UNSW Sustainable Development Goals

2024 Report

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Bedegal (Kensington Campus), Gadigal (City and Art & Design Campuses) and Ngunnawal people (Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra) who are the traditional custodians of the lands where each campus of UNSW is located.

Contents

Introductions

Since UNSW Sydney was established in 1949, we have endeavoured to positively impact society for the benefit of all. With this vision at the core of everything we do, we remain committed to driving real-world change through transformative education, innovative research and meaningful engagement. The 17 United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide us with a global framework that underpins how we respond to society's most pressing challenges and work to improve lives around the world.

In 2024, we launched our Progress for All Strategy – a clear roadmap for how UNSW will live true to this mission over the next ten years. Grounded in the values of equity, sustainability and impact, the strategy charts a bold direction for the next decade. Its nine pillars are closely aligned with the 17 SDGs – reflecting our ambition to help build a more just and resilient future, both locally and globally.

Alongside this strategic vision, we developed UNSW's first Societal Impact Framework – a practical guide that shapes the University's efforts to positively transform society. Informed by the SDGs alongside national and international initiatives, the framework outlines four key areas of impact and, together with the strategy, is further embedding SDG into our University's strategic direction.

The Division of Societal Impact, Equity & Engagement is enabling this work. The division leads and coordinates UNSW's contributions to societal progress, ensuring that our academic and operational activities remain responsive, and acting as a catalyst for meaningful, measurable change.

UNSW continues to have a real impact across all 17 of the SDGs. Recognising the vital role universities like ours play in achieving the goals, we continuously track our progress against the 2030 SDG agenda. Our efforts are reflected in our global rankings. In the 2024 QS World Sustainability Rankings we placed 3rd globally for Social Impact and equal 12th for Sustainability. In the 2024 Times Higher Education Impact Rankings, UNSW rose to 7th in the world and achieved four top 10 SDG rankings.

Our rankings reflect the efforts, innovation and collaboration of our students, colleagues, partners and communities in embedding sustainability, equity and impactful engagement into everything we do. I am delighted to introduce this fourth annual *UNSW Sustainable Development Goals Report*, which showcases the breadth and depth of our impact and progress. It highlights the momentum we're building and reaffirms our commitment to advancing the SDGs as part of our mission to evolve progress for all.

Professor Bruce Edward Watson
Pro Vice-Chancellor Societal Transformation & Equity

Ensuring visibility and understanding of UNSW's diverse contributions to the SDGs remains a key priority.

The UNSW SDG Steering Committee plays a central role in building awareness, supporting collaboration and empowering staff and students to align their work with the SDGs. We focus on fostering and supporting cross-disciplinary collaborations and partnerships aligned to the goals. 2024 marked a year of milestones for the committee, as we introduced new opportunities to champion this work.

We appointed our first Deputy Chair to build our capacity to strengthen and embed SDG initiatives and engagement between our faculties, centres and institutes. We also initiated and supported UNSW's participation at the Times Higher Education Global Sustainable Development Congress in Bangkok, where we hosted two sessions in partnership with the UN and regional collaborators. The events were a powerful opportunity to share our work on a global stage and advance existing and emerging partnerships.

Students play a pivotal role in shaping our SDG efforts. In late 2024 we appointed four student representatives from undergraduate, postgraduate and research programs to work with the Steering Committee and Manager, Societal Transformation. They are helping to shape priorities and initiatives for student engagement with the SDGs, and ensure students have a voice at every meeting.

A real highlight of the year was the inaugural SDG Showcase, led by the Societal Transformation & Equity team. Held during Global Goals Week, the event spotlighted the extensive SDG-related work being undertaken across the University. Featuring 50 exhibitors, 20 talks and presentations, and a dynamic program of interactive workshops, hackathons and masterclasses, the Showcase brought together over 1000 students and staff to explore and advance our contributions.

Highlighting the breadth of our community's contributions and providing a unique opportunity to connect with experts and discover ways to get involved, the event was both a celebration of UNSW's collective efforts and a launchpad for future engagement. We are excited to continue this event annually to deepen our community's connection with the SDGs.

As the culture of SDG engagement continues to grow at UNSW, so too does the momentum behind our activities. The approach we use to guide this work centres around four pillars that shape this report: Research & Enterprise; Education & Student Experience; External Leadership & Engagement; and Operations & Governance. This framework ensures we remain transparent, accountable and connected in our progress toward advancing the SDGs.

Professor Rita Henderson
Deputy Dean (Societal Impact and Translation), Faculty of Engineering and Chair of the UNSW SDG Steering Committee
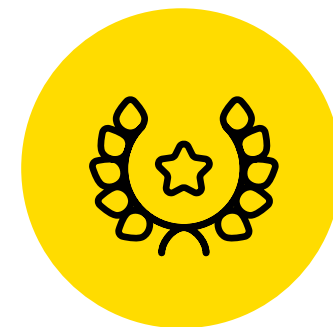
2024 highlights

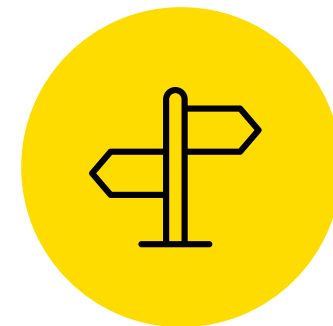### 3rd in the world for social impact

UNSW Sydney ranked 3rd in the world for Social Impact and 12th for Sustainability in the QS Sustainability Rankings, earning a top 20 spot for the third year in a row.

7th in the world for SDG impact

UNSW ranked 7th in the world in the 2024 Times Higher Education Impact rankings. This overall ranking included:

- 2nd in the world for SDG 13 Climate Action
- 3rd in the world for SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation
- 8th in the world for SDG 14 Life Below Water and SDG 15 Life on Land.

First SDG Showcase

UNSW held its inaugural SDG Showcase to shine a light on the work being done by the University to progress the SDGs. From world-renowned research and game-changing global initiatives to everyday policy and practice changes on campus, the event provided a unique opportunity for our community to speak to the experts behind the work, and explore possible ways to get involved.

Featuring 50 exhibitors, 20 short talks and presentations and half a dozen workshops, hackathons and masterclasses, there was something for everyone.

Record donation to tackle cervical cancer in the Pacific

UNSW received a record A$25.9 million donation from the Swire Group to screen more than 130,000 women in seven Pacific countries for cervical cancer. The funds will allow the Kirby Institute at UNSW to work with regional partners to tackle one of the deadliest preventable cancers in the region.

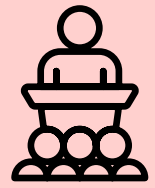### 3rd in research funding in Australia

- A$85 million from 108 Australian Research Council (ARC) grants.
- A$117.9 million from 72 National Health & Medical Research Council (NHMRC) grants.
- A$60.7 million from 23 Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) grants.
- A$373 million in revenue and 151 business partnerships in the TORCH, Defence Trailblazer, and Trailblazer for Recycling and Clean Energy programs.

Partner of Global Sustainable Development Congress

UNSW was a content partner and sponsor for two events at the Times Higher Education Global Sustainable Development Congress in Bangkok, which sought to advance progress on the SDGs together with 145 partner organisations from 85 countries.
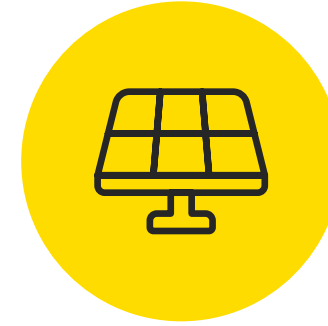
Presenter at UN Summit of the Future

UNSW co-hosted an event on rising sea levels at the UN Summit of the Future Action Days in New York, highlighting the impact on Pacific countries and showcasing its research-backed solutions.

Convener of international dialogues on ocean sustainable development

The Global Ocean Accounts Partnership, whose Secretariat is hosted at UNSW, convened the 5th Global Dialogue on Sustainable Ocean Development in Bali. It brought together over 450 participants from nearly 50 countries, including ministerial representatives from seven nations. The landmark gathering catalysed concrete commitments, notably Indonesia's launch of its National Ocean Accounts Dashboard and Costa Rica's leadership of a global pledge for countries to develop ocean accounts by 2030.

Celebrating 50 years in solar

UNSW celebrated the 50th anniversary of its solar research lab, the first in Australia. UNSW Scientia Professor Martin Green pioneered the PERC and TOPCON solar cells in the lab. Both cells account for 90% of modern global solar cell manufacturing.

Restoring mangroves in Fiji

UNSW is working with the University of the South Pacific to design floating mangrove islands in Fiji to protect vulnerable coastlines from a warming climate and to revitalise ecosystems.

Key national human rights appointments

Research by UNSW's Australian Human Rights Institute contributed to the establishment of a:

- National Student Ombudsman – to provide students with a trauma-informed complaints mechanism as part of a national government plan to address campus sexual violence in higher education
- National Anti-Slavery Commissioner – to shape the implementation of future modern slavery reforms, following research on company compliance with the *Modern Slavery Act 2018*.
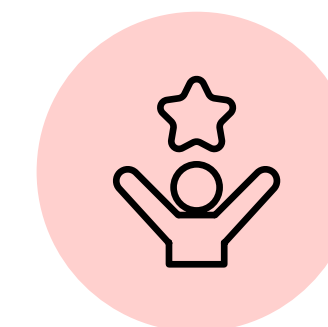
Reducing emissions in university supply chains

Founded by UNSW, the International Universities Climate Alliance (IUCA) represents climate research universities from more than 20 countries. In 2024, UNSW expertise was showcased in an online Global Thematic Dialogue on reducing university supply chain emissions, presented by the IUCA. The event attracted registrations from academic and professional staff from 75 universities and several global organisations across 24 countries.

Emissions targets achieved

UNSW has achieved its 2025 target of a 30% reduction in total emissions (scopes 1, 2 and 3). It aims to achieve a 50% reduction by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050 compared to a 2018 baseline.

Students from under-represented backgrounds thriving at UNSW

Students admitted via UNSW's Gateway Admission Pathway and Program - who are from under-represented schools and low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds - achieved similar retention levels, success rates and marks to the wider domestic undergraduate community in 2024.The data shows UNSW's bold approach to widening participation is translating into success, not just access.

SDG 1: No Poverty

From co-publishing two national reports on poverty and launching a short course on poverty and inequality, to pursuing equitable changes to the tax system, awarding equity scholarships and providing financial services to staff in need, UNSW is leading a range of initiatives that contribute to ending poverty.

Research & enterprise

Inequality report

The Poverty and Inequality Partnership between the Australian Council of Social Service and UNSW published the *Inequality in Australia 2024 Report*. The report highlighted that the top 10% of households hold 15 times the wealth (averaging A$5.2 million per household) compared to the lowest 60% of households (averaging A$343,000 per household). It demonstrated increasing inequality in Australia and the need for major reform to housing, superannuation and income support.

Material Deprivation report

The Poverty and Inequality Partnership also published the *Material Deprivation in Australia Report*, which found that one in 12 Australians cannot afford two or more essential goods or services. People on welfare support are around five times more likely to experience material deprivation than the general population (45% vs 9%), and those on the parenting payment are four times more likely (38%).

Measuring climate impact on the disadvantaged

In Australia, climate disasters could lead to more than 500,000 homes becoming uninsurable by 2030, many in already disadvantaged areas. UNSW researchers were awarded an ARC Discovery grant for a project that will evaluate how climate-related disasters are likely to impact the wellbeing of the already disadvantaged. The project will develop a new model of insurance provision and related disaster responses.

Education & student experience

Poverty and inequality short course

The Poverty and Inequality Partnership launched a short course titled 'Understanding poverty, inequality and social disadvantage in Australia'. The course explores the causes and consequences of poverty and inequality in Australia, with individuals with lived experience, advocates and researchers. It is suitable for professionals and researchers working in social policy in for-profit, not-for-profit and government sectors, and individuals with an interest in supporting their organisation's advocacy for social change.

Equity scholarships

In 2024, 13 new equity scholarships at UNSW were established. The total number of equity scholarships was 1806, with 1366 awarded in the year and 440 continuing from prior years. For refugee and asylum seekers, 16 students held scholarships, with seven awarded in 2024 and nine continuing. The total scholarships for accommodation were 107, with 60 awarded in 2024 and 47 continuing.

External leadership & engagement

Tax Clinic lobbies for equality

The UNSW Tax and Business Advisory Clinic provides free tax and business advice, community education and research-driven advocacy for those most in need. In 2024, the Clinic hosted the Inspector-General of Taxation and Taxation Ombudsman for a roundtable discussion on preventing system abuse by perpetrators of domestic violence, and potential reforms to get to the root of economic inequities.

Tackling poverty's complexity

As part of Anti-Poverty Week, UNSW hosted a panel featuring experts from ACOSS, Uniting NSW/ACT and UNSW's Social Policy Research Centre. The panel discussed the Poverty and Inequality Partnership between ACOSS and UNSW, which aims to sharpen the national focus on poverty and inequality in Australia. The partnership was highlighted as a model example for addressing poverty's complex issues.

Operations & governance

Support for staff facing uncertainty

UNSW offers its staff a range of support services for those facing personal challenges and uncertainty. These include seminars on financial wellbeing, free counselling sessions and a staff hardship fund that delivers emergency financial support for bills, rent, temporary accommodation and food insecurity.

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Publications

SDG 2: Zero Hunger

UNSW worked to eradicate hunger by researching access to healthy and affordable food in a remote Aboriginal community and in Sri Lankan schools, contributing to an Australian Government report into food security, and highlighting the benefits of campus food gardens.

Research & enterprise

Improving student food literacy

Food security among university students in affluent nations is a growing concern. In partnership with Macquarie University, UNSW published a chapter in *Higher Education and SDG 2* on the potential for campus food gardens to improve students' food literacy and access to nutritious food. They can also help universities engage with the SDG 2 targets.

Investigating food insecurity in a remote Aboriginal community

In partnership with the Dharriwaa Elders Group, UNSW surveyed access to food in Walgett's Aboriginal community. Researchers found 46% of the community were experiencing food insecurity. Also, none of the 242 participants were meeting dietary guidelines and were therefore at risk of diet-related chronic disease. The partnership is continuing to work on community-led strategies to improve food and water security.

Education & student experience

Improving nutrition in a remote town

For the third consecutive year, UNSW students completed a placement in the rural town of Bourke to help improve nutritional outcomes for local Aboriginal people through a community garden. The garden produces seasonal produce and is used in a food hamper delivery program for older people. In 2024, students designed and built another garden for the local high school.

Disease-free meals in Sri Lankan schools

Five UNSW Chemical Engineering students travelled to Sri Lanka to work with the UN's World Food Program to improve the nutrition and safety of school meal programs. Students investigated the industrial manufacture of food, evaluating the safety of corn, potential aflatoxin contaminations and the fortifying of rice with iron. They delivered recommendations for good practice, including rapid testing for aflatoxin.

External leadership & engagement

Helping Pacific countries achieve SDGs

Pacific countries are not on track to reach the SDGs, including goals related to food. To assist, UNSW hosted a roundtable where experts, industry and researchers discussed the role of carbon in food, energy and water security post 2030 and how countries can satisfy new net zero methodologies without sacrificing progress on specific SDGs.

Food innovation in the Asia Pacific

In celebration of World Food Day, UNSW hosted an online forum to discuss global food system innovation and how they can be applied in the Asia Pacific to leave no-one behind. Presentations were made by global food experts from the UN's World Food Programme, UNICEF, the International Food Policy Research Institute as well as Asia Pacific universities.

Operations & governance

Healthy and sustainable menu at UNSW SDG Showcase

At UNSW's inaugural SDG showcase, the menu was curated by researchers from the UNSW Dietetics and Food Innovation team in the Faculty of Medicine & Health in collaboration with University caterers. The menu offered healthy and sustainable food options to attendees.

Nutrition assistance for employees

As part of a new employee assistance program, UNSW offered its staff a Nutrition and Lifestyle Assist service. The service provides specialist advice on nutrition, sleep, resilience, mindfulness, addictive behaviours, retirement planning and positive lifestyle changes.

366
Publications

2 ZERO HUNGER

Highlights

– Arc's Food Hub — a free food pantry initiative on campus received over 65,000 visits by students in 2024

– UNSW food security expert, Professor Johannes le Coutre, was elected to the prestigious International Academy of Food Science & Technology

SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing

To promote healthier lives and wellbeing, UNSW advanced understanding of healthier food options in Aboriginal communities and the benefits of lower sodium in processed food, treated elderly loneliness with innovative AI, and sought to remove legal barriers to ending HIV and hepatitis.

Research & enterprise

Advancing health in Aboriginal communities

UNSW researchers from the Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership presented at the 2024 Food Governance Conference about community-led approaches to healthy food and drinking water in remote Aboriginal communities. Together with The George Institute, they also gave evidence at a Victorian Government Inquiry into Food Security about the relationships Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have with food systems in connection to Country.

Advocating for less sodium in processed food

High sodium levels in food lead to serious health problems. Together with The George Institute, Griffith University and Johns Hopkins University, UNSW conducted a study that showed mandating stringent targets for sodium levels in Australian packaged foods in line with World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations could prevent 40,000 cardiovascular events, 32,000 cases of kidney disease and 3000 deaths over a 10-year period.

Treating loneliness with AI

Loneliness is a modern-day epidemic in Australia costing A$2.7 billion annually. UNSW's Big Anxiety Research Centre is building AI 'digital companions' to support Australians facing loneliness and other psychosocial challenges, like dementia, eating disorders and depression. AI companions provide calm, non-judgemental conversation that can help people regulate their emotions.

First Nations philanthropy award

The Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership between UNSW and the Dharriwaa Elders Group was a finalist in the First Nations Philanthropy category at the 2024 Australian Philanthropy Awards.

Education & student experience

Helping students nurture their mental health

The theme of the 2024 Mental Health Month at UNSW was 'Let's Talk About It'. Students were encouraged to pause and reflect on their mental health and wellbeing in a wide range of workshops on topics including mindfulness, how to help a friend, wellbeing across cultures, building skills for healthy romantic relationships, and navigating anxiety and low mood.

Specialised chairs for Solomon Islands children with disabilities

More than one billion people living with disabilities require technical support. UNSW's Assistive Tech Hub develops technology solutions for them. In 2024, the Hub designed a postural chair for children with disabilities in the Solomon Islands that can adapt to their growth, endure daily wear and tear, and be manufactured locally at low cost.

External leadership & engagement

Showcasing UNSW health innovations

UNSW hosted the Future Health Expo in 2024. More than 800 businesses, investors and government bodies discovered more than 100 groundbreaking projects by UNSW researchers in the areas of health systems, health technology, next-gen medicine and therapeutic innovations. The projects aligned with the National Reconstruction Fund Corporation's priority areas.

Eradicating HIV and hepatitis

The law is an obstacle to ending blood-borne viruses. UNSW-based Health+Law helps remove legal barriers in Australia to testing, treatment and better health outcomes for people living with HIV and hepatitis. In a world first in 2024, with national peak bodies, community organisations and individuals across the country, Health+Law mapped the legal landscape for people living with both diseases.

Operations & governance

$600m Health Translation Hub

Set to open in 2025, the 35,000 square metre UNSW Health Translation Hub will bring together researchers, clinicians, industry partners and public health officials to translate research discoveries into better patient care and health outcomes. UNSW research will focus on personalised medicine, advanced therapeutics, equitable health systems, dementia, ageing well, mental health and cancer.

Australia's first holistic children's cancer centre

Opening in the Health Translation Hub in 2025, the Minderoo Children's Comprehensive Cancer Centre (MCCCC) is an Australian first. The MCCCC will bring together experts from the Children's Cancer Institute, Sydney Children's Hospital and UNSW to provide specialised cancer treatment, education and research. It will feature wet and dry laboratories, spaces for research, education and training, and oncology units.

Improving hospital staff wellbeing

Research demonstrates that green spaces in hospitals have the potential to improve the health and wellbeing of staff and patients. In 2024, UNSW researchers completed designs to restore the first of three outdoor terrace spaces in the Royal Hospital for Women. In addition to benefiting wellbeing, the green terraces will increase biodiversity in the local area.

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

11,496
Publications

Highlights

UNSW students assessed campus retailers for healthy food options as part of the University's Good Food Charter

Awards

NSW Scientist of the Year – Scientia Professor Helen Christensen for her work in digital mental health

UNSW Eureka Prize – Professor Stuart Tangye for his work diagnosing rare diseases

SDG 4: Quality Education

From fostering positive attitudes to disability in Indonesian schools and engaging high school students with the SDGs, to providing educators with resources on poverty and neurodivergence, and hosting its fourth Education Festival, UNSW raised the bar on education.

Research & enterprise

Positive disability attitudes in Indonesian schools

Researchers from the UNSW Social Policy Research Centre and Universitas Negeri Padang are collaborating on a seed-funded study to examine how positive attitudes towards students with disability can be fostered in Indonesian school communities. The project focuses on two primary and junior high schools in Padang, West Sumatra, and aims to deliver impact through policy, practices and community empowerment.

Linking Business students to SDGs

The UNSW Business School's SDG Committee continued to raise awareness among faculties and students about the School's commitment to the goals in 2024. This included engaging more than 800 students in a survey on what SDGs the Business School should prioritise, running faculty research and teaching SDG showcases for the first time, having a presence at Orientation Week and organising volunteering events around sustainability issues.

Education system performance and sustainability

UNSW researchers wrote a background paper for the *UNESCO 2024/5 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report* on educational leadership. Titled 'Leading for equity and excellence through systemic design', the paper drew on large-scale education data to test education system performance against the pillars of SDG 4. UNSW researchers also co-published a paper highlighting the fragility of the Sydney school education workforce due to high living costs.

Education & student experience

Connecting students to the SDGs

The Data Visualisation and Communication course in the UNSW Business School teaches students how to tell a story around data that has real-world SDG impact to non-technical stakeholders. Students are asked to pick an SDG and at the end of their project recommend how they would tackle the problem using the data they have found. By following their own interests, students discover why the SDGs are important.

Pathway program for underrepresented students

UNSW hosted 2926 students from 149 Gateway partner schools throughout the year as part of its Gateway educational outreach programs. The programs aim to widen university participation of students from under-represented and low-SES backgrounds in Greater Western Sydney and regional NSW. At one of the on-campus days, students were asked to use social media to engage young people in health and wellbeing issues (SDG 3), and to come up with ideas for waste management (SDG 12).

Mapping SDGs in engineering

Two schools in the UNSW Faculty of Engineering - the School of Civil and Environmental Engineering, and School of Chemical Engineering - mapped the SDGs in each program using different approaches. Staff from both schools then led workshops at the UNSW SDG Showcase and Education Festivals to discuss the different approaches, the usefulness of mapping, and next steps. The School of Chemical Engineering also conducted a student survey on awareness and perceptions of the SDGs, which was presented at the World Engineering Education Forum 2024.

SDG grants for Business School students

Each year, the UNSW Business School awards SDG research grants. In 2024, five grants were awarded for projects exploring climate extremes and financial crises, the transition of electricity markets towards renewable energy, food waste, information use in sustainability policymaking, and the role of digital technologies in environmental and social challenges. In partnership with the Global Water Institute, the School also awarded five SDG research grants to master's and PhD students.

External leadership & engagement

Fostering inclusive education

Researchers from UNSW's Social Policy Research Centre co-developed poverty and inequality education resources that have been used by teachers for more than 60,000 primary and secondary students. The resources call on students to examine real-life stories and analyse and interpret data to discover the realities of those experiencing poverty. UNSW researchers also co-published a teaching guide for university lecturers on making students from under-represented backgrounds feel valued and supported.

Inspiring the next STEMM leaders

Students from 21 Sydney high schools participated in the UNSW Faculty of Engineering's Water Wise Energy Smart program in 2024. The program aimed to empower Sydney's youth to become sustainability champions. Students were asked to build a solar-powered house and participate in a water filtration challenge. UNSW Engineering also hosted 60 girls from Coogee Public School, who learned about water filtration, electrical circuits and solar energy.

Operations & governance

Communities advancing education

The UNSW Education Focussed Communities of Practice (EF CoPs) are a group of active learning and teaching communities comprising academics, professional staff, students and guest members. Each EF CoP selects an education initiative that has University-wide impact and meets regularly to discuss progress. Initiatives include AI, course design and development, education for sustainable development, teaching for equity and diversity, and work-integrated learning (WIL).

More sustainable universities

The University Social Responsibility Network – of which UNSW is a member – hosted higher education researchers, policymakers and administrators from around the world in Beijing to discuss higher education transformation and sustainable development. At the event, UNSW led a roundtable discussion on 'Decolonial Approaches to University Social Responsibility: Equity, Engagement and Justice'.

Neurodiversity toolkit for educators

To foster greater inclusion in higher education, UNSW's Diversified team hosted a webinar on the unique barriers neurodivergent students face and a toolkit they developed to help educators.

UNSW Education Festival

In its fourth year in 2024, the Education Festival brought together the University's learning and teaching community for 13 events that fostered greater knowledge, supported cross-discipline collaboration and helped educators develop and grow.

783
Publications

Awards

A$2.7 million grant to continue inspiring kids aged eight to 12 to pursue STEM subjects

Highlights

More than 6000 people attended UNSW's National Science Week event

13

SDG 5: Gender Equality

UNSW championed equality between genders by helping to make healthcare more accessible and to prevent financial abuse, encouraging women participation in STEMM, business and politics, and by launching its first gender equity strategy.

Research & enterprise

More equitable healthcare for non-binary people

Clinicians' lack of familiarity with trans and gender-diverse patients can be a barrier to quality sexual healthcare. To address these barriers, researchers at UNSW's Australian Human Rights Institute are assessing the accessibility of publicly funded sexual health services in NSW for non-binary individuals from the perspective of clinicians. They are identifying strategies for improvement and delivering recommendations to government.

World-class health centre to challenge male-centricity

The Centre for Sex and Gender Equity in Health and Medicine was launched at UNSW in 2024 to research key issues and develop and support policies aimed at making medical care more equitable.

Protecting women from financial abuse

Approximately 16% of Australian women have experienced financial abuse by a cohabiting partner. A UNSW paper found 58% of financially vulnerable women seeking pro bono tax services have experienced domestic and family violence.The report's authors recommended increasing services for vulnerable women and tackling gender issues in Australia's tax system. A separate UNSW report recommended changing insurance policies to better protect victim-survivors from financial abuse.

Education & student experience

> A$2.5m from UNSW alumna for **female students studying mathematics**

Encouraging women participation in STEMM and business

Women are under-represented in STEMM and business in Australia. The UNSW STEMM Champions program hosted students from Coogee Public School at the Faculty of Engineering to ignite interest in and passion for engineering. The UNSW Business School held a Girls in Business camp where high school students from across NSW met inspiring female leaders, visited companies and gained an understanding of different business fields.

External leadership & engagement

Nurturing more women political leaders

With the aim of increasing the number of women in politics, UNSW's Pathways to Politics program delivers practical training, workshops, mentoring and career-long support to women with ambitions of becoming political leaders. The program ran for its fourth year in 2024 and was hosted by UNSW's Gilbert + Tobin Centre of Public Law and supported by the Australian Human Rights Institute, the Social Policy Research Centre and others.

Enhancing economic security for women in the Pacific

Rising global fragility has dented progress in international development, particularly for women. UNSW received a Centre for Australia-India Relations grant to investigate Indian and Australia development programs targeting women's economic security in the Pacific. To support inclusive and sustainable development, the report proposed building a new cooperation framework, fast-tracking access to finance and technology, prioritising gender data, and cooperating on gender-intentional climate action and resilience.

Operations & governance

UNSW's first Gender Equity Strategy
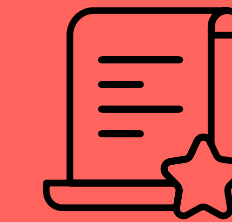
In 2024, the University launched the UNSW Gender Equity Strategy. The 2024-2028 Strategy promotes inclusive practice for people of all genders, it builds on commitments and programs already in place for women and gender-diverse people, and it sets new, measurable objectives for future progress. The strategy will enable staff of all genders to feel valued, respected and able to be their authentic selves.

1056
Publications

5 GENDER EQUALITY

Awards

High Commendation for the UNSW Women in Construction project – Australian Institute of Building awards

Highlights

An innovative smart bench to enhance feelings of public safety for women and gender-diverse people – together with MIT and the NSW Government

SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

To help protect and support access to the world's most valued resource, UNSW worked with local partners to enhance water knowledge and quality in regions including the Asia-Pacific, Kenya, Uganda, the rural NSW town of Walgett and on campus.

Research & enterprise

75 years of UNSW water research

To demonstrate its commitment to safeguard the planet's marine, freshwater and urban water ecosystems, UNSW hosted the exhibition 'Living Water: 75 years of water research at UNSW'. The exhibition showcased the significant contributions made by University researchers towards water governance and security, healthy oceans, resilient coastlines, and safe and equitable access to water in Australia and globally.

Informing water decisions in the South Pacific

In collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNSW investigated changes in the climate and water availability in Palau, Tonga and Timor-Leste. The research provided reliable data and analysis each country can use to make better informed decisions around climate adaptation and water. The project supported the FAO's Regional Pacific Climate Adaptation Programme.

Education & student experience

Empowering future leaders in Timor-Leste

In support of water conservation and climate change mitigation, UNSW participated in Timor-Leste's PermaYouth Camp. More than 800 future sustainability leaders, including seven UNSW students, gained technical permaculture skills and knowledge, and insights into the challenges Timor-Leste faces. UNSW researchers presented their work, which uses satellite data to model water security, and hydrological monitoring and water balance modelling in the country.

Capturing the human experience in water security

Human experiences are not typically captured in water research. In partnership with The George Institute for Global Health and Water Research Australia, UNSW hosted a webinar on the benefits of the Water Insecurity Experiences (WISE) Scales, which capture human experiences with food and water security. The WISE method improves transparency and accountability, and enhances decision-making.

External leadership & engagement

Model filtration system in rural Kenya

Access to water in rural areas of Kenya is limited. UNSW brought together partners from its Uganda water initiative and the Kenyan social enterprise FundiFix to install a model filtration system at FundiFix offices that delivers safe drinking water. FundiFix will share the results with local government, aiding efforts to improve water quality in the Kitui region.

Improving water quality in Walgett

People, animals and plants rely on Walgett's rivers for food and water. UNSW works in partnership with the local Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG), including the Walgett River Rangers, to measure and publish reports on the quality of the water weekly. The University also worked with the DEG to build a water kiosk for residents that, unlike the town's water supply, is low in sodium and safe for people with chronic health conditions.

More than 6400 litres of safe drinking water provided to Walgett residents at the Dharriwaa Elders Group water kiosk.

Operations & governance

Dharug Water Walk on campus

UNSW and Aunty Rhonda Dixon-Grovenor hosted a public walk on campus to consider how water moves through the watercourse and under urban streets, and rises through ancient aquifers to flood swampland on Bidjigal and Kamaygal land. Walkers also learned about local Indigenous knowledges and language to encourage community participants to connect with Country.

798
Publications

Awards

IAHR and UNESCO award for excellence in water training and education

SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

From rolling out a campus electrification plan and working on technologies to turn waste and sunlight into hydrogen, to supporting the take-up of clean energy by students, households and Pacific Island communities, UNSW led the race to net zero.

Unlocking solar cell efficiency

In a world first, UNSW researchers uncovered the mystery of how light particles split. They will apply this knowledge to create a new solar cell prototype with the aim of increasing cell efficiency beyond the current 30% ceiling, which could transform the future of renewable energy.

Research & enterprise

Global solar hydrogen hub

Converting sunlight into hydrogen via photocatalysis is a cost-effective approach to hydrogen production. UNSW and its global partners received $750,000 in government funding to establish a world-leading hub for photocatalytic solar hydrogen research. The new hub will coordinate global research and commercialisation efforts in support of net zero targets.

Two emissions projects grants

Two UNSW projects received seed funding from the NSW Government as part of its net zero ambitions. The SunSPOT app helps people understand the costs, savings and returns on a rooftop solar system, batteries and heat pumps. The other project is an open platform for real-time renewable energy bidding and trading that will help increase renewable energy distribution and supply.

Education & student experience

Australia's first Student Energy Chapter

The complexity of the world's energy transition demands a diverse range of perspectives and skills. To help, UNSW students established Australia's first Student Energy Chapter, which comprises a global network of 50,000 students across 120 countries. The Chapter will empower the next generation of leaders to address the growing demand for clean energy projects and policies.

Solar communication and energy for Pacific countries

Communications services in Vanuatu are often damaged during natural disasters, when they are needed most. UNSW students worked with Vanuatu Community Aid and locals on Tanna Island to install and repair solar-powered lighting and phone charging at key locations and in schools. In Fiji, UNSW Engineering students installed rooftop solar systems on homes as part of an elective course.

External leadership & engagement

Showcasing UNSW innovations to industry

Connecting researchers with industry is vital for delivering clean energy projects. UNSW hosted the Future Climate & Clean Energy Expo, which saw more than 850 businesses, investors and government bodies discover more than 100 green technology projects at UNSW. Projects aligned with the key National Reconstruction Fund priorities of climate resilience and biodiversity, decarbonisation, extreme weather, and waste reduction and recycling.

Turning waste into hydrogen in remote communities

UNSW and the University of Newcastle's Trailblazer for Recycling and Clean Energy (TRaCE) team is working with Rio Tinto on technology that repurposes organic waste, which would otherwise go to landfill, into a resource to generate renewable hydrogen. The technology could be particularly beneficial for remote communities in arid locations, as it overcomes the need for a clean water source with electrocatalytic water splitting. Once established, the technology could be scaled up globally.

Masterclass on business sustainability

As the world's third largest exporter of fossil fuels, Australia's leadership in energy transition is vital. The UNSW Business School hosted the AGSM 2024 Professional Forum, with a masterclass on putting responsible and sustainable leadership principles to work. Attendees were challenged to come up with strategies to keep the world below the 2°C global warming target. Solutions were put into a global climate simulation to demonstrate to attendees and to empower Australian business leaders to transition towards more sustainable business practices.
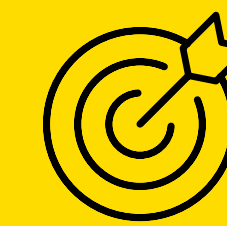
Operations & governance

First all-electric building

UNSW unveiled its first fully electrified building, Colombo House, which features electric water heaters, cooktops, dryers and barbecues – preventing 82 tonnes of CO_2e emissions per year. The University plans to electrify other accommodation buildings by 2025, and all campuses by 2030. Electrical amenities at UNSW are powered by 100% renewable energy purchased in an innovative agreement from the Sunraysia Solar Farm.

UNSW receives global sustainability award

UNSW's efforts to decarbonise and achieve net zero received the Schneider Electric Award for 'impact to my enterprise'. UNSW was one of five recipients from a pool of 400 globally, and it was the only Australian organisation. The University was recognised for its Environmental Sustainability Plan, use of 100% renewable electricity, its electrification rollout and its digitisation of systems.

2791
Publications

Goals

Electrify all accommodation buildings by 2025 and all campuses by 2030

Awards

UNSW's Climate 10x Accelerator program – raised more than A$1.1 million for startups

Professor Andy Pitman appointed Net Zero Commissioner by NSW Government

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

UNSW promoted the values of decent work and economic growth by highlighting underpaid social service workers and the need for more action on modern slavery, nurturing the careers of Indigenous students, preparing the health workforce for the future and equipping students to become drone pilots.

Research & enterprise

Highlighting underpayment of social workers

More than 300,000 Australians work in community and social service industries, and the majority are women in non-government organisations. A UNSW survey of 3122 workers found that at least 30% of workers were paid less than their legal entitlements. Researchers recommended amending the relevant payment award for the industry to ensure workers' skills and contributions are recognised, and to help achieve gender pay equity.

Quicker work status for asylum seekers and refugees

UNSW researchers are leveraging AI technology to collect data on decisions made by the courts in the case of asylum seekers and refugees seeking protection visas. UNSW's 'Hear Me Out' platform informs people, such as asylum seekers and refugees, about how to lodge a formal complaint to authorities. Both projects are helping asylum seekers and refugees to establish their legal working status faster, allowing them to participate fully in Australia's economy.

Education & student experience

Modern slavery accountability

Globally, more than 50 million people are estimated to be living in conditions of modern slavery. UNSW hosted a talk by specialist in state-corporate crime Dr Rhiannon Bandiera. The talk questioned whether Australian state and corporate action on modern slavery was enough, and proposed that meaningful impact requires action across the full continuum of exploitation. Dr Bandiera also highlighted the coloniality of Australia's modern slavery legislation.

Indigenous careers symposium

The UNSW Nura Gili Centre for Indigenous Programs works with organisations like Ernst & Young to support and prepare Indigenous students for the workforce. In 2024, the Centre hosted the UNSW Indigenous Careers Symposium where experts discussed the importance of a people-focussed approach to the Indigenous career lifecycle. Industry partner representatives and Indigenous students also shared their firsthand experiences.

HR's role in sustainability

To help future human resource (HR) professionals embed sustainability into their organisations, UNSW launched the Sustainability and Human Resources Management course. Examining real-life case studies and featuring guest speakers from different industries, the online course supports students to learn how to describe an organisation's sustainability challenges, how Human Resources Management policies and practices impact those challenges, and what approaches and strategies add value.

External leadership & engagement

The future of the health workforce

UNSW's Faculty of Medicine & Health hosted a seminar titled 'The future of healthcare: who, where and how?' which was attended by more than 300 participants. At the seminar, experts from the NSW Government and the Australian health industry proposed that by planning for the future, the industry can create a more resilient, adaptable and innovative workforce that is well prepared to meet the health challenges and opportunities of tomorrow.

Operations & governance

Making campus more inclusive

To mark the International Day of People with Disability, UNSW hosted a panel event on 'Breaking Barriers: Exploring Disability Inclusivity at UNSW'. Experts discussed the University's progress and potential in making its campus more inclusive for everyone. The panel featured a Paralympian and UNSW student, a neurodiversity consultant, a director of the UNSW Creative Robotics Lab and the director of the UNSW Disability Innovation Institute.

Work-integrated learning for students

There is increasing pressure on educators to incorporate Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) into higher education degrees, but it remains a challenge. To help the sector, UNSW hosted a talk by Professor Denise Jackson from Edith Cowan University, who is an expert in employability and WIL. Professor Jackson discussed ongoing challenges and the opportunities to advance WIL to better meet the needs of diverse stakeholders.

818
Publications

Highlights

UNSW is investigating the potential for skilled refugees to meet demand for workers in regional Australia

Awards

=1st in Australia for employable graduates – Australian Financial Review's Career Impact award

SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

In support of sustainable growth, UNSW launched research hubs to address the housing and carbonisation crises, helped Indonesian shrimp farmers to minimise disease risks, nurtured new entrepreneurs in Western Sydney and developed students' knowledge of quantum technologies.

Research & enterprise

Helping Indonesian shrimp farmers to avoid disease

To prevent and mitigate epidemics at Indonesian shrimp farms, UNSW is working with eFishery, Padjadjaran University and Indonesia's Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries to develop an information system that detects, reports and monitors shrimp diseases. By reducing disease risks, the research helps improve productivity and sustainability at the farms and in the aquaculture industry.

New lab to solve Australia's housing crisis

Australia is experiencing a housing crisis. To help policymakers, UNSW's City Futures Research Centre (CFRC) received a A$1 million grant to create a Housing Analytics Lab. The lab aims to develop digital tools on past and live planning assessments and approvals, and provide insights into land zoning, development pipelines, social and affordable housing, and rental availability.

Education & student experience

Accelerating entrepreneurship in Western Sydney

UNSW Founders invested $700,000 in funding to launch a Health Tech Entrepreneurship Program, as part of the Liverpool Innovation Precinct in Western Sydney. Inaugural events included Pitch Night, where 20 teams presented ideas to address social challenges to more than 120 attendees. First place went to a dental business for people living with disabilities. Four of the five winners were women-led teams, including a business that creates re-usable earplugs from sustainable materials.

Sustainable design courses at UNSW

In UNSW's Designing in Context course, students use the SDGs to solve a design challenge related to the circular economy, social impact, accessibility, sustainable fashion, health or eco design. In the Creativity and Entrepreneurship course, students refer to the SDGs to uncover big and meaningful problems worth solving.

For a safe and fair digital world

Together with the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), UNSW hosted the Trustworthy Digital Society Research Forum where 60+ leaders from government, industry and academia explored opportunities to foster an equitable, safe and sustainable digital world.

External leadership & engagement

Showcasing UNSW at Parliament House

To demonstrate UNSW's positive impact on society, University researchers and educators exhibited their innovative and groundbreaking work to more than 150 federal politicians and policy advisors at Parliament House in Canberra. The 'Powered by UNSW' showcase featured short talks on cancer research, solar energy, quantum computing, tax and women in business.

New decarbonisation institute

To help tackle the world's dependency on fossil fuels, UNSW launched the Institute for Industrial Decarbonisation (IID). The IID will harness expertise across disciplines – including engineering, business, law, planning and design – to support government and industry ambitions to achieve net zero. IID will demonstrate global leadership as the transition towards net zero gathers pace.

Operations & governance

Nurturing innovation on campus

UNSW commissioned an Innovation Working Group comprising academic and professional staff to create an action plan to grow and nurture the University's innovation ecosystem. The plan includes establishing an innovation hub and playbook, developing more physical and virtual spaces for innovation, and sharing more staff stories of innovations that have impact.

New quantum lab for students

UNSW's new capstone Quantum Teaching Lab in the School of Physics builds students' skills by demonstrating emerging quantum technologies. Experiments at the lab focus on quantum correlation, coherent quantum manipulation and quantum properties of matter. Undergraduates work with research-grade instrumentation and equipment in a collaborative environment to advance their understanding of quantum technology and its potential to significantly impact the world.

1503
Publications

Highlights

Torch Innovation Expo in China – showcasing UNSW innovations in sustainability

Awards

UNSW ranked 1st for startups and spinouts – for the third straight year

Most entrepreneurial university in Asia Pacific – 2024 Triple E Awards

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities

UNSW advanced the pursuit of equality for all with research on legal support for refugees, the need for more social housing, and improving accessibility, and it achieved prestigious platinum award status for LGBTQIA+ inclusion.

Research & enterprise

Fairer visa outcomes for refugees

In Australia, refugees and people seeking asylum apply to the government for protection visas and, if unsuccessful, appeal the decision in court. Using AI to mine court data, UNSW researchers found 52% of refugees did not have legal representation and those who did were nine times more likely to succeed than those without. The findings indicate the government's decision to abolish funding for free legal services may be disadvantaging refugees.

Healthy interventions for troubled times

UNSW's Nutrition, Exercise and Social Equity (NExuS) team in the School of Clinical Medicine leads research into mind-body and non-pharmacological interventions for people experiencing mental illness, gender-based violence and food insecurity, as well as refugees and asylum seekers.

Improving disability research

UNSW's Disability Innovation Institute (DIIU) hosted the Disability Matters Online Symposium to examine inclusive research methodologies and their impact on research in Australia.The symposium is part of a six-year collaboration with the global Disability Matters project, which aims to make disability the driving subject of research. The DIIU also published guidance on the ethical issues involved in co-production research with people with disability in Australian universities.

Support for students with disabilities

ActivateUNSW offers students with disabilities, a long-term health condition or mental health condition group mentoring sessions in a safe environment to help them ease into University life.

Education & student experience

25% of all students from equity cohorts

UNSW is committed to having an undergraduate community that reflects the broader Australian population, and enabling access, participation and success for students from equity cohorts. To support this commitment, the UNSW Gateway Equity Target aims for 25% of commencing domestic undergraduate students to be from a low-socioeconomic background and/or socio-educationally disadvantaged school by 2027. In Term 1 2025, enrolments from equity cohorts had risen to almost one in four, putting UNSW within striking distance of its 2027 target.

External leadership & engagement

A need for fairer housing policies

A report by UNSW's City Futures Research Centre (CFRC) titled 'Towards an Australian National Housing and Homelessness Strategy' inspired federal politicians to call for a 10-year National Housing and Homelessness Plan. The CFRC also found the rates of homelessness are up 22% in the three years to 2023-24, and that housing stress is intensified in Queensland. UNSW also led a report highlighting the need for more social housing for people with complex needs.

Healing Indigenous trauma with VR

In a world first, UNSW's Transforming Trauma project is working in partnership with Aboriginal communities and organisations to develop culturally informed virtual reality (VR) tools that provide psychosocial support to Indigenous Australians in regional and remote communities experiencing trauma. In 2024, the project received a A$2.8 million federal grant to evaluate the cultural, psychosocial and health impacts of the VR tools being developed.

Decolonising language

UNSW hosted a Linguistics Symposium featuring research on decolonising language and discussing recent work around social justice, multilingualism and digital technologies.

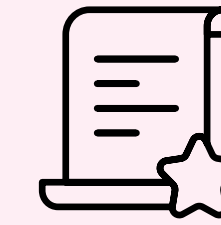# Operations & governance

Training for better equality

As part of its commitment to a respectful and inclusive culture, UNSW launched a new suite of diversity and inclusion training in 2024, which was attended by 428 staff. Topics include LGBTQIA+ allyship, cultural inclusion, accessibility and student equity. It also offered workshops on anti-racism to staff and students at UNSW Diversity Festival 2024.

Making hidden disabilities visible

It is estimated that 4 million people in Australia live with a hidden disability. To increase awareness and support, UNSW implemented the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower initiative. The initiative includes student and staff training, and offering a green sunflower lanyard to those with hidden disabilities who can wear it to let people know they may need extra help, time or support.

1191
Publications

Highlights

Better disability preparedness in crises and natural disasters event – event hosted by the Australian Human Rights Institute and DIIU at Diversity Festival 2024
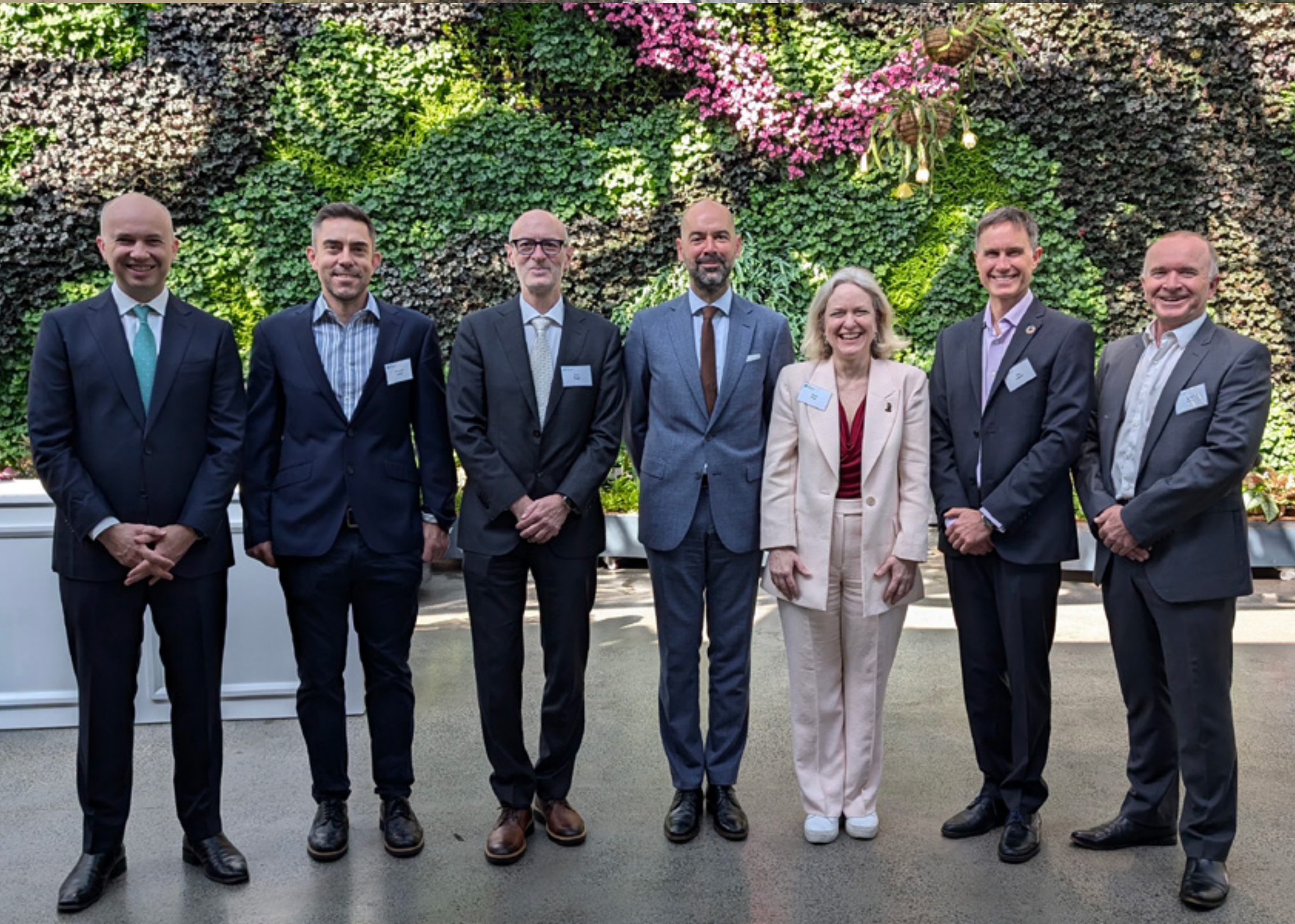
Awards

Only NSW university awarded platinum status for LGBTQIA+ inclusion – Australian Workplace Equality Index 2024

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

To help humans become more sustainable, UNSW discovered the benefits of city parks for ecosystems, how to cool hot cities and the impact of climate on indoor pollution, it hosted marquee sustainable living events and it received an award for a campus bush food project.

Research & enterprise

Urban green spaces benefit ecosystems

Researchers from UNSW and multiple institutions undertook a study that found underlined urban green spaces positively contribute to local ecosystems. The study compared 56 urban green spaces and found they assisted nearby natural environments in 23 ways, including better water retention, carbon capture, nutrient recycling and pathogen control. The study demonstrates urban green spaces are doing more than connecting people with nature.

Sustainability for a remote Aboriginal community

Researchers from the Yuwaya Ngarra-li Partnership with the Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) published a paper highlighting its community-led design approach to improving the built environment and wellbeing of Walgett's Aboriginal community. UNSW is also working with the DEG and the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service on a community-led disaster response and recovery project to address the disproportionate impact on Aboriginal communities in disasters.

Cooling towns and cities

Researchers from the School of Built Environment led a A$700,000 project to create a National Heat Vulnerability Observatory Index to measure and mitigate heat vulnerability in Australian towns and cities. UNSW researchers also co-published the results of a study that cooled the city of Riyadh by up to 4.5°C with highly reflective 'super cool' materials developed by UNSW, and with irrigated greenery and energy retrofitting measures.

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Two Seidler Chairs appointed

Professors Richard Hassell and Wong Mun Summ were appointed Seidler Chairs in the Practice of Architecture. The two founded WOHA, an architecture firm specialising in climate change and urbanisation.

Education & student experience

Campus sustainability projects win awards

Two UNSW student teams mentored by the UNSW Cities Institute won top prizes at the 10th Global Conference of the Alliance for Healthy Cities in Seoul. The UNSW Bush Tucker Trail Project won first prize in the healthy city policy category for its green corridors on campus that increase biodiversity. Another UNSW team won second prize for the use of community gardens to enhance the student experience.

Planting food plants on campus

UNSW Urban Growers held a Garden Bee on campus to celebrate World Food Day. Students and staff planted pumpkin, bean, cucumber and leek seeds, and harvested lettuce, silverbeet and strawberries, and they installed a compost bin. UNSW Urban Growers is a staff and student initiative that has cultivated a community garden for learning and retreat purposes that is open to everyone.

Real-life SDG experience for first-year students

For the fifth year in a row, the UNSW Business School led the UN SDG Challenge for First-Year Students to motivate and inspire students to address complex social and environmental issues. More than 180 students in 33 teams worked on a case study on how renewable energy developers can support regional communities to be sustainable. Final pitches were judged by representatives from EY and Snowy Hydro, an Australian renewable energy company.

External leadership & engagement

UNSW hosts events championing sustainability

UNSW hosted a range of key sustainability events in 2024. The Urban Futures Expo showcased 75 innovations by UNSW researchers to drive urban transformation and sustainability. The UNSW Institute for Climate Risk & Response hosted its first annual conference, which was attended by 150 delegates from industry, government, academia and the community. The UNSW Cities Institute hosted a Thai Government delegation to further collaborative efforts to build smarter cities.

Smarter support for disaster victims

The frequency of disasters is rising at an alarming speed. To better support people in the aftermath of a disaster, UNSW launched its HowWeSurvive initiative in 2024. At a UNSW event, Senior Research Fellow for HowWeSurvive and former lead of the Australian Red Cross disaster recovery program, Dr Kate Brady, highlighted the predictable consequences of disasters and how those affected can be better supported.

UNSW hosts events championing sustainability

Operations & governance

Creating a world-class campus

To ensure UNSW continues to offer world-class spaces for students, researchers and staff through to 2040, UNSW launched the Future Campus project. The project sought community input on four key Space Principles that will apply to all future capital projects and space strategies. Initial project plans include the removal of obsolete buildings and building of sustainable replacements, and increasing student accommodation options and affordability.

Making urban cities more climate-resilient

More than 10 million Australians live in urban areas that suffer from urban overheating. To further understand the impact of overheating on people's health, researchers from the UNSW Climate-Resilient Cities Lab used smart sensors and 3D modelling to measure and analyse heat and air quality in indoor and outdoor campus environments. The study highlighted the need for adequate cross ventilation and air filtration.

1471
Publications

Highlights

Solving the housing crisis — City Futures Research Centre awarded A$1 million to create a housing data lab

Awards

PLEA Lifetime Award — Scientia Professor Mat Santamouris for his heat mitigation technologies

Architecture and Planning awards — for A$2.24 million Smart Regional Spaces project that enables digital inclusion in NSW communities

SDG 12: Responsible Production and Consumption

From transforming old mattresses and textile waste into kitchen tops and supporting the case for a global treaty on plastics, to championing less plastic on campus and less waste by its labs and suppliers, UNSW led the charge towards a circular economy.

Research & enterprise

Leader of global recycling and clean energy program

The UNSW SMaRT Centre is the recycling lead in the A$277 million Trailblazer for Recycling and Clean Energy (TRaCE) program. TRaCE is a partnership between UNSW, the University of Newcastle and 27 industry partners. Running for four years until 2026, it is helping Australia and the world transition to sustainable recycling and clean energy solutions, such as solar, sustainable fuels, energy storage and recycling microfactories.

Turning waste into green ceramics

A TRaCE collaboration between the UNSW SMaRT Centre and Kandui Technologies is creating non-toxic 'green ceramics' from waste textiles and mattresses, which can be used as an alternative to cut stone in kitchens and construction. The green ceramics are made using UNSW's revolutionary MICROfactorie waste-to-product technology. TRaCE support will help the project to upscale manufacturing and explore additional waste streams.

Education & student experience

Plastic Free July

UNSW joined the global Plastic Free July campaign calling for the campus community to ditch plastic and single-use packaging. In 2024, the UNSW campaign targeted the reduction of the campus's use of 500,000 single-use coffee cups annually. The campaign builds on UNSW's ongoing Plastic Free Dining initiative, with campus retailers removing plastic items and switching to fully compostable packaging.

Designing a circular economy

The undergraduate Concepts and Context course in the School of Art & Design inspires students to become designers who lead the transition from the linear production of textiles towards circular economy principles. The course helps student develop their understanding of textile creation, lifecycles and impact. Design strategies that divert cloth from landfill and use waste textiles are strongly encouraged.

External leadership & engagement

Data and institutional groundwork for a global plastics treaty

UNSW's Centre for Sustainable Development Reform (CSDR), serving as Secretariat for the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (GOAP), is advancing global efforts to manage plastic pollution through both data innovation and international policy development. At the UN's global plastics treaty negotiations in South Korea, CSDR launched two critical data tools – the Plastics Data Checklist, which helps countries assess available data across the plastics lifecycle, and the Global Plastics Data Tracker, which identifies supply chain opportunities for progress. The CSDR simultaneously works with member states to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including marine environments. CSDR successfully cultivated strong support among member states for this data-driven approach to plastic pollution management ahead of continued negotiations in 2025.

Tackling the data problem with plastics

To support global efforts to improve plastic pollution management, UNSW's Centre for Sustainable Development Reform launched two data tools at the UN's global plastics treaty negotiations in South Korea. The Plastics Data Checklist helps a country understand what data is available on plastics across their lifecycle. The Global Plastics Data Tracker identifies global supply chain data to indicate where progress can be made.

Reducing resource use

No country in the world that meets the basic needs of its citizens is operating at a sustainable level of resource use. To help countries get there, the UNSW Centre for Ideas hosted an event called 'Degrowth'. Sustainability experts from UNSW, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and government discussed the urgent resource challenges that need to be faced to slow climate change, reduce inequality and ensure a sustainable future.
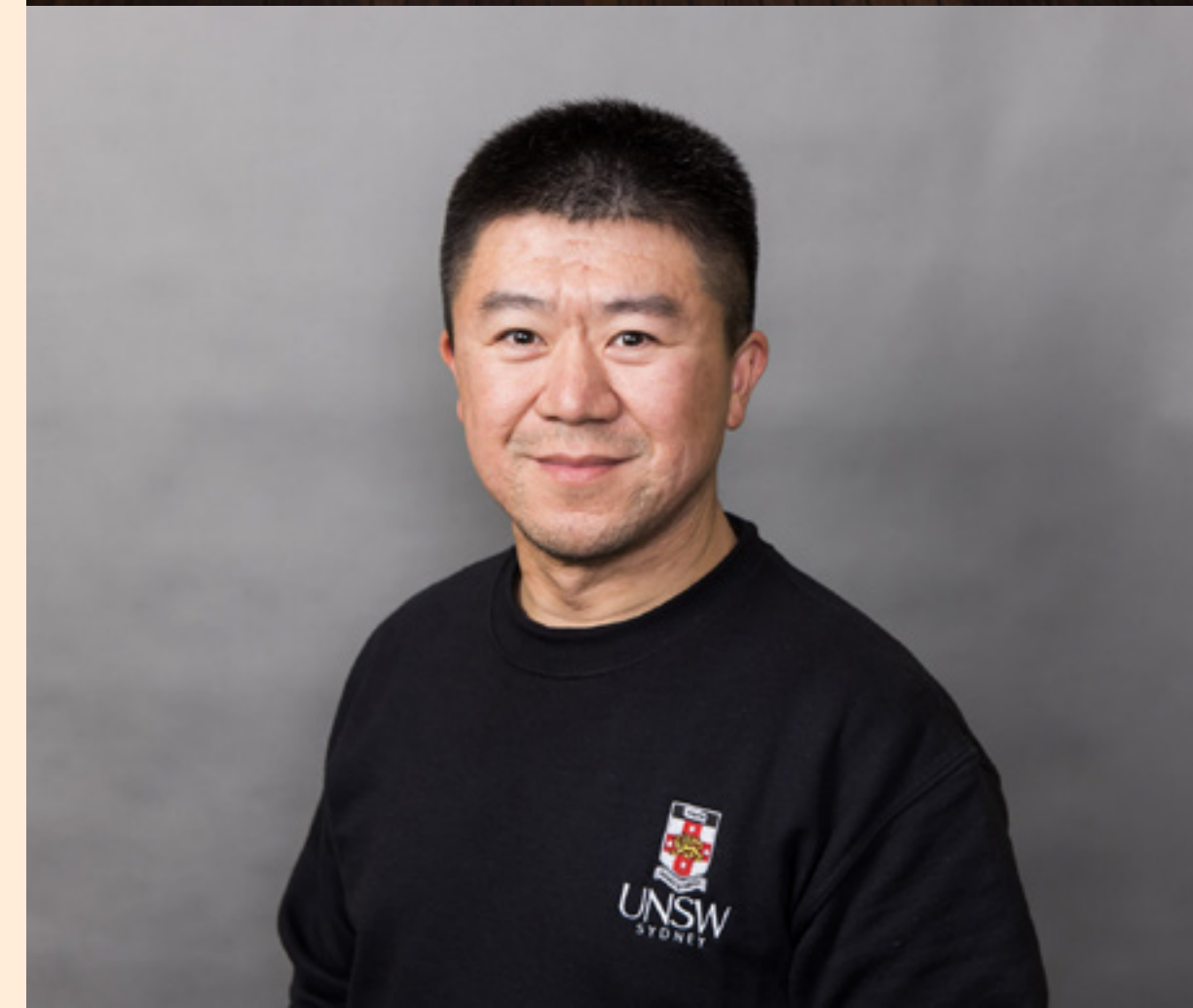
Operations & governance

Lab swap to avoid waste

Laboratory consumables and equipment are one of UNSW's top five sources of supply chain carbon emissions. UNSW TechNet hosted an inaugural lab swap event to promote resource sharing and circular economy behaviour. Approximately 60 UNSW students and staff participated with around 80 boxes of consumables and seven pieces of equipment donated. More than 70% of items worth A$26,000 were swapped, avoiding 12 tonnes of CO2e emissions.

Supplier Charter updated

In 2024, UNSW updated its Supplier Charter to reinforce its commitment to ethical, sustainable and socially responsible procurement. The new version of the charter introduces enhanced standards of conduct in business dealings, environmental sustainability, work health and safety, diversity and inclusion, social value and around misconduct. UNSW also launched a Sustainable Procurement Framework to foster stronger sustainability in its supply chain.

725
Publications

Highlights

59 UNSW labs have now received global LEAF accreditation for sustainability

Awards

Edgeworth David Medal – Professor Yansong Chen for his solar panel recycling technology

SDG 13: Climate Action

In support of net zero ambitions, UNSW developed innovative ways to train firefighters in 3D, shared its climate expertise with the public, collaborated with the UN and other international partners to develop and share knowledge, hosted a workshop to help people understand climate action they can take at a local level, and created dashboards to track its own emissions goals.

Research & enterprise

Water for Climate Mitigation

Energy production is water intensive. In collaboration with the UN-Water Expert Group on Water and Climate Change and the International Universities Climate Alliance (IUCA), UNSW helped to investigate important water use data in the pursuit of climate targets. The study served as a critical input to the UN-Water Analytical Brief on Water for Climate Mitigation, which was launched at COP29.

Delivering 3D fire training to firefighters

Bushfires are common and dangerous in NSW. UNSW entered into a five-year agreement with Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW) to provide immersive bushfire visualisation training for firefighters. A University-built 3D cinema at FRNSW's premises will recreate real-world scenarios where wind speed, fuel load and temperature can be adjusted to help firefighters prepare for the unpredictable behaviour of fires.

Listening to locals to improve disaster recovery

Disaster recovery is dominated by top-down command-and-control philosophies, despite evidence showing community-led recoveries are more successful. To improve disaster recovery efforts, UNSW researchers founded HowWeSurvive. The initiative aims to improve decision-makers' ability to listen to people affected by disasters and call out bad practices that overlook community voices.

Education & student experience

Climate empowerment for higher education students

Universities play an important role in empowering future climate leaders. Together with the International Universities Climate Alliance (IUCA), Monash University and UN-Youth Australia, UNSW co-hosted an online global thematic dialogue to consider global youth perspectives on climate education. The event convened youth leaders and youth empowerment experts across the world ahead of COP29.

Empowering individuals to act on climate

To help unravel the complexities of climate change, UNSW hosted a Climate Fresk workshop for students and staff where they learned about the climate crisis and what kind of individual action they can take. More than 160 UNSW staff and students participated in the workshop, and more than 2 million people from 167 countries have participated globally.

External leadership & engagement

Exploring natural solutions for climate challenges

In partnership with engineering consultancy Arup Australia, UNSW hosted a roundtable to explore the positive roles nature can play in climate adaptation in Australasia and the Pacific. UNSW and Arup identified opportunities to collaborate on Pacific migration, mangrove interventions, student mobility and STEM research engagements.

Sharing climate knowledge at marquee events

To advance climate action, the UNSW Institute for Climate Risk & Response held an inaugural conference to explore its efforts and opportunities. UNSW's Making Good Media project hosted a talk at SXSW Sydney on how media might cover positive climate action in the future. And at the University's first-ever SDG Showcase, UNSW researchers discussed their groundbreaking efforts in climate change and clean energy.

Operations & governance

Powering analysis of emissions and climate risk

UNSW is committed to achieving a 30% emissions reduction by 2025, 50% by 2030 and net zero by 2050 compared to its 2018 baseline. The University created dashboards to show carbon emissions by faculty and division, empowering teams to monitor their progress and achieve targets. UNSW also engaged 80 stakeholders to undertake an assessment of climate-related risks and opportunities in 2024, for sharper resilience planning and disclosure requirements.

Planting trees to offset emissions

For 2024 emissions, UNSW chose to voluntarily purchase carbon credits equivalent to its scope 1 emissions. UNSW partnered with Greenfleet to purchase 9217 units from Australian native reforestation offsets, as well as the same number of Verified Carbon Credits Units (VCUs) from international projects. UNSW staff and students also joined Greenfleet to plant around 1100 native trees in the Lucas Heights Reserve, helping to restore native ecosystems, build critical habitat for koalas and possums, restore water quality and remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

13 CLIMATE ACTION

1370
Publications

Highlights
Signed up to the 'living lab' approach to carbon neutrality – with 18 universities worldwide

Awards

Global climate communications prize – Scientia Professor Matthew England

International award for pioneering research – Professor Lisa Alexander for her climate change datasets

SDG 14: Life Below Water

UNSW sought to preserve water life by helping restore wetlands and kelp forests, leading global efforts in ocean accounting and collecting coastal data from the around the world to conserve beach ecosystems.

Research & enterprise

Restoring wetlands for farmers and birds

Working with local council and WetlandCare Australia, UNSW's Water Research Laboratory (WRL) transformed degraded landscape into 80 hectares of new tidal wetlands on the mid-north coast of NSW. WRL performed a similar restoration in the Tomago Wetlands. Both projects reduce acidity impacts for nearby farmers and create a respite for animals, such as migratory wading birds.

Saving oysters from climate change

Oysters are vulnerable to disease and mass mortality events. Together with UTS and the NSW Government, UNSW explored how climate change events, like heavy rainfall, are weakening the immune defences of oysters and creating novel diseases. To ensure the resilience of oysters, researchers recommended enhancing selective breeding programs.

Leading ocean sustainable development

The Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (GOAP) Secretariat, hosted by UNSW's Centre for Sustainable Development Reform, advances ocean sustainable development through research, capacity enhancement, and institutional strengthening. Ocean accounts transform fragmented data into indicators revealing marine ecosystems' economic, livelihood, climate, and community value. The Ocean Fellows Program embeds 33 researchers across 14 countries, pioneering applications including social ocean accounting in Mozambique and blue carbon valuation in Indonesia. In 2024, the Secretariat produced 22 knowledge products and 30 policy briefs while training 1110 individuals across 56 sessions, ensuring ocean accounting methodologies translate into practical sustainable governance solutions worldwide.

Education & student experience

Exhibiting 75 years of UNSW water research

Water is at the centre of every community. To showcase the University's commitment to protecting this vital resource, UNSW exhibited 'Living Water: 75 years of water research at UNSW'. The exhibition highlighted the significant contributions made by UNSW toward water governance and security, healthy oceans and resilient coastlines, and safe and equitable access to water.

Accounting for the impact of artificial light on fish

Artificial light at night can harm shallow reefs. UNSW's Centre for Marine Science and Innovation found that the predatory and plant-eating behaviour of fish can be altered in unexpected ways under artificial light, compared to daytime and dark environments. The research highlights how coastal management strategies need to account for light pollution to preserve valuable underwater resources.

External leadership & engagement

Restoring kelp forests and enhancing restoration impact

The world's kelp forests are rapidly disappearing. A UNSW-led project called the Kelp Forest Challenge aims to restore 4 million hectares of kelp forests globally by 2040. In 2024, the project was endorsed by the UN Decade of Ocean Science. Research lead Dr Aaron Eger also co-developed a database of marine and coastal restoration projects in Australia and New Zealand.

Better coastal planning

Coastlines are experiencing vast change. To help coastal planners, UNSW researchers created the CoastSnap app. The app enables community members to take photos on their smartphones at more than 350 installed cradles in 31 countries. Almost 50,000 photos have been collected and are being used as data to track events like sand erosion, seaweed impacts on fishing and dune recovery.

Operations & governance

Restoring Sydney's underwater forests

In 2024, UNSW's 'Operation Crayweed' project received a $890,000 Ian Potter Foundation grant to expand and accelerate seaweed restoration along a 70 kilometre stretch of Sydney's coastline. The project allows for models of best practice to be shared with a global community of kelp conservationists, and it supports efforts to engage local communities and foster a deeper connection to the underwater world.

585
Publications

Highlights

Kelp Forest Challenge endorsed by the UN Decade of Ocean Science

SDG 15: Life On Land

Interventions to protect vulnerable animals and conserve important habitats, using Indigenous knowledge to better manage bushfires and increasing biodiversity on campus were some of the efforts UNSW made to protect life on land in 2024.

Research & enterprise

Protecting vulnerable animals

To help animals survive and thrive, UNSW researchers analysed the diet of male southern elephant seals who are threatened by climate change, it reintroduced quolls, bettongs and bilbies to a national park after a 100-year absence due to feral cats and foxes, and it helped open a new rescue centre for platypuses affected by drought in regional NSW.

Using Indigenous knowledges to manage bushfires

Bushfires devastate Australian communities and are becoming more frequent. To help prevent and manage them, UNSW researchers are incorporating Indigenous practices and understandings of fire in bushfire management. Research areas include corresponding Indigenous songlines to managing landscape on ridgelines, and examining traditional fire lore to understand how modern bushfire regimes will be affected by climate change.

Education & student experience

Re-introducing native food plants on campus

UNSW students and staff planted 265 native bush food plants spanning 26 species on campus to increase biodiversity and habitat for native flora and fauna. Plant species included kangaroo grass, lemon myrtle and native raspberries. The planting launched the Bush Tucker Trail Project. In phase two of the project, students will install educational signage, beehives and insect hotels.

External leadership & engagement

Conserving important marshlands

The Macquarie Marshes and wetlands are important for vegetation and bird breeding, however they are threatened by climate change and water resource development. UNSW's Centre for Ecosystem Science provided conservation advice on the wetlands and inner floodplains of the Macquarie Marshes. The advice detailed key species and ecological processes critical to the survival of the marshes.

Examining land care by Aboriginal councils

Awarded land by government, Aboriginal Land Councils seek to create economic enterprises, protect culture and conserve the land. In partnership with the NSW Government, UNSW researchers examined the involvement of Aboriginal Land Councils in land care and conservation work. They found a desire among councils to better manage the land and grow an income stream from this work.

Operations & governance

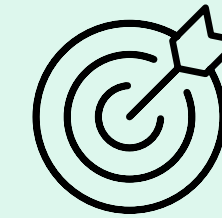## Imparting bush regeneration skills

Together with Randwick City Council, UNSW hosted a bushcare volunteering day on its Gordon Bay campus. Volunteers planted Indigenous coastal heath species to support habitat for small birds. They also learned about the craft of bush regeneration alongside the Council's knowledgeable Bushcare Team and dedicated volunteers.

Creating a conservation area in arid NSW

Fowlers Gap is an extensive arid area of NSW supported by almost 60 years of UNSW research. In 2022, the University announced it would restore the area, making it into a dedicated site for conservation. In 2024, UNSW researchers finished installing fencing to protect native fauna and flora from rabbits, goats, kangaroos and invasive predators, such as foxes and cats.

790
Publications

Goals

Create healthy, resilient campuses — established a biodiversity metric for measuring progress

Awards

Science 'Oscars' award — to Professor David Keith for his work conserving ecosystems

A$2.5 million Industry Laureate Fellowship — to Professor David Keith to help sustain healthy ecosystems

SDG 16:
Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

UNSW led efforts to reduce out-of-home care rates among Aboriginal children and helped an Aboriginal community reduce contact with the justice system, it supported security and safety progress in conflict-affected Nepal, and it launched its own sustainability and modern slavery strategies.

Research & enterprise

Reducing out-of-home care rates for Aboriginal children

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make up 42% of children in out-of-home care in Australia, but only 5.9% of the child population.UNSW's Dr BJ Newton is a Ministerial Aboriginal Partnership Group member advising the NSW Government on how to reduce this overrepresentation. Her 'Bringing Them Home, Keeping Them Home' research – a global first – has significantly informed government plans for systemic reform.

Inclusive research to improve refugee services

The voice of refugees is often absent in research around human rights services, which can eventually result in services further disadvantaging them. Together with the NSW Refugee Communities Advocacy Network and input from key countries worldwide, UNSW identified best practice guidelines to follow in community-based research. Researchers concluded that recognising refugee relationships and documenting their perspectives are integral to inclusive human rights-informed care.

Security and safety in the Indo-Pacific

In support of security and community safety in Nepal, UNSW's Institute for Global Development (IGD) along with the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies(Cambodia) and the Niti Foundation (Nepal) met with regional police, political leaders and civic leaders to discuss key challenges and potential solutions. The trilateral partnership presented key findings on community safety and security in the Indo-Pacific to the Australian Government.

Education & student experience

Reform ideas for Australia's legal system

At UNSW's annual Hal Wootten Lecture, Magistrate Professor David Heilpern outlined three reforms to positively transform the legal landscape. The reforms included the hearing of appeals of refused bail in District Court instead of the Supreme Court to reduce wait times, ensuring small breaches of process don't override far more serious crimes, and reducing testing for drug driving involving medicinal cannabis.

Decision-making in a volatile age

In a Sydney first, UNSW hosted the Nobel Prize Dialogue to discuss and explore the future of decision-making, which is being negatively impacted by a decline in democracy, geopolitical tensions and AI. In a series of talks, Nobel Prize laureates and international experts explored the powerful forces that shape our decisions and how we can navigate the digital age.

External leadership & engagement

Reducing contact with the justice system

The Aboriginal community in Walgett are the target of over-policing, leading to a high risk of contact with the criminal justice system. With the aim of avoiding further criminalisation and marginalisation, UNSW's Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership with the DEG developed the Two River Pathway to Change Model in 2018. In 2024, they published a review of the model. Another Yuwaya Ngarra-li project is facilitating collaboration with local services to support Walgett residents to pay off fines and avoid the justice system.

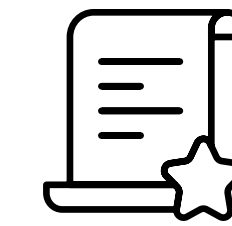### Business and human rights training in Asia

In partnership with the UN Development Programme, UNSW's Australian Human Rights Institute delivered training on business and human rights to national human rights institutions across Asia. The training increased capacity and understanding of business and human rights, promoted knowledge exchange, and built networks and linkages for those working in business and human rights in the region.

Operations & governance

Sustainability and modern slavery strategies

In 2024, UNSW launched a Sustainable Procurement Framework and a Modern Slavery Strategy. The Sustainable Procurement Framework outlines risk assessments and risk mitigation strategies for suppliers around environmental sustainability, modern slavery, human and labour rights, and social procurement. The Modern Slavery Strategy aims to manage social risks and protect human rights through strong governance, risk management, and effective remediation and reporting.

1118
Publications

Highlights

450 hospital patients benefited from free legal services from the UNSW Kingsford Legal Centre's Health Justice Partnership in the five years to 2024

Awards

Global Australian Award — Professor Mimi Zou for global leadership on AI governance

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

From working with key partners to improve healthcare outcomes in Australia and off-grid solar repair skills in Africa, to empowering countries to tackle plastics pollution and supporting Australian companies to act more sustainably, UNSW nurtured a range of partnerships to progress the goals in 2024.

Research & enterprise

Delivering better healthcare in NSW

Comprising UNSW and 14 other organisations, the Sydney Partnership for Health, Education, Research and Enterprise (SPHERE) develops innovative ways to deliver better healthcare outcomes to NSW communities. In 2024, SPHERE highlights included providing recommendations to a government inquiry into menopause and perimenopause, and funding research exploring how technology can support older Australians to age at home independently.

ARC Linkage grants for projects in African and Aboriginal communities

Through the ARC Linkage program, a UNSW-led project in partnership with CLASP, SolarAid and Zuwa Energy is developing off-grid solar repair skills in Malawi and Zambia. It also partnered with the NSW Government, four Australian universities and one Canadian university to examine how young and urban Aboriginal people can enjoy better sexual health and wellbeing.

Education & student experience

Raising global engineering skills

More engineers are needed worldwide. To support progress, UNSW joined forces with Arizona State University and King's College London to create the Engineering & Design Institute London (TEDI-London) in 2020. In 2024, the founding cohort of students completed their Global Design Engineering degrees. TEDI-London currently has 120 students enrolled who are learning how best to tackle global engineering challenges.

Sharing best practices with Timor-Leste and Tonga

UNSW signed three memorandums of understanding in 2024 with Universidade Nacional Timor Lorosa'e and Dili Institute of Technology in Timor-Leste and Christ's University of the Pacific in Tonga. The universities agreed to activities like sharing academic materials, running staff and student exchange programs, increasing the number of local PhDs, supporting curriculum development and producing seminars on the SDGs.

External leadership & engagement

Ocean sustainable development through partnership

Through the Centre for Sustainable Development Reform's Secretariat leadership, the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (GOAP) expanded to 44 member organisations across 23 countries. The Global Dialogue in Bali attracted 7 Indo-Pacific Ministers and over 450 participants from nearly 50 countries, facilitating knowledge exchange and policy momentum. Key outcomes included Indonesia's National Ocean Accounts Dashboard launch and Costa Rica's Joint Declaration, with 18 countries pledging to advance ocean accounts by 2030. GOAP's regional Communities of Practice provide platforms for peer learning, while partnerships with the High Level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, IOC-UNESCO, and UN SEEA Technical Working Groups have integrated ocean accounting into global ocean governance frameworks.

UNSW working with UN on global events

UNSW is a strategic knowledge partner of the UN Development Coordination Office – Regional Officer for Asia and the Pacific (UNDCO), assisting with the engagement of local resources and capabilities. In 2024, the partnership curated events in Bangkok and New York together with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), the UN Executive Office of the Secretary General (UNEOSG),and UN Global Pulse.

Operations & governance

UNSW joins the UN Global Compact

The UN Global Compact is the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative. In 2024, UNSW became a non-business signatory to the Compact and joined the UN Global Compact Network Australia, contributing to a national community of organisations committed to advancing the Compact's Ten Principles for ethical, sustainable, and socially responsible practice. This step builds on UNSW's longstanding commitment to responsible business, including the UNSW Business School's participation in the UN Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME).

UNSW opens new health building

In partnership with the Randwick Health Campus, UNSW opened the new Integrated Acute Services Building (IASB) in the Prince of Wales Hospital, a first in NSW. The IASB features 10 floors of laboratories and research, teaching and collaboration spaces. The partnership aims to foster connections between students, researchers and clinical teams to ultimately improve healthcare innovation and outcomes.

23,222
Publications

Highlights

UNSW hosted Timor-Leste President, His Excellency José Ramos-Horta – to discuss water, food and health

Awards

Community Champion for STI testing in remote communities – Shaping Australia Awards

Methodology

This report is a snapshot of UNSW's contributions to advancing the UN SDGs through the 2024 activities of students, staff and partnerships, as part of the University's commitment to positive societal impact and improving life on earth.

Stories were selected for inclusion based on submissions from faculties, centres and institutes, and through a desktop review of UNSW news articles, websites and other key UNSW reporting.

We have endeavoured to select the most relevant SDG for each story. Many stories are relevant to multiple goals and targets, reflecting the interconnected nature of the SDGs. Progress in one area — such as health, education or climate action — often supports or depends on progress in others. This interdependence highlights the need for interdisciplinary approaches that bridge social, environmental and economic factors.

The entries are divided into the four broad pillars by which UNSW understands our contributions to the goals: Education & Student Experience; Operations & Governance; Research & Enterprise; and External Engagement & Leadership.

Publications

Publication numbers are based on Scopus SDG datasets in SciVal and cover UNSW research outputs 2021-24. Each SDG from 1–16 can be added as a research area. Access the relevant Scopus dataset.

This mapping was used as part of the 2025 THE Impact Rankings approach to scoring research outputs. SDG 17 is calculated as the sum of all SDG-related publications in each time period (with duplicates removed). SciVal does not offer SDG 17 as a research area, but the total for the current THE Impact Rankings can be found on the website. Note: this reflects the latest THE data and is limited to the years included in the Impact Rankings.

For more details about UNSW's and our partners' contributions to sustainability, see:

- 2024 UNSW Annual Report
- 2024 Arc Annual Report
- 2024 Environmental Sustainability Report
- 2022-2024 Environmental Sustainability Plan
- UNSW Business School PRME reporting
- Workplace Gender Equality Agency
- Australian Workplace Equality Index
- SAGE Athena Swan
- Australian Human Rights Institute Societal Impact Report 2021-2024
- Sustainability Matters publications & reports page

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