

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



SCHOOL OF
SOCIAL SCIENCES



Strategic Plan

2022-2026

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

With respect for Aboriginal cultural protocol and out of recognition that its campuses occupy their traditional lands, Western Sydney University acknowledges the Darug, Eora, Dharawal (also referred to as Tharawal) and Wiradjuri peoples and thanks them for their support of its work in their lands (Greater Western Sydney and beyond).

COVER IMAGE:
CHRIS EDWARDS
SWIMMY CREEK
MIXED MEDIA ON LATVIAN LINEN
100 CM X 145 CM
2010
WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY ART COLLECTION
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INTRODUCTION

The School of Social Sciences is a multidisciplinary School, comprised of leading experts in Sociology, Geography, Social Work, Criminology, Arts Therapy and Counselling, Development Studies, and Anthropology.

While diverse in our focus and skillsets, by the nature of our disciplines we share a common interest in the human condition and social justice. Across our curricula and embedded in our research is an intrinsic need to understand human behaviour and what it takes to build better societies.

As a School, we have a reputation for excellence and impact in research – which is recognised by global rankings. From our ground-breaking work on green infrastructure, to challenging heteronormativity to humanitarian response, rehabilitation and development – we are committed to encouraging and supporting research that makes a positive difference to society, and equally dedicated to ensuring those strengths are translated into research-led teaching.

We deliver 25 undergraduate and postgraduate degrees to more than 4,000 students across four campuses – Parramatta South, Parramatta City, Liverpool, and Penrith. To our students, we offer frameworks to innovate, think critically, and independently evaluate the shifting social worlds around them.

This instils the skills that our graduates need, to pursue social justice and social change consciously and ethically within their chosen fields.

As a School, we believe that true equity is born from individuals having power and agency, and an ability to influence decisions that impact their own futures. In our teaching, we apply the principle of ‘the learner as the expert’ and are committed to applying a ‘flipped’ model of curricula design, in which students are treated as partners and have the power to influence and shape the content that they consume through co-design.

Our domestic students come from a wide range of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and our international students come to us from Europe, Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific region. We value the rich diversity of our student cohort and draw upon their intercultural strengths and connections to their communities.

In our communities – both in Greater Western Sydney and beyond our national borders – we are committed to contributing to social, cultural, political, and environmental change, and to building mutual capacity and capability in marginalised, disadvantaged, and diasporic groups.

A key strength of our School is our commitment to building and nurturing relationships with Australia’s Indigenous communities. Following the launch of our [*School of Social Sciences Indigenous Strategy \(2020-2025\)*](#), we succeeded in reaching population parity in our Indigenous staff and student cohorts in 2020, and we now have a focused objective of building the proportion of Indigenous staff and students in our School and ensuring that Indigenous students have the same retention outcomes as non-Indigenous students.

In formulating this *School of Social Sciences Strategic Plan (2022-2026)*, the School of Social Sciences has set out to align with the community-minded and student-centric principles of *Sustaining Success*.

This Strategy highlights a wide range of specific objectives, aligned with each of our portfolio areas – Engagement, Learning and Teaching, Research and International.

It is through these objectives that we will activate a plan of intentional, outward engagement, with a focus on:

- Developing sustainable student flows and enhancing student experience.
- Meaningful, research-led change in local, international, and diasporic communities.
- Deep, thoughtful, and reciprocal engagement with our peers, partners, students, and alumni.
- Cultivating an equitable, supportive, and collaborative environment that is conducive to individual and shared success and impact.

I am confident that our *School of Social Sciences Strategic Plan (2022-2026)* will harness our energies to continue to deliver high quality education for our students, world class research and publications, and meaningful social change in the Greater Western Sydney and Indo-Pacific regions.

**Professor Brian Stout,
PVC HASS Cluster, Dean,
School of Social Sciences**

Alignment with the *Sustaining Success 2021-2026 Strategic Plan*

Sustaining Success describes a 'Principle of Connectedness' which underlies how Western Sydney University is "embedded in the economic, cultural and social growth of the Western Sydney region" (pp. 16).

Through its 'Enablers', *Sustaining Success* also asserts the importance of the University acting as "an integral part of the fabric of Western Sydney," (pp. 21) and concurrently asserts its position as an "unambiguously global" institution (pp. 24).

Further, the Plan also highlights that the notion of 'Excellence' can be achieved when we "engage our students as partners in their educational journey," and recognises that "expanding international engagement and forging new partnerships and networks... brings greater depth, experience and connectedness to our endeavours in Western Sydney." (pp. 11).

These are positioning statements that have high resonance with the School of Social Sciences and have been drawn upon to inform and influence the creation of this School Strategic Plan.

How to read this Strategy

The *School of Social Sciences Strategic Plan (2022 – 2026)* is comprised of five key themes:

- Community connectedness
- Student experience
- Equity, diversity, and inclusion
- Work culture and professional development
- Innovation and excellence.

Governance position holders within the School have provided input into the overall strategic objectives that underpin each theme, with individual School actions then arranged in line with the following portfolio areas:

- Engagement
- Learning and teaching
- Research and HDR
- International.

Key measurements are then presented as School-wide aspirations that each portfolio will work towards.

Indigenous Strategy

It is important to note that the School has also launched its [*School of Social Sciences Indigenous Strategy \(2020-2025\)*](#).

This *School of Social Sciences Strategic Plan (2022 – 2026)* is best read in conjunction with our *Indigenous Strategy* – which asserts our position as a leader in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and student recruitment, retention, wellbeing, and success.

Broad in its objectives, the *Indigenous Strategy* contains a range of objectives and success measures that intersect our research, learning and teaching portfolios.

This Strategy intends to be complementary. Just as the *Indigenous Strategy* intersects with our other School portfolios, this *Strategic Plan* aims to interact in respectful and empowering ways with Indigenous peoples and Indigenous knowledge, and echoes the intention to prioritise strategic objectives that foster and enable the participation of Australia's First Nations people.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE ONE

COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS

Establish new, and nurture existing, partner relationships in domestic and international organisations that:

- Provide real, tangible benefits for the partner organisation and the broader community.
- Complement our disciplines.
- Enhance our curricula and our research reputation.
- Enhance Western's reputation as a globally recognised research institution.

ENGAGEMENT

1.E.1. Implement whole-of-School strategies that seek to enhance and strengthen our engagements with community and industry in Greater Western Sydney.

1.E.2. Incentivise and celebrate partnerships and collaborative relationships.

1.E.3. Clearly articulate reciprocal benefits of partner relationships, and impact of research and engagement activities, to domestic and international audiences.

1.E.4. Prioritise domestic collaborations that:

- Reflect local and regional concerns and address key societal issues.
- Lead to meaningful, change and capability building in communities.
- Further the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

LEARNING AND TEACHING

1.LT.1. Continually evaluate the learning and teaching implications of partnerships, agreements, and collaborations.

1.LT.2. Prioritise partnerships that directly correlate with improving learning and teaching outcomes and curricula.

1.LT.3. Prioritise industry partnerships that enhance the School's ability to produce 'STEM skilled graduates' in line with NPILF targets.

RESEARCH AND HDR

1.R.1. Continually evaluate research collaborations and ensure research focus aligns with community and industry objectives.

1.R.2. Collaborate with academic, government, NGO, and industry partners on research.

1.R.3. Deliver high-profile research events, aimed at local, national, and international audiences, that allow our work to be widely shared with our partners, peers, industries, and the broader community.

INTERNATIONAL

1.I.1. Implement whole-of-School strategies that seek to enhance and strengthen our engagements in China and the Indo-Pacific.

1.I.2. Prioritise international collaborations that:

- Reflect global concerns and address key societal issues.
- Lead to meaningful, change and capability building in international communities and emerging economies.
- Further the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

KEY SUCCESS MEASURES

Collaborative projects and partnerships with domestic and international organisations.

Number of research collaborations that include external (domestic and international) research partners.

Co-funded industry PhD scholarships.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE TWO

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Transform the student experience in key programs through a focus on industry-led coursework, work-integrated learning (WIL) and real-world experience, and mobility programs.

ENGAGEMENT

- 2.E.1.** Strengthen connections with alumni.
- 2.E.2.** A new Social Work placements strategy, with a focus on generating new placement contacts with domestic and international organisations.
- 2.E.3.** Address the separation between placement agreements and partnerships within the School, and develop a framework for creating broader, holistic partnerships with placement providers.

LEARNING AND TEACHING

- 2.LT.1.** Develop a system for industry and community insights to directly inform curricula development and teaching.
- 2.LT.2.** Maintain excellence in delivering flexible curriculum, with emphasis on exemplary student experiences across all modalities.
- 2.LT.3.** Support and encourage the input of student representatives and associations in the work of the School.
- 2.LT.4.** Highlight the presence of STEM skills in Social Science programs and contribute to the identification of units that contribute to producing STEM-skilled graduates.

RESEARCH AND HDR

2.R.1. Develop a system for research outcomes to directly inform curricula review processes.

2.R.2. Establish a cycle of 'Research Ready' workshops aimed at training emerging researchers for grant application writing.

2.R.3. HDR candidates considered emerging academics, with:

- Full involvement in a formal, School research mentoring scheme.
- Equitable access to resources.
- Opportunities to forge strong professional relationships among colleagues in the School and HASS Cluster.
- Opportunities to co-publish with academic colleagues.
- Participation in an annual research conference.

INTERNATIONAL

2.I.1. Provide a high-quality, supportive environment for international students by delivering first-class student support from enquiry and graduation to employment.

2.I.2. Develop reliable and sustainable international student flows from established international partner institutions through Transnational Education (TNE) programs.

2.I.3. Leverage existing institutional and school partnerships and explore new models of collaboration to create opportunities for new and varied student experiences.

KEY SUCCESS MEASURES

WIL, placement, and student mobility opportunities.

Placement networks for Social Work.

HDR load and completion rates.

International student mobility exchange agreements.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE THREE

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

Improve access to higher education for prospective students from disadvantaged or marginalised groups – with a focus on disability, gender, cultural and linguistic background, and socio-economic status – and provide appropriate support for all staff and students.

ENGAGEMENT

- 3.E.1.** Enrich pathway programs that target marginalised groups and students of Indigenous, and Pacific Islander background.
- 3.E.2.** Develop culturally specific recruitment, retention, and support strategies for domestic students of Indigenous and Pacific Islander background.
- 3.E.3.** Ensure that support mechanisms include two-way consultation and incorporate student feedback.
- 3.E.4.** Enhance and extend pathways from TAFE, College Undergraduate Certificates and Diploma programs into aligned undergraduate courses.

LEARNING AND TEACHING

- 3.LT.1.** Adopt a whole-of-School approach to internationalising, decolonising, and Indigenising curricula.
- 3.LT.2.** Improve accessibility options and mechanisms for supporting students with disability and diverse backgrounds and experiences, including students of Indigenous, and Pacific Islander background.
- 3.LT.3.** Ensure curricula reflects learning outcomes pertaining to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

RESEARCH AND HDR

3.R.1. Enhance the School's capacity for Indigenous research both in Greater Western Sydney and beyond.

3.R.2. Support and encourage Indigenous applications for post-doctoral research fellowships.

3.R.3. Prioritise and support applications for Cat 1, 2 and 3 grants that relate to issues of cultural, ethnic and gender diversity and include Indigenous research.

INTERNATIONAL

3.I.1. Grow international postgraduate student population, with a strategic focus on China and the Indo-Pacific.

3.I.2. Develop culturally specific recruitment, retention, and support strategies for international students from the Indo-Pacific.

3.I.3. Maintain a focus on retention and ensuring positive graduate outcomes for international students – including through the provision of academic and English literacy supports.

3.I.4. Ensure that domestic students of Indigenous and Pacific Islander background have opportunities to participate in international mobility programs.

KEY SUCCESS MEASURES

International student retention and satisfaction.

Number of Indigenous students, and international students from China and the Indo-Pacific.

Support programs and scholarships for Indigenous and Pacific Islander students.

Articulation agreements with overseas institutions.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE FOUR

WORK CULTURE AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Empower our staff to find meaning and fulfillment in their work through a focus on culture, professional development, wellbeing, collegial support, and interdisciplinary connections.

ENGAGEMENT

- 4.E.1.** Encourage and support cross-disciplinary, cross-unit and cross-institutional collaborative relationships with staff from other Schools and Institutes within the University.
- 4.E.2.** Improve School alignment and collaboration with the HASS Cluster.
- 4.E.3.** Contribute to broad initiatives within the HASS Cluster to address NPILF targets and identify and enhance STEM skills in Social Science programs.

LEARNING AND TEACHING

- 4.LT.1.** Encourage collegial peer-review practices through involvement in Open-Door and teaching squares.
- 4.LT.2.** Support and develop sessional staff through communities of practice and a sessional academic mentoring program.
- 4.LT.3.** Support staff to submit WEFS applications via a School-based writing and mentoring scheme.

RESEARCH AND HDR

4.R.1. Establish a formal research mentoring scheme within the School that encourages staff to show leadership in scholarly activities, and supports researchers at all academic levels, including Early Career Researchers and HDR candidates.

4.R.2. Include ‘research culture’ as a substantive and ongoing item on relevant School Committees and Work Group meetings and establish a periodic assessment of the School’s research culture.

4.R.3. Adopt a School-wide process for the preparation and submission of ADP applications.

4.R.4. Consider innovative work practices that create the time and space for staff to meet informally, develop collegial relationships, and prioritise reflection and connection.

INTERNATIONAL

4.I.1. Expand opportunities and support for academic staff to engage in research and innovation at a global level and build relationships with international collaborators.

4.I.2. Collaborate with global partners to support the development of staff and mutual exchange of knowledge and skills in learning and teaching and research.

4.I.3. Upskill staff and support the development of international bids for research and innovation funding.

KEY SUCCESS MEASURES

WEFS applications.

Cross-disciplinary, cross-unit and cross-institutional alignments with Institutes, Themes and Clusters.

Support strategies for HDR candidates and Early Career Researchers.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE FIVE

EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

Adopt a whole-School approach to acknowledging that reputation and excellence is built on a solid foundation of quality.

ENGAGEMENT

5.E.1. Support staff in promoting and disseminating their work, through:

- Publications (open access where possible).
- Applying for internal and external awards and recognition.
- Non-traditional outputs (including creative works that are publicly accessible).
- Community-engaged training schemes.
- Knowledge-sharing with government, non-government, and industry organisations.

LEARNING AND TEACHING

5.LT.1. Prioritise the 'scholarship of learning and teaching'.

5.LT.2. Introduce new seed funding for innovative learning and teaching applications and encourage staff applications for externally funded schemes.

5.LT.3. Maintain focus on evidence-based curriculum, taking on board learnings from QiLT survey data, and outcomes of broader learning and teaching research.

RESEARCH AND HDR

5.R.1. Build the School's reputation as a research powerhouse focused on sustainability and impact, and as a key site of social research on, and for, Greater Western Sydney.

5.R.2. A systematic approach to planning and preparing grant applications that align with University requirements and deadlines.

5.R.3. Encourage researchers to publish in peer-reviewed, high-impact journals – with a focus on contributing high-quality publications to the 11 four-digit Social Science Field of Research (FoR) classification codes.

INTERNATIONAL

5.I.1. Continue to provide staff with opportunities to share research with international partners.

5.I.2. Work with Research Services to provide support for staff applying for international funding.

5.I.3. Improve key metrics that impact and influence international rankings.

KEY SUCCESS MEASURES

Times Higher Education Subject Ranking for Social Sciences.

QS World University Ranking by Subject for Sociology and Geography.

Excellence in Research in Australia (ERA) rankings for priority FoR codes.

Research outputs and grant income.

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