



NSW Department of Education



Public Partnerships for Public Benefit

The NSW Higher Education Strategy 2025-29



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge that across NSW we live and work on Aboriginal land made up of many Countries.

We sincerely pay our respects to Elders past and present and celebrate the rich contribution Aboriginal peoples make to Australia and the diverse and unique cultural and spiritual relationships Aboriginal peoples have to Country.

The NSW Department of Education is committed to being a culturally responsive and inclusive education system where every Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander student is known, valued and cared for to learn, grow and belong.

We acknowledge our longstanding partnership agreement with the NSW AECG Inc. which is based on the principles of respect, commitment, collaboration, and accountability to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal learners.

Equity is a key priority in Public Partnerships for Public Benefit: The NSW Higher Education Strategy 2025-29. We are committed to giving every Aboriginal learner the opportunity to study a university degree.

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Introduction

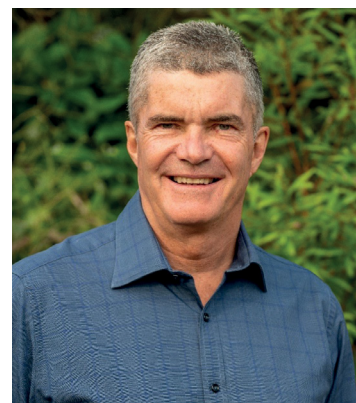
Minister's foreword

Universities are a vital resource for NSW, educating more than half a million students every year in areas which touch every part of our community and economy. They add more than \$12 billion to the state's economy each year, and their research drives progress across science, technology, policy, the arts and humanities.

Public Partnerships for Public Benefit: the NSW Higher Education Strategy 2025–29 marks a commitment by the NSW Government and the NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee to draw on the excellence of NSW's universities to benefit both learners and industries in NSW. In order to address the skills needs of our state, we need a strong and sustainable higher education system that better integrates with the vocational education and training sector.

With this strategy, universities will continue their important mission to prepare graduates with the skills needed for the fast-changing job market. They will work in partnership with Government to provide better options for students finishing school and for adults wanting to learn new skills for different job opportunities. And as society continues to change and as issues grow more complex, the Government will lean on the crucial research and insights universities produce to support us in making decisions that are in the best interests of the people of NSW.

We know that universities operate in a complex national and international landscape with changes underway as part of the Universities Accord. They compete for students at home and abroad, with



international students playing an important role in our university communities, contributing to our economy and bolstering our workforce in critical sectors such as health and education. The NSW Higher Education Strategy 2025-29 has been designed to align with and support the delivery of the NSW International Education Action Plan, which aims to enhance the experience of international students and strengthen their contribution to NSW's workforce and economy.

In 2024, the NSW Government launched its first Skills Plan in 16 years, laying out a clear roadmap for how we will comprehensively tackle our state's critical skills shortages. Together, the NSW Higher Education Strategy 2025-29 and the Skills Plan set a clear direction for tertiary education in NSW.

I look forward to working closely with our university partners to deliver our shared priorities for higher education in NSW.

The Hon Steve Whan MP

Minister for Skills, TAFE and Tertiary Education

Message from the Convener of the NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee

NSW universities deliver exceptional teaching and learning, advance society with impactful research and innovation and collaborate to create meaningful real-life benefits for communities. According to 2023 data from the Australian Government Department of Education, NSW universities educated 366,730 students*, underscoring their critical role in shaping the state's future workforce. This role is further reinforced by the NSW Higher Education Strategy 2025–29, which will guide collaboration between the NSW Government and NSW universities to drive a strong economy and prosperous, inclusive communities.

Developed through extensive consultation with stakeholders across NSW universities, the strategy highlights the essential partnership between universities and government in generating greater opportunities for the people of NSW. It demonstrates the power of collaboration — when universities, business, industry, community and government share knowledge, combine expertise and work towards common goals. The strategy establishes a shared vision, providing a framework for government, higher education and industry to align efforts for the benefit of NSW.

Importantly, the strategy reinforces the sector's role in supporting key NSW Government initiatives. We are proud to partner with the NSW Government on shared priorities to address future skills and workforce needs, help students reach their education and career goals, improve access to higher education for underrepresented groups and contribute to the prosperity of local communities. Innovation requires



not only deep and sustained collaboration but also patient and strategic investment. This strategy encourages us to think beyond the present and embrace the possibilities of the future.

Universities are engines of innovation, growth and transformation. They equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to meet future challenges, ready to navigate change and capitalise on emerging opportunities. By continuously evolving disciplines to reflect industry shifts and working closely with government and business, universities play a vital role in boosting productivity, diversifying the economy and creating new jobs. The NSW Higher Education Strategy 2025–29 underscores the need for agile, forward-thinking approaches that enable both universities and government to respond effectively to emerging challenges for the benefit of the people of NSW.

Professor Alex Zelinsky AO

Convener, NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee
Vice-Chancellor and President
University of Newcastle

*This includes Domestic, International, Postgraduate and Undergraduate students



Context for change

In 10 years, 9 out of 10 jobs will require a post-secondary qualification, with around half requiring a university degree, and 44% requiring a vocational education and training (VET) pathway. To address this, historic national and state reforms are underway in higher education, immigration and the NSW skills system that provide challenges and opportunities for our state.

The Australian Universities Accord and the NSW VET Review recommend a stronger connection between higher education, VET and schools. Strengthening partnerships between our public education providers – universities, TAFE NSW, and schools – is critical to achieving our workforce and skills goals. If the recognition of prior learning is easily, consistently and clearly applied, pathways between VET and higher education can better target skills needs, expand career opportunities and improve the student experience.

This strategy has been designed to prioritise our skills needs while also expanding the education and career options available to students. It complements Our Plan for NSW Public Education and the NSW Skills Plan, which prioritise giving students a range of meaningful post-school pathways.

Many equity cohorts in NSW are underrepresented in higher education. While the Accord's enrolment targets will go a long way to address this, there are certain issues the NSW Government can address. These include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander qualification completion and lifting access barriers for regional students.

The strategy also recognises that tertiary education, research and innovation are valuable resources for public policy. The government has promised to reduce its reliance on private consultancies,

creating an opportunity to apply university research to complex policy challenges. Effective policies and services, based on the best evidence, will lift the public's trust in both universities and the public sector.

The NSW Government is uniquely positioned to support the future success of higher education. We make significant investments in university research, provide access to practical experience for students working in essential public sector careers, support cutting edge innovation precincts, manage legislation around university land and governance and hold a strategic relationship with the Australian Government. These 'enablers' lay the foundation for a new phase of strategic collaboration.





NSW Higher Education Strategy: plan on a page

Shared priorities	Support current and future NSW skills and workforce needs	Build capabilities to navigate post-school and lifelong learning pathways	Improve equity outcomes in higher education	Enable the use of shared assets, expertise and research for the public good
Actions	1a. Influence Australian Government policy and funding settings to align with NSW Government workforce priorities and critical skills needs.	2a. Establish consistent credit transfer, recognition and articulation arrangements in 5-10 occupations that are NSW priorities as identified in the NSW Skills Plan.	3a. Support the implementation of the Australian Universities Accord's equity goals and address any gaps in these goals.	4a. Develop a standard agreement that can be used by all universities and NSW Government agencies when seeking to procure work.
	1b. Deliver the NSW International Education Action Plan to support a competitive, diversified and resilient education sector.	2b. Lead the future development of integrated tertiary sector models to provide greater opportunities to students.	3b. Influence national and state reforms of admissions practices, including university early offers, to support equity, clarity, consistency and student aspiration and success.	4b. Streamline university research procurement in the public sector.
	1c. Facilitate partnerships between industry, higher education and VET providers to address critical workforce shortages, including for the government workforce and in regional NSW.	2c. Support TAFE self-accreditation to enable agile articulation arrangements with universities for blended models.	3c. Work with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples to lift completion by providing access to a culturally safe higher education experience while staying connected to country, community and family.	4c. Identify examples of productive talent exchange between universities and government and promote these across the public sector.
	1d. Use the Regional and Suburban University Study Hub networks to boost government workforce initiatives.	2d. Enhance and promote successful school, VET and university pathway collaborations to maximise equitable post-school learning outcomes.	3d. Support applications for new university study hubs in areas that will allow underrepresented cohorts to participate in higher education.	4d. Facilitate collaborations that make government and university data more accessible and impactful.
	1e. Collaborate with universities and the NSW Education Standards Authority to upskill existing teachers and enhance the supply, quality and diversity of new teachers.	2e. Offer new models, resources and data to improve career advice and support student pathway options.	3e. Diversify university governing bodies, including ministerial appointments, to better reflect the communities they serve.	4e. Support place-based collaborations that enable education providers and industry to innovate for the benefit of NSW communities.
	1f. Promote community-based decision-making and planning that supports regional skills needs.	2f. Foster innovations and collaborations that support people to upskill and reskill throughout their careers.		4f. Support university planning and land transactions that are aligned with government priorities and foster vibrant communities.
What success looks like	Skills and workforce needs are being met in accordance with state and national goals.	Learners have detailed knowledge of pathway options and are confident in reaching their education and career goals.	NSW universities support an increasingly diverse and inclusive student population.	A shared ecosystem of assets and evidence supports effective policy, reducing reliance on consultancies, and increasing public trust in universities and government.

Shared Priorities



1. Support current and future NSW skills and workforce needs

NSW will need to accommodate a significant increase in higher education attainment to meet skills and workforce needs, especially in critical and emerging industries, and in the state’s regions.

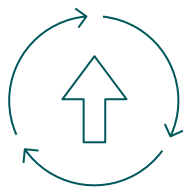
Challenge	Actions
<p>Future growth: The amount of NSW learners with a university qualification will need to increase by 39% by 2050 to meet skills and workforce needs. University qualification holders aged 25 to 34 will need to grow about twice as fast as the population in the same age group.¹</p> <p>Industry skills shortages. There are significant skills shortages in the health, design, engineering, science, transport, education and legal industries. For example, 47% of education professionals are in shortage, yet only 7% of growth is expected by 2028.²</p>	<p>1a. Influence Australian Government policy and funding settings to align with NSW Government workforce priorities and critical skills needs.</p> <p>1c. Facilitate partnerships between industry, higher education and VET providers to address critical workforce shortages, including for the government workforce and in regional NSW.</p> <p>1e. Collaborate with universities and the NSW Education Standards Authority to upskill existing teachers and enhance the supply, quality and diversity of new teachers.</p>
<p>International students: While it is not yet known how international student migration reform will affect projected skills and workforce needs, international students comprise a significant proportion of NSW graduates in fields with critical skills shortages, including IT (63%), engineering (52%), architecture and building (32%), health (16%) and education (14%).³</p>	<p>1b. Deliver the NSW International Education Action Plan to support a competitive, diversified and resilient education sector.</p>
<p>Regional skills shortages: Regional, rural and remote areas are finding it difficult to hire suitable candidates due to location.⁴ Regional skills shortages are significant and are set to worsen over the next 5 years.⁵</p> <p>Community decision making: Regional skills shortages have unique characteristics that are best understood by local stakeholders. They require interventions that are ‘led locally and community based’.⁶</p>	<p>1d. Use the Regional and Suburban University Study Hub networks to boost government workforce initiatives.</p> <p>1f. Promote community-based decision-making and planning that supports regional skills needs.</p>



2. Build capabilities to navigate post-school and lifelong learning pathways

Stakeholder consultation for both Our Plan for NSW Public Education and the Higher Education Strategy has emphasised the importance of giving learners more education pathway options. A balance is needed between expanding these options while incentivising pathways that fill skills and workforce needs.

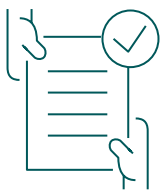
Challenge	Actions
<p>Integration: Students are given more pathway options when VET and higher education are integrated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated degrees also provide an invaluable blend of practical and theoretical learning that can address our workforce and skills needs.⁷ VET qualifications can serve as a vehicle for both low socioeconomic status and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students to transition into higher education.⁸ However, only 10% of NSW university undergraduate students are admitted based on their VET qualifications.⁹ 	<p>2b. Lead the future development of integrated tertiary sector models to provide greater opportunities to students.</p>
<p>Credit transfer: The tertiary system currently lacks a consistent and robust system for credit transfer. It is also difficult to align VET with university courses, given universities can self-accredit their courses while VET providers cannot.¹⁰</p>	<p>2a. Establish consistent credit transfer, recognition and articulation arrangements in 5-10 occupations that are NSW priorities as identified in the NSW Skills Plan.</p> <p>2c. Support TAFE self-accreditation to enable agile articulation arrangements with universities for blended models.</p>
<p>Career advice: Students currently receive advice on their pathway options from a range of different and sometimes conflicting sources, including career advisors, parents, caregivers, web searches, friends and social media.¹¹ The NSW VET Review also recommends improving the quality, consistency, and availability of career advisors in schools.¹²</p>	<p>2d. Enhance and promote successful school, VET and university pathway collaborations to maximise equitable post-school learning outcomes.</p> <p>2e. Offer new models, resources and data to improve career advice and support student pathway options.</p>
<p>Lifelong learners: Pathways should focus on school leavers and lifelong learners. The Australian Universities Accord warns that structural barriers are preventing lifelong learners from upskilling in critical and emerging skill areas.¹³</p>	<p>2f. Foster innovations and collaborations that support people to upskill and reskill throughout their careers.</p>



3. Improve equity outcomes in higher education

The Australian Universities Accord has proposed major equity reforms, including needs-based funding, placement stipends, welfare support, HECS-HELP reform, and the expansion of Regional and Suburban University Study Hubs. However, these reforms require state-level support, as well as complementary initiatives that target barriers to completing a university qualification. The strategy recognises that equity groups exist within intersecting social categorisations.

Challenge	Actions
<p>Parity of representation: As of 2022, the participation rates in NSW are below parity for the following groups:¹⁴</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Nations students: 2.5% (Parity 3.0%) • Lowest quartile socioeconomic status students: 15.1% (Parity 19.7%) • Regional, rural and remote students: 16.6% (Parity 22.5%). 	<p>3a. Support the implementation of the Australian Universities Accord's equity goals and address any gaps in these goals.</p> <p>3b. Influence national and state reforms of admissions practices, including university early offers, to support equity, clarity, consistency and student success.</p>
<p>Regional barriers: People who live in regional areas are half as likely to get a university degree as those in metropolitan areas. Initiatives like the Country Universities Centre program show that more support for studying off-campus lifts barriers to higher education.¹⁵</p>	<p>3d. Support applications for new university study hubs in areas that will allow underrepresented cohorts to participate in higher education.</p>
<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander completion: Once students enrol in university, they need appropriate support so that they remain and complete their studies. The 6-year completion rate for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students who commenced a Bachelor's degree at a Table A or B higher education provider in 2018 is 41.9%. The same rate for non-indigenous students is 62.9%.¹⁶</p> <p>Barriers to completion: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander completion is impeded by a range of factors, including lack of teaching support, financial insecurity, a lack of preparedness for university learning, cultural safety on campus, and loss of connection to family, community and country.¹⁷</p>	<p>3c. Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to lift completion by providing access to a culturally safe higher education experience while staying connected to country, community and family.</p>
<p>Council diversity: University councils do not currently reflect the diverse communities that universities serve.¹⁸</p>	<p>3e. Diversify university governing bodies, including ministerial appointments, to better reflect the communities they serve.</p>



4. Enable the use of shared assets, expertise and research for the public good

Universities and the public service support people, knowledge and assets that, if shared, could better serve the public good and thereby increase public trust in both sectors.

Challenge	Actions
<p>Research: The NSW Government has recently signalled its intention to dramatically reduce its reliance on consultancies for public policy research. University research is of great value to policy makers, yet there are barriers to the exchange of ideas and personnel between government and higher education. These can be overcome by developing ‘evidence ecosystems’ where collaborations are authorised, procurement is streamlined and data are made accessible.¹⁹</p> <p>Data: Any new data sharing initiatives relevant to Aboriginal communities will need to respect Aboriginal Cultural and Intellectual Property, reflecting Priority Reform Four of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.²⁰</p> <p>Public perception:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Public trust in government capability has eroded due to reliance on private consultancies.²¹• Public confidence in our universities has declined from 81.1% in 2008 to 67.9% in 2023.²²	<p>4a. Develop a standard agreement that can be used by all universities and NSW Government agencies when seeking to procure work.</p> <p>4b. Streamline university research procurement in the public sector.</p> <p>4c. Identify examples of productive talent exchange between universities and government and promote these across the public sector.</p> <p>4d. Facilitate collaborations that make government and university data more accessible and impactful.</p> <p>4e. Support place-based collaborations that enable education providers and industry to innovate for the benefit of NSW communities.</p>
<p>Land: Currently, there are no guidelines for universities that clarify the approach of the Minister for Skills, TAFE, and Tertiary Education in considering approval of university land transactions. Greater clarity will help universities provide the Minister with the necessary information to make decisions, strengthening public trust in the responsible management of public land.</p>	<p>4f. Support university planning and land transactions that are aligned with government priorities and foster vibrant communities.</p>

Enablers



Partnerships with public schools

The NSW Department of Education can enable collaborations between universities, public schools and TAFE NSW to explore innovative pathways and modes of teaching and learning.

NSW Government resources

The NSW Government has a variety of existing initiatives, resources, collaborations and networks that it can leverage to support new partnerships.

NSW university legislation

The NSW Government supports compliance with the 10 NSW university acts and can utilise Cabinet procedures to amend the acts to enable a more fit-for-purpose sector.

Australian Government relations

The NSW Department of Education can act as the central advocate for the tertiary education sector to the Australian Government.

National and state reforms

Reforms such as those recommended by the Australian Universities Accord are producing new opportunities for innovative collaborations aimed at strengthening the sector.

Principles for Collaboration

Partnerships between the NSW Government and the NSW higher education sector should follow these principles to ensure effective and responsible collaborations that maximise public benefit.

Addresses NSW Government and higher education sector priorities

- Delivers against NSW Government objectives and the priorities of the sector, informed by consultation and feedback.
- Delivers against an identified policy agenda and/or interagency initiatives across NSW.
- Demonstrates capability to build prosperity in NSW and its communities.

Enhances the quality and impact of collaborations with NSW Government

- Demonstrates innovative approaches to cross-sector collaboration with education, business, industry and NSW communities.
- Utilises inter-disciplinary expertise from government, universities and industry for shared impact locally and globally.
- Leads to knowledge transfer, shared understanding and capacity building between the sector and government.

Respectfully engages with communities

- Aboriginal programs are codesigned with community members and in consultation with State and Territory Indigenous Education bodies.
- Projects show an understanding of community contexts and challenges.
- Demonstrates outcomes that will benefit the community.
- Is governed with effective, accountable, fair and inclusive values.
- Respects equity, diversity and inclusion.

Fosters excellence and opportunity for NSW

- Demonstrates a high quality, innovative approach to co-design, delivery and impact evaluation.
- Increases engagement and benefit between NSW Government, universities, industry, students and the wider community, including by building pathways and increasing access to education.
- Supports leveraged investment, expertise and capacity building, particularly in areas where government support will catalyse innovation or help deliver capacity of the state to meet current and future challenges.

Demonstrates value for money

- Demonstrates feasibility through joint investment including with industry, investment attraction, shared use of facilities and in-kind support.
- Includes potential for social or economic returns on investment by targeting emerging technologies and sectors or under-served regional areas.
- Reduces duplication and maximises sustainability for investment, impact and resourcing by identifying and leveraging best practice.

Alignment with Closing the Gap

Participation and attainment

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are underrepresented in higher education participation and completion. To enable equal opportunity for these students regardless of background, and to support engagement and lift completion, working with Aboriginal communities to provide a culturally safe and connected experience at university will be imperative.

Higher education is the focus of 2 out of 17 socioeconomic outcomes under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which aims to work in partnership with Aboriginal organisations and communities to improve life outcomes for all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. Action 3c of this NSW Higher Education Strategy 2025-29 directly contributes to targets 6 and 7 of Closing the Gap, which involve:

- Increasing the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25 to 34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) from 47% in 2021 to 70% by 2031.
- Increasing the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15-24 years) who are in employment, education or training from 58% in 2021 to 67% by 2031.

Data sovereignty

Priority Reform Four of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap aims to enable more sharing of data at a regional level, to give Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples access to and control over information that will support communities to make decisions about their futures. Any new data sharing initiatives relevant to Aboriginal communities under action 4e of the NSW Higher Education Strategy 2025-29 should therefore respect Aboriginal Cultural and Intellectual Property, also known as Indigenous Data Sovereignty, to reflect this priority.



The importance of elevating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and committing to their self-determination was also recognised in the Australian Universities Accord final report, which raised the need to further explore this issue through an Indigenous-led review process. The NSW Government supports this recommendation.

Stakeholder consultation

The NSW Higher Education Strategy 2025-29 was informed by extensive consultation with the following stakeholders:



- NSW Vice-Chancellors' Committee
 - Australian Catholic University
 - Avondale University
 - Charles Sturt University
 - Macquarie University
 - Southern Cross University
 - University of New England
 - University of Newcastle
 - University of Notre Dame
 - University of NSW
 - University of Sydney
 - University of Technology Sydney
 - University of Wollongong
 - Western Sydney University
- Aboriginal Affairs NSW
- NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG)
- Jobs and Skills Australia
- The Cabinet Office
- Office of Regional Economic Development
- Investment NSW
- Ministry of Health
- Department of Communities and Justice
- TAFE NSW
- Transport NSW
- Study NSW
- Office of the NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer
- Public Service Commission
- Bradfield Development Authority
- National Tertiary Education Union
- Department of Education post-school student voice forum (Skills and Pathways Advocacy and Representative Committee).

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We acknowledge the homelands of all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and pay our respect to Country.

Say hello

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