Local Health District to create a world-leading health, education, and biomedical research complex by 2027.

The University has a comprehensive set of research performance metrics linked to our strategic plan and enterprise risk matrix to measure progress against these goals, which are reported regularly to the University Senate.

Strategies for Engaging with Industry:

By working with our partners and communities we are all stronger, and the impact and influence of our research and teaching is greater. Our 2032 Strategy aims to ensure that the work of the University is more compelling, and more important to society, than at any other time in our history; recognising that partnership, including with industry, is essential for us to meet this ambition.

Our strategy formally recognises that most complex problems require partnerships to deliver solutions. By 2032, we aim to be consistently great partners, and people will seek us out as a partner of choice in our local, national, and international communities.

We offer opportunities for industry to collaborate with our researchers, access research facilities, obtain consultancy services, work with our students, or license or invest in our large portfolio of investments.

To ensure strategic collaboration, we maintain three key levels of external engagement and partnership management. Faculty external engagement teams manage faculty-specific partnerships and relationships directly. A University-wide external engagement function supports the faculties and manages multi-faculty partnerships. This function allows for personalised and consistent relationship management over time and without the constraints of being project based.

The External Engagement Community of Practice brings together leaders in the external engagement community to share information and ensure best practice is developed and embedded across our strategic priorities.

Our partners are diverse in their size, their objectives, and their expectations. Embracing this diversity, we work with each of them to create a shared understanding of what a successful partnership looks like – whether they be a multinational company, a public organisation, a donor, one of our alumni, or a local community group. We seek to make all our partners feel welcome, and we will celebrate with them the positive impact of our collaboration.

We go out of our way to resolve issues that stand in the way of creating and sustaining effective partnerships. We value and reward the ability to nurture strong, enduring partnerships across our community. While these relationships will change over time, we continually invest in the skills and knowledge of our staff, so that we ensure a consistently positive partnership experience.

To deliver, we invest more time and attention into personal interactions with our current and potential partners, and in the systems that support our people to be great partners. This enables us to respond more quickly to change and opportunity brought about by digital disruption, or new funding opportunities to meet government priorities.

They – and the broader community – acknowledge, understand, and value our work. Our reputation as an excellent collaborator helps decision-makers to understand and respect our contribution to society.

SIGNED for and on behalf of
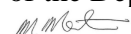
THE COMMONWEALTH OF
AUSTRALIA

by

Madonna Morton

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Full name (please print)

First Assistant Secretary

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Position

of the Department of Education

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Signature

29/05/2024

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Date

SIGNED for and on behalf of

THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

by

Professor Mark Scott AO
_____
Full name (please print)

Vice-Chancellor and President
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Position

Mark Scott (signature)

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Signature

In the presence of:

Mr Tim Payne
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Witness (please print)

**Director, Higher Education Policy and
Projects**
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Position or profession of witness (please
print)

Tim Payne (signature)

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