



UNSW Widening Participation Strategy to 2035





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Acknowledgement of Country

UNSW respectfully acknowledges the Bidjigal, Biripai, Dharug, Gadigal, Gumbaynggirr, Ngunnawal and Wiradjuri peoples, on whose unceded lands we are privileged to learn, teach and work. We honour the Elders of these Nations, as well as broader Nations that we walk together with, past and present, and acknowledge their ongoing connection to culture, community and Country.

Knowing I could enter a top university despite limited school resources and inequities lifted a huge weight off my shoulders. Now, as a University Ambassador, I help students like me see that their experiences belong in higher education and strengthen UNSW's diversity.

Dinara,
UNSW Student

Introduction

At UNSW, student equity is central to our mission. We are committed to widening access, improving retention and ensuring student success across the full educational journey – from pre-tertiary outreach and undergraduate study through to postgraduate and lifelong learning.

Our institutional Strategy, Progress for All, sets a bold vision for transformative innovation, inclusive education and real-world impact. This Widening Participation Strategy to 2035 builds on that vision by setting out how UNSW will address systemic barriers and expand opportunities for students historically underrepresented in higher education.

The Australian Universities Accord Final Report underscores the national imperative to lift tertiary attainment to 80% by 2050, including raising university attainment from 45% to 55%. Importantly, it calls for representational parity across four priority cohorts: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students from low socio-economic backgrounds, students from regional and remote areas, and students with disability. This shift from measuring access alone to focusing on participation, retention and completion is one that aligns strongly with UNSW's longstanding approach.

We have sound foundations to build upon, currently one in four commencing undergraduate students come from socio-educationally disadvantaged schools and low-SES backgrounds and 60% come from NSW public schools. This progress reflects the impact of our deep partnerships with schools, TAFE, community organisations and philanthropic supporters.

Yet significant challenges remain. Gaps in retention and success, inequitable experiences of teaching and support and systemic barriers that persist across different stages of study. We know that one-size-fits-all models of curriculum and services disproportionately disadvantage equity cohorts, and that structural changes to teaching, support, and culture are required to achieve parity. Central to this is providing an environment that is empowering, free of racism and conducive to the success of student equity cohorts.

As a leading Australian university, UNSW has both the capability and the responsibility to drive change within our institution and across the sector. This Strategy consolidates the gains we have made, responds to the challenges outlined in the Accord and commits us to evidence-based action that expands opportunity, improves success and ensures lasting impact for students, communities and the nation.

Widening participation in higher education and creating the environment for students to thrive are fundamental elements of the UNSW Strategy: Progress for All. We know that equity, diversity and inclusion are the wellspring of individual and institutional excellence, bringing expansive experiences and talents together for the benefit of all. This work will support faculties and divisions across the University in ensuring access to a UNSW education and the opportunities it provides are ever more inclusive, equitable and far-reaching.

Professor Attila Brungs,
Vice-Chancellor and President

Our mission

UNSW's mission is to create an environment that addresses systemic barriers and expands opportunities for students from historically underrepresented backgrounds to access and succeed at university and beyond.

Our approach

We will take a whole-of-university approach, embedding student equity as a shared responsibility across all areas of UNSW. Our progress will be measured through evidence and collaboration and sustained through long-term investment and direct support for students from equity backgrounds.

A timeline of equity in higher education

UNSW Sydney

UNSW Widening Participation Strategy to 2035



Strategy overview

This Strategy lays the foundations for expanded opportunities for access to UNSW for equity cohorts and provides another pathway for Indigenous Australians. By creating new inclusive pathways and removing barriers, we take a critical step towards reshaping higher education into a space where Indigenous students can thrive, lead and define their own futures on their own terms. A more inclusive higher education system.

Professor Leanne Holt,
Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Indigenous

The Widening Participation Strategy is a key enabler of UNSW's institutional Strategy, Progress for All. It sits within Pillar 7: Advance economic and social prosperity and aligns with:

- Objective 1: an open, connected, accessible University that takes responsibility for improving lives, and
- Objective 2: lifelong education that promotes career success and empowers individuals to have societal impact.

To achieve this, the Widening Participation Strategy is structured around five interconnected pillars:

Pillar 1 Access and participation

Broaden access to UNSW for students from underrepresented and systemically disadvantaged groups

Pillar 2 Inclusive teaching and learning

Support educators to embed best-practice approaches to inclusive teaching and learning for equity cohorts

Pillar 3 Student success and experience

Deliver relevant and effective targeted initiatives that enhance belonging, safety and engagement for equity cohorts at key transition points throughout the student journey

Pillar 4 Leadership and innovation

Advance and accelerate innovation in student equity and widening participation across the sector

Pillar 5 Students as partners

Ensure students from equity cohorts are active partners in shaping initiatives and contributing to UNSW's inclusive culture

Goals and objectives

Pillar 1

Access and participation

Goal

Broaden access to UNSW for students from underrepresented and systemically disadvantaged groups

We will broaden and diversify our pathways so that more students from historically underrepresented groups can enter and succeed. Our programs will be designed to be accessible and responsive to the intersectional and compounded barriers many students face. We will refine existing programs and explore flexible, modular qualifications in line with new directions in higher education.

Objectives

1. Expand educational outreach initiatives to prepare students for academic transition and success and nurture an early sense of belonging at UNSW.
2. Extend and promote access pathways to a broader range of underrepresented and non-traditional cohorts, including:
 - Students from low SES backgrounds* including recent school leavers and mature age
 - Students with disability*

- Students from regional and remote areas *
 - Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students*
 - Students at educationally disadvantaged schools
 - Students from refugee backgrounds
 - Students who are first in family to attend university
 - Young people in the youth justice system
 - Students with TAFE qualifications.
3. Increase opportunities at UNSW for students with lower ATAR achievement.
 4. Develop modular, stackable and transferable qualifications aligned with national frameworks.
 5. Build a sustainable base of philanthropic funding for outreach programs, scholarships, grants and awards to address systemic and financial barriers.

* Cohorts identified by The Australian Universities Accord Final Report as substantially underrepresented in higher education.

Pillar 2

Inclusive teaching and learning

Goal

Support educators to embed best-practice approaches to inclusive teaching and learning for equity cohorts

As our student community becomes increasingly diverse, our learning environments, teaching practices and systems must evolve to meet their needs. UNSW will invest in the capability of educators and the design of curricula, assessments and learning environments to ensure inclusivity is embedded across all programs.

Objectives

1. Build staff capability to deliver inclusive teaching and learning, with a focus on understanding the needs of equity cohorts.
2. Embed Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a foundational commitment across all programs and modes of delivery.
3. Improve academic preparedness of equity cohorts through curriculum renewal that embeds academic literacies and incorporates competency-based assessment in relevant courses.
4. Improve institutional data literacy to monitor performance and inform inclusive teaching and learning strategies.
5. Develop and implement an Indigenous curriculum framework and strategy for teaching and learning.
6. Enhance first-year digital learning environments to better prepare equity cohorts for academic success.
7. Ensure educational transformation projects adopt an equity lens and engage equity cohorts in partnership and co-design.

Pillar 3

Student success and experience

Goal

Deliver relevant and effective targeted initiatives that enhance belonging, safety and engagement for equity cohorts at key transition points throughout the student journey

The student experience is shaped by more than academic studies, and equity cohorts often face unique challenges in fully participating at university. UNSW's ambition is to strengthen systems and services that foster early belonging, enable access to co-curricular activities, and create safe, inclusive environments.

Objectives

1. Ensure all current and new student success and experience initiatives are evidence-based, student-informed and demonstrate measurable impact.
2. Embed a culture of continuous improvement for student success and experience programs and service delivery.
3. Strengthen staff understanding of newly targeted equity cohorts and build capability to deliver inclusive services.
4. Enhance institutional systems for the early identification of students who require additional support to succeed.
5. Implement a whole-of-university model for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander student success and targeted opportunities.
6. Elevate and expand employability activities that improve graduate outcomes for equity cohorts.
7. Expand participation subsidies for Work Integrated Learning opportunities.
8. Provide wraparound financial and social supports, including equity scholarships, grants, awards, and access to affordable student accommodation.

Pillar 4

Leadership and innovation

Goal

Advance and accelerate innovation in student equity and widening participation across the sector

UNSW will contribute thought leadership by translating research into practice and sharing insights that inform national policy and institutional strategies. We will work with partners to challenge structural barriers and champion approaches that are scalable, sustainable and adaptable across the higher education sector to expand access and success for underrepresented students everywhere.

Objectives

1. Establish a Centre for Innovation in Student Equity to accelerate to sector-wide progress and expand the University's influence and reputation.
2. Advocate for the removal of structural barriers in higher education through research, thought leadership and resource development.
3. Publish best-practice approaches co-designed with students to support University stakeholders and the broader higher education sector to effectively implement widening participation strategies.
4. Develop new strategic partnerships that are cross-sectorial and cross-university to drive innovative approaches to addressing systemic barriers for equity cohorts.

Pillar 5

Students as partners

Goal

Ensure students from equity cohorts are active partners in shaping initiatives and contributing to UNSW's inclusive culture

Students bring essential perspectives to the design and delivery of equity initiatives. UNSW will strengthen its partnership with students by embedding their voices in decision-making, expanding opportunities for leadership and amplifying their lived experiences to drive a more inclusive culture.

Objectives

1. Expand consultation and co-design with students from equity cohorts to inform key University initiatives.
2. Amplify and elevate the lived experiences of students from equity cohorts to support a sense of belonging and representation across UNSW.
3. Enhance the capability of University Ambassadors as leaders in student equity through targeted training and professional development such as cultural responsiveness and anti-racism training.
4. Increase access to employment and leadership opportunities for students from equity cohorts.



Widening participation is not only a moral imperative, it's a national priority. This work puts UNSW at the forefront of the reform agenda laid out by the Australian Universities Accord, taking a whole-of-university approach to equity that drives access, outcomes and transformation.

Verity Firth,
Vice-President, Societal
Impact, Equity and
Engagement

When students can see themselves at university early on, everything shifts. Effective educational outreach establishes an early sense of belonging amongst students and this is one of the strongest drivers for long-term participation and success.

Mary Teague,
Director, Student
Equity



The prioritisation of equity at UNSW means that students like me are welcomed into an institution that values our intelligence, capability and unique perspectives. Coming to UNSW through the Gateway Admissions Pathway, I felt supported in my studies and my transition to living in a big city. That experience motivated me to become a University Ambassador and support other students on a similar journey.

Mitch, UNSW Student



Case study

Faculty of Arts, Design & Architecture

UNSW Sydney

UNSW ADA is a faculty committed to diversity and inclusion. With world-leading researchers, educators, and practitioners dedicated to social justice, our multifaceted approach to widening participation is creative, collaborative, and innovative. It is also personal: many of us are first in family to attend university. We're tremendously proud that 30% of our undergraduate cohort now comes from low-SES and educationally disadvantaged schools. In ADA we remain unwavering in our commitment to fostering continuous and sustainable advancements in educational equity.

Professor Claire Annesley,
Dean, Faculty of Arts, Design
& Architecture (ADA)

The Faculty of Arts, Design & Architecture (ADA) is committed to equitable access, participation and success for students from underrepresented and marginalised backgrounds.

Guided by the ADA2051 Strategy, equity is embedded across every stage of the student experience—from program design and learning environments to student support.

Key initiatives implemented by the faculty

ADA's holistic approach to widening participation is informed by student feedback and evidence-based practice, ensuring initiatives are continuously refined and co-designed with students and partners.

Redesigned programs for flexibility and access

In response to feedback from current and future students, ADA conducted a comprehensive review and redesign of its undergraduate programs, emphasising:

- Flexible structures that support both breadth and focus
- Multiple access pathways, including over a dozen options such as the Gateway Admission Pathway and Portfolio Entry
- Clear connections to Work Integrated Learning and employability.

Reimagined orientation and belonging

Recognising the importance of transition support, ADA invested in early, equity-informed orientation strategies, including:

- Co-designed onboarding packs with embedded equity content
- Refined communication and registration processes for incoming students
- Interactive orientation events that foster belonging and confidence
- An ADA Professional Development Framework, which serves as the model for the UNSW-wide framework and supports educators to embed inclusive and equitable teaching practices across all programs.

Delivered targeted, evidence-based support

ADA collaborates with current students to design targeted support tailored to evolving needs, including:

- Work Integrated Learning stipends
- Textbook support schemes
- Materials grants for first-year students
- Ongoing evaluation to ensure support remains responsive and effective.

Achievements

Since 2020, ADA has:



Nearly doubled its access rate of students who make up the Gateway Equity Target cohort, reaching

29.6%
in 2025.



Increased undergraduate satisfaction from

73%
to
80%
in 2024.



Improved retention of students from Gateway schools by

9.7%
&
7.8%
in students from low-SES areas.



Achieved success rates for students from Gateway schools of

93%
&
95%
for students from low-SES areas.

Case study

Faculty of Science

UNSW Sydney



We've built a structured, evidence-informed approach to supporting equity cohorts, ensuring early diagnostics, inclusive teaching and practical support like textbook access, travel support, and Peer Assisted Study Sessions. These changes are already shaping a more inclusive learning environment and lifting academic outcomes in the faculty of Science.

Professor Sven Rogge,
Dean, Faculty of
Science

The Faculty of Science strives to create an equitable place of work and study that drives innovation, productivity and meaningful progress.

Guided by its 10-Year Strategy, the faculty places educational access, participation and success at the heart of its vision. It is dedicated to removing structural barriers and expanding Science education opportunities for students from underrepresented backgrounds. This commitment is reflected through tailored engagement initiatives, inclusive entry pathways and targeted support programs designed to enable every student to thrive.

Key initiatives

Science's approach is grounded in evidence-based practice and student feedback and ensures initiatives are continuously refined and responsive to diverse student needs.

Reduced financial barriers to participation

To address the ongoing financial pressures faced by students from equity backgrounds, Science introduced targeted financial grants, including:

- Travel grants to support commuting to and from campus
- Course and study materials grants
- Work Integrated Learning participation grants.

Introduced targeted early intervention support

To identify and support students at risk of academic disengagement, Science developed a cross-unit Early Intervention Program. The program focuses on timely, individualised outreach and academic support.

Improved access to learning accommodations

In partnership with Equitable Learning Services (ELS), the UNSW Health Clinic, and the School of Psychology, Science developed a subsidy to support the Specific Learning Disability and ADHD Assessment Subsidy developed by ELS. This subsidy provides funding for eligible students to access psychological assessments that would enable them to receive a diagnosis and access learning accommodations and support plans.

Strengthened academic connection through peer learning

Science enhanced access to academic mentoring through the Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) program. In partnership with the central PASS and Nexus teams, Science evaluated the program, developed a convenor toolkit, and expanded participation. Resulting in 40 Science courses now engaged with PASS—the most of any UNSW faculty.

Created inclusive spaces for after-hours learning

In response to student feedback, Science supported the creation and expansion of School Drop-In Centres, offering free after-hours tutoring. Three of the Faculty's eight schools now run these sessions, improving accessibility for students who require flexible study support.

Centralised learning resources for Gateway students

In collaboration with the Science Education Team and the Central Student Learning Team, the Faculty launched the Science Gateway Equity Target Moodle Resource Bank—a central hub for students outlining Faculty and University specific support resources for students as part of the Gateway Equity Target Cohort.

Achievements

Since 2020, Science has:



Increased its access rate of students who make up the Gateway Equity Target cohort, from

17.1%
to
24.8%
as of 2025.



Achieved success rates for students from Gateway schools of

91%
&
88%
for students from low-SES areas in 2024.



Increased its participation rate of students who make up the Gateway Equity Target cohort, from

15.5%
to
20.5%
as of 2025.



Retention for students who entered through the Gateway Admission Pathway has increased by 10% since 2021, reaching

81%
(2% higher than the overall domestic undergraduate Science cohort).

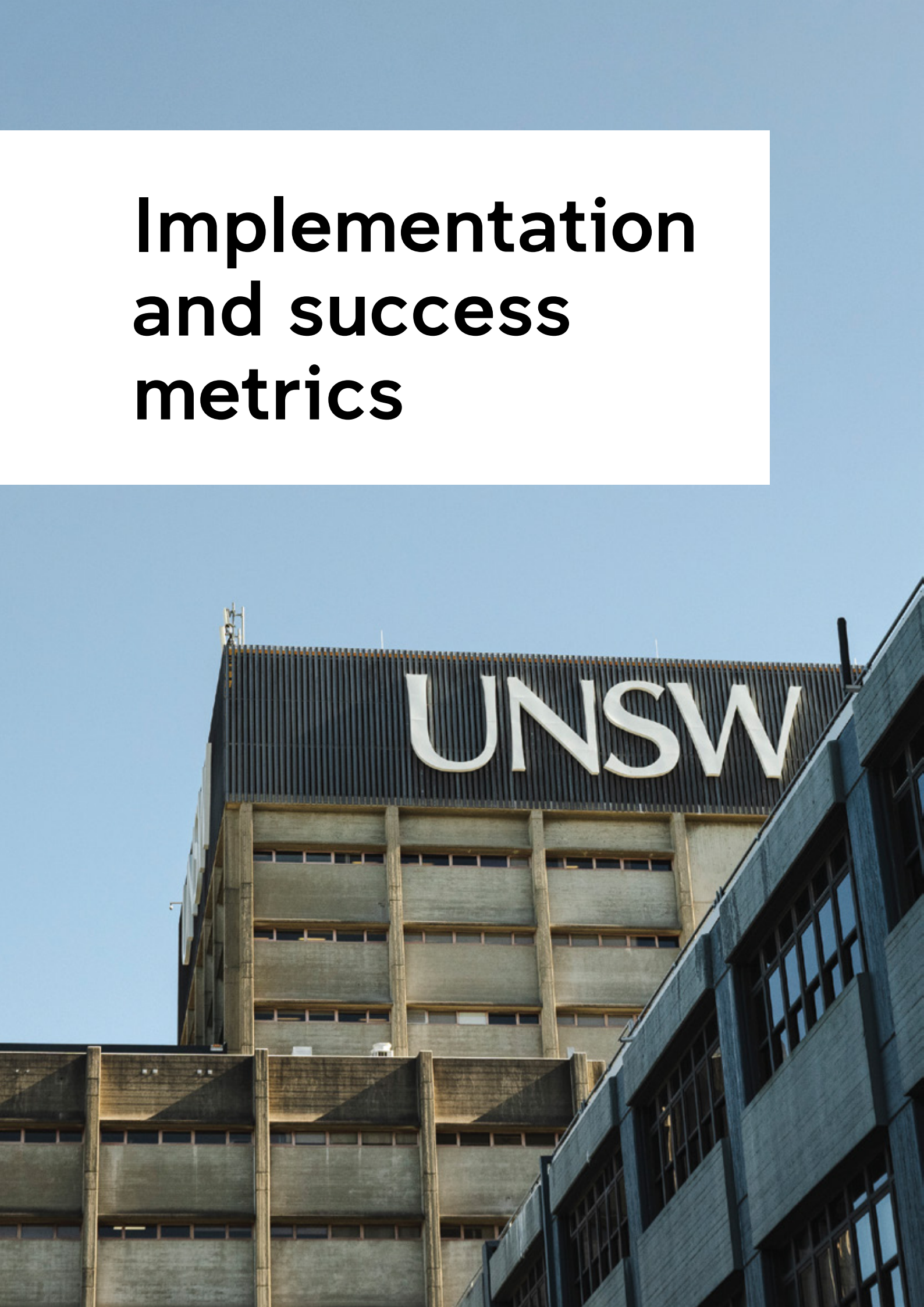
Supporting student success requires more than aspiration—it requires intentional design. In Science, we are applying data-informed approaches to identify learning needs early and provide academic support, resources and peer learning opportunities that foster equitable outcomes.

Associate Professor
Rebecca LeBard,
Associate Dean
Education, Faculty
of Science



As someone who arrived in Australia as an asylum seeker, equitable access to education changed my life. UNSW Gateway didn't just open academic doors, it gave me a sense of belonging and purpose. Now, as a University Ambassador, I'm proud to support other students from underrepresented backgrounds to believe that their stories, too, belong in higher education.

Hasti, UNSW Student



Implementation and success metrics

UNSW will implement this Strategy at an unprecedented time of change in the local and global environments. This makes implementation planning and delivery critical to its success.

In 2025, we will plan the outputs needed to achieve the ambitious goals outlined in this Strategy. Then, Widening Participation Operational Plans will guide the Strategy’s delivery over three trienniums.

Foundational year 2025
Triennium 1 2026 – 2028
Triennium 2 2029 – 2031
Triennium 3 2032 – 2034

Measures of success

We will measure the success of this Strategy using a range of key performance indicators and by tracking the completion of outputs set out in the triennium Operational Plans.

The following indicators will be measured for the below target equity groups and for students coming to UNSW through the below entry schemes and pathways.

This Strategy sets out access rate targets for each key equity groups and commits to monitoring all other indicators for each equity group.

Measures

- Access rates
- Matriculation rates from pathway programs to UNSW degrees
- Weighted average marks
- Success rates
- Retention rates
- Student Experience data

Target groups

- Students from low SES backgrounds
- Students from regional/remote areas
- Students with disability

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students
- Students from educationally disadvantaged schools
- Students from refugee backgrounds
- Students who are first in family to attend university
- Young people with experience in the youth justice system
- Students with a military service background

Entry schemes into UNSW

- Gateway Admission Pathway
- Indigenous Admission Scheme
- TAFE Pathways Program
- Medicine Rural Entry Scheme
- Portfolio Entry and Critical Thinkers Entry Scheme

Pathways into UNSW

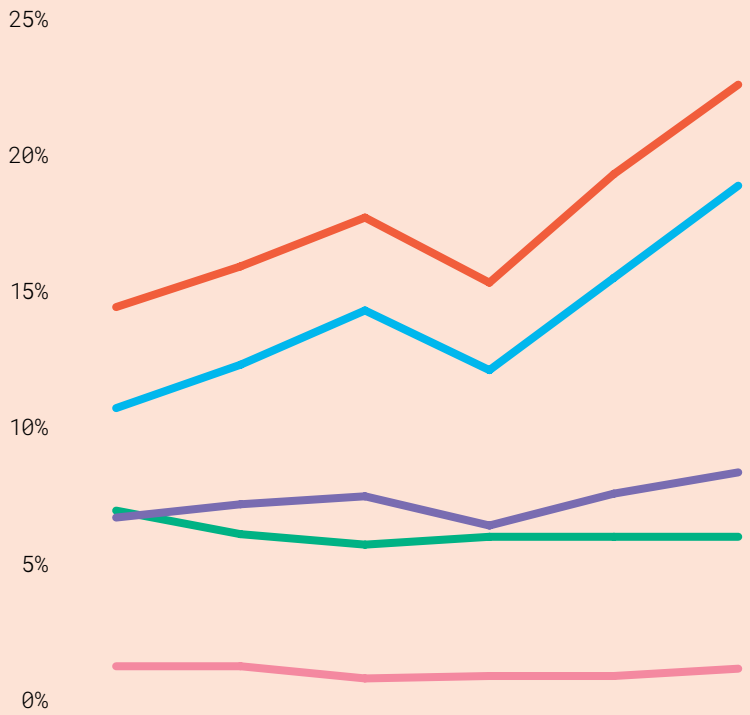
- University Preparation Program
- Indigenous Pre-Program
- UNSW Diploma

Current Access Rates

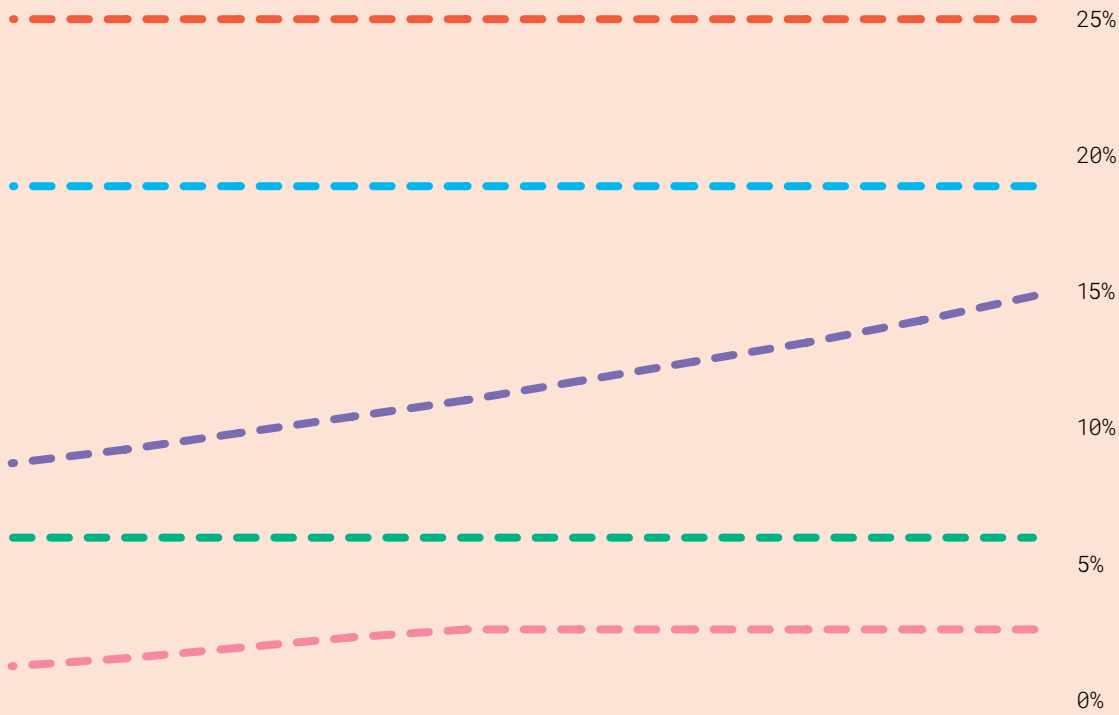
Target Access Rates

Targets have been set for access rates for key equity cohorts and are outlined below. Although formal targets are not set for newly recognised equity cohorts or for additional metrics of weighted average marks, success and retention, these will be monitored throughout the life of the Strategy.

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UNSW Widening Participation Strategy to 2035



Source: Data sourced from internal UNSW systems and the Australian Government, Department of Education, *Higher Education Statistics*: www.education.gov.au/higher-education-statistics





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Cricos code 00098G



UNSW
SYDNEY