

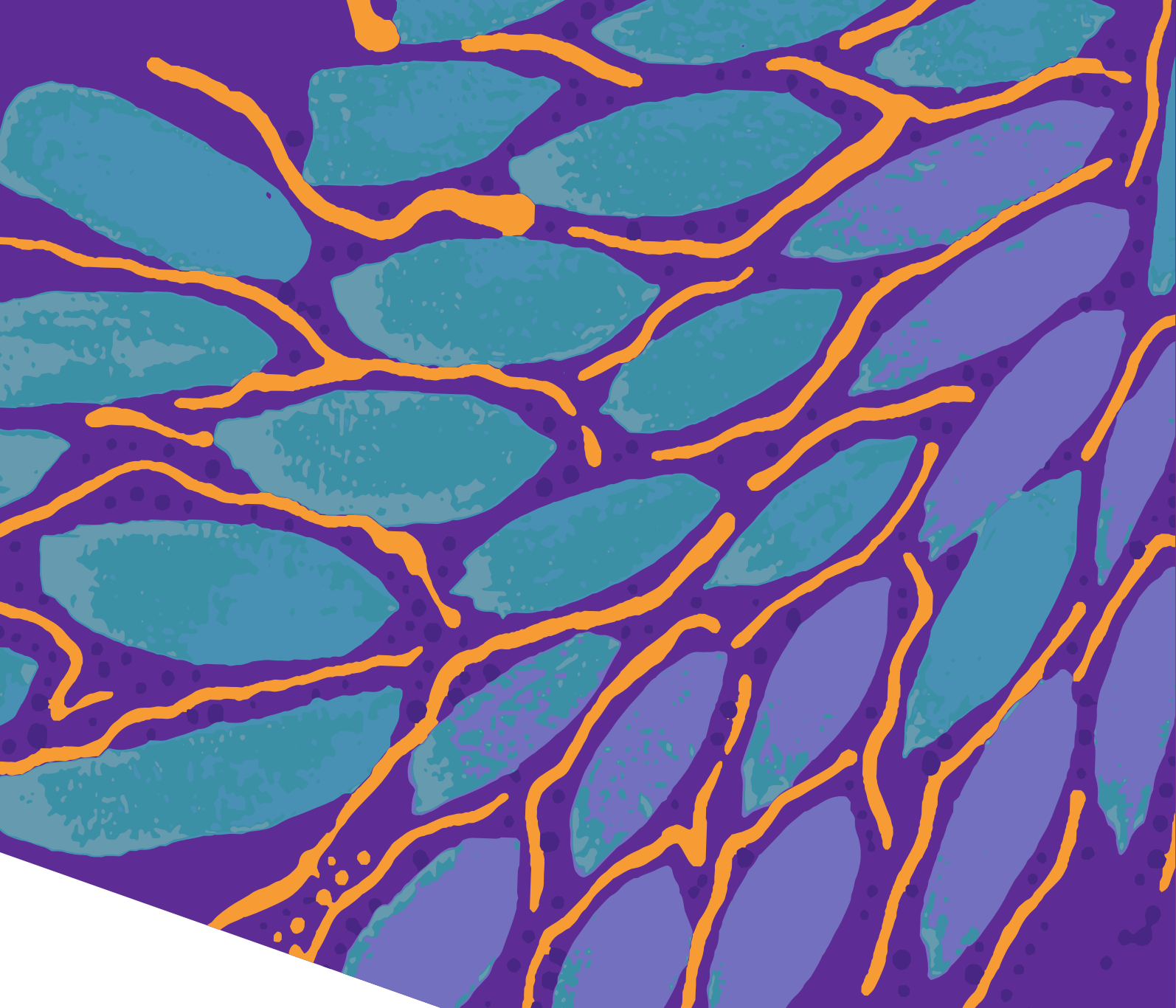
WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



Better Together

SUSTAINABILITY REPORT 2024





ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Western Sydney University acknowledges the Darug, Eora, Dharawal (also referred to as Tharawal) and Wiradjuri peoples. We acknowledge that the teaching, learning and research undertaken across our campuses continues the teaching, learning and research that has occurred on these lands for tens of thousands of years.

ARTWORK: This Indigenous artwork is drawn from an original artwork, *Those who came before us*, co-facilitated by Wiradjuri-Gamilaroi artist Allan McKenzie and includes contributions from 120 Western Sydney University staff and students. The imagery pieces are a statement of Western Sydney University and its staff, students and community's commitment to an inclusive Australia and its First Nations people.

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THEIR FUTURE OUR RESPONSIBILITY

NABIN GAUTAM

*Masters Student
(Social Work)*

For Nabin, what matters is how the impact of costs of living especially rent and groceries have deeply affected international and domestic Western students.

He hopes for meaningful reform to migration policies that support a more inclusive future.

KATHERINE WARWICK

*PhD Student
(Science)*

For Kat, what matters is that the environment is a priority and major polluters should be held accountable through taxation.

Kat also believes tax reform, affordable high education funding and home ownership models are urgent requirements to address increasing inequality.

2030

SUSTAINABILITY PRIORITIES

We asked our students what matters most to them from our *Sustainability and Resilience 2030 Decadal Strategy* priorities*. They collectively ranked their top three:

- 1. CLIMATE ACTION:** SET UP EFFORTS TO SUPPORT CLIMATE ACTION IN OUR REGION.
- 2. INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES:** EMBRACE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER KNOWLEDGES FOR PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABILITY AND CARING FOR COUNTRY.
- 3. FOOD SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE:** PROMOTE AGROECOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES FOR JUST FOOD SYSTEMS.

* Indicated in our 2024 Sustainability Literacy Survey (n = 118) and aligned to our Sustainability and Resilience 2030 Decadal Strategy nine interconnected priority statements.

FOREWORD



**Distinguished Professor
George Williams AO
Vice-Chancellor and President**

Western Sydney University can be proud of our deep commitment to our students, making a meaningful difference in the community, and improving the liveability of our planet, both now and for future generations.

Throughout 2024, universities around the globe confronted an intersection of financial, political, technological, and societal challenges. The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital tools into education presented both exciting opportunities and significant risks. Universities grappled to balance innovation with growing cybersecurity threats. Meanwhile, the spread of misinformation—amplified by generative AI—shaped electoral processes and intensified already fraught geopolitical tensions.

In Australia, both domestic and international students faced escalating costs of living, which strained their financial stability and impacted their well-being. The cost of housing, mental health pressures, and financial insecurity have all become pressing issues. A recent survey by Mission Australia revealed that 56 per cent of young Australians aged 15–19 identified the cost of living as their top concern, surpassing even climate change and mental health for the first time. This highlights the inequities in the fees for university courses, which is pricing many young people out of higher education and their future aspirations.

These challenges unfold against a backdrop of worsening ecological crises. Biodiversity continues to decline, and ecosystems are at risk of collapse due to human activities and climate change. The El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) has intensified, causing

severe heatwaves, droughts, and floods across the globe. In Australia, we are seeing more intense rainfall events and longer, more destructive fire seasons. These environmental shifts are threatening agriculture, infrastructure, and communities, underscoring the need for urgent action on adaptation and mitigation.

We acknowledge the pressing realities of the world around us and remain steadfast in our dedication to creating more equitable and sustainable futures. Our tenth annual sustainability report, *Better Together*, highlights our enduring work and ongoing commitment to sustainability and resilience across four key areas: Curriculum, Operations, Research, and Engagement. For the third consecutive year, we are proud to be recognised as leaders in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings.

As we look beyond the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 agenda, we continue to push the boundaries of what is possible. Our work is never done in isolation; we have a long history of impactful collaboration with each other, our communities, industries, and leaders. Together, we are stronger, and together, we will continue to drive meaningful change.

At Western Sydney University, we truly are ***better together.***



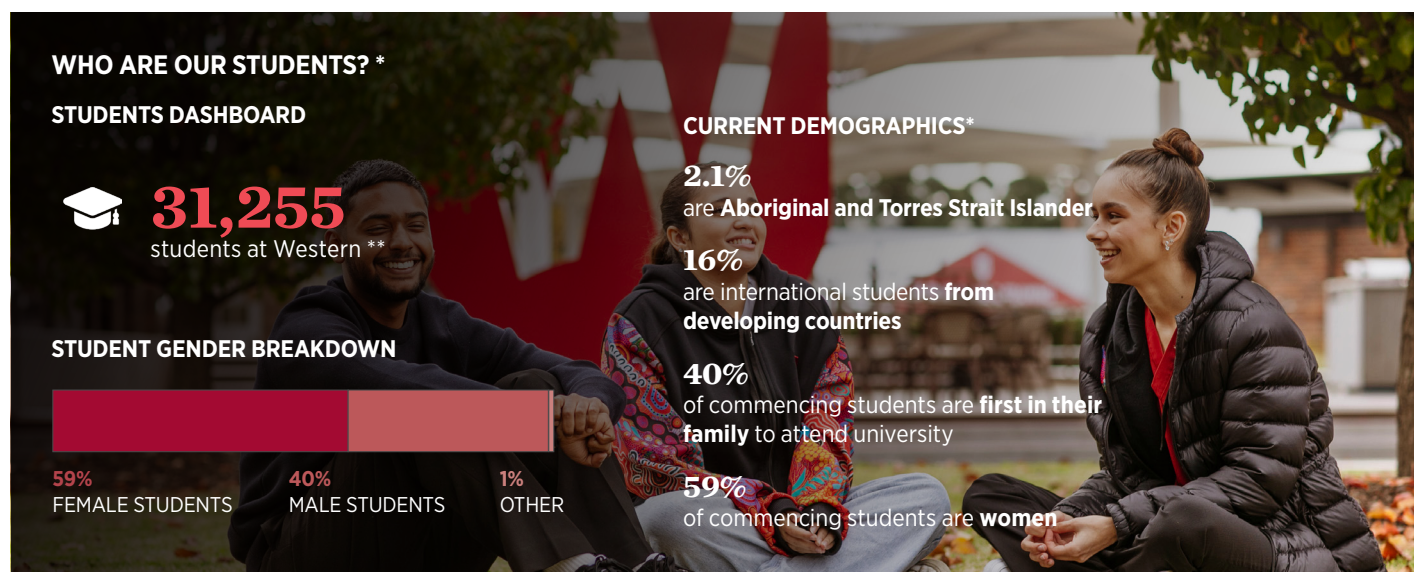
The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 are a blueprint towards a better, more sustainable future. In becoming an educational signatory to the SDSN Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Initiative, Western Sydney University is committed to supporting and promoting the principles of the SDGs across our CORE Framework.

We have indicated the most relevant SDGs and their target within this report where applicable.

WHO ARE WE?

EDUCATION, EQUITY AND STUDENT PARTICIPATION

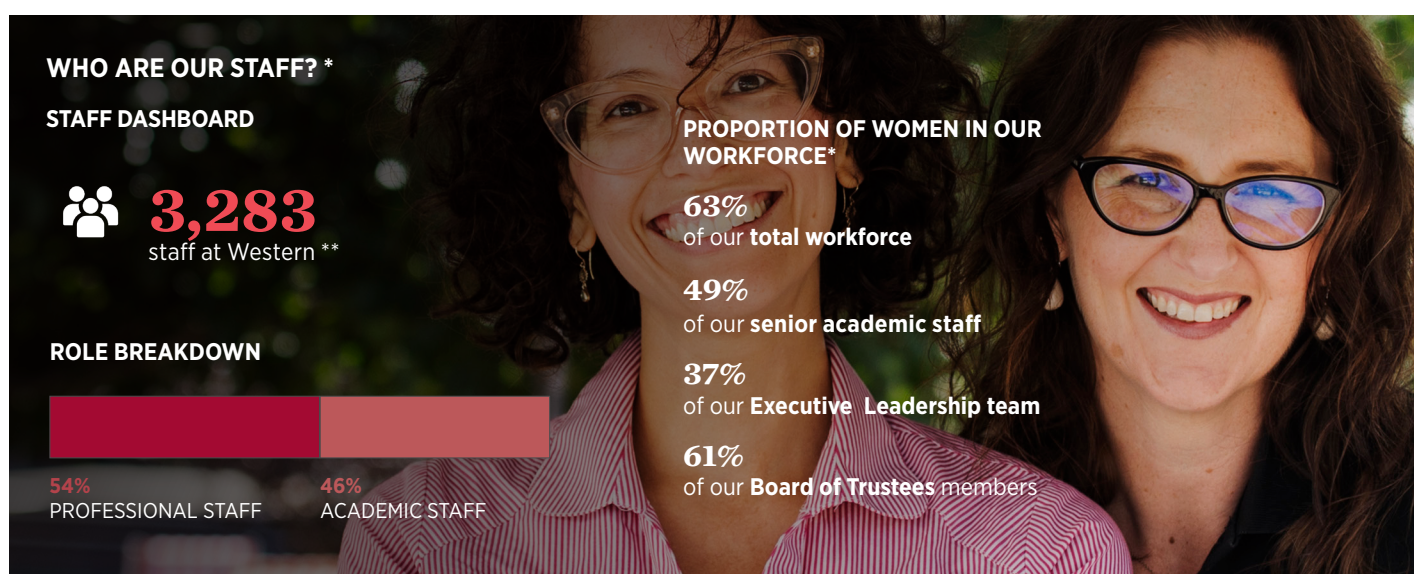
Western Sydney University draws students from more than 160 different countries and cultures. Our region has the most significant urban population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Almost half of our students are the first in their family to attend university, and represent a higher than sector average low-socioeconomic circumstances. We celebrate the diverse and rich cultural communities that give our campuses their vibrancy, and strive to create a inclusive, safe and respectful place for study.



Target: 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

EMPLOYMENT, LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Recognised as a workplace employer of choice for gender equality for over two decades, the University actively promotes gender equality through various initiatives, including increasing female representation in leadership roles, reducing the gender pay gap, and fostering an inclusive and flexible work practices for all.



Target: 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

* Over 460 data points and case studies are collated as part of THE Impact Ranking submission. This dashboard is a summary of our 2024 ranking submission. ** Figures are full time equivalent.

TAKING ACTION ON FOOD INSECURITY

2 ZERO
HUNGER

Target 2.1: By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round.

“1 out of 2 of our students are food insecure, which presents a significant barrier to student success. Our range of food programs ensure our students can access healthy and nutritious meals throughout the week.”

- Richard Martino, Student Community

The Western Pantry initiative provides students with access to fresh and healthy produce, pantry staples and hygiene items, free of cost. Since its launch in July 2024, the Western Pantry at Kingswood and pop-up sites have recorded over 3,000 student visits, demonstrating its significant impact on students.

The fresh produce is sustainably sourced from local farms, market gardens, food rescue organisations, and our own greenhouse production on Hawkesbury campus. This initiative builds on other established food security programs offered to our students, which include community lunches and dinners to combat isolation and free student breakfasts.

Western Sydney University's food security programs initiative are supported by nine student casual employees, three student clubs and eight community partners, and Chaplains working with our Student Community and Food Security team.

FOOD SECURITY PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS



23,000

free **community dinners and breakfasts** served to improve community cohesion and food security



3,400

Western Pantry and pop-up pantry visits by students since July 2024



1 tonne⁺

of vegetables grown on campus for horticultural research by the National Vegetable Protected Cropping Centre, including the Western Pantry



Capabilities for the future

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

We are committed to building students' AI literacy by supporting students in making conscious choices about their use of AI tools, and to use them appropriately and effectively in ways that promote human, social and environmental wellbeing.

- PROFESSOR BRIAN STOUT, PRO VICE-CHANCELLOR, LEARNING AND TEACHING

OUR AI POLICY

Our artificial intelligence (AI) policy guides the responsible and ethical use of AI and generative AI tools. This includes uses for learning, teaching, assessment, research and administrative functions. We are committed to assessing the environmental impact of AI as part of maintaining our critical engagement with these tools as a technology and striving to use AI in ways that are aligned with the University's sustainability commitment.

AI FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

As AI advances at significant speed, understanding how to use these tools appropriately and effectively is a vital skill for student success. Western actively guides students to navigate this evolving landscape. Our students and staff are provided with access to Microsoft Copilot which provides commercial data protection. Western also offers Academic Integrity Modules (AIM) and Study Smart Workshops to all students and staff emphasising the importance of critical thinking in a world undergoing massive technological change.

AI ENGAGEMENT BY OUR STAFF AND STUDENTS



71%

of university staff (professional and academic) said they had **used generative AI** for their university work (in the QUT 2024 AI Survey)



18

Study Smart Generative AI workshops offered by The Library



7,413

students undertook the **Academic Integrity Modules (AIM)** online

GENERATIVE AI IN THE CLASSROOM

Our academics are designing and delivering authentic and critical assessments and learning experiences to equip students for active, responsible AI participation in work and wider society:

- **HOW CAN AI BE USED TO ENHANCE CRITICAL THINKING?** In the subject Foundations of the Communication Industry, students use generative AI to produce a counterpoint to a media text they are analysing for a case study. Students are asked in their assessment to identify the benefits, shortcomings, and ethical issues of output from generative AI, acknowledging its use.
- **HOW CAN HEALTH USE AI EFFECTIVELY AND APPROPRIATELY?** In the Speech Pathology Practice 3 subject, students evaluate the ethics and efficacy of using generative AI to create client reports. The activity provides opportunities to link to the Speech Pathology Code of Ethics and explore the ethical use of generative AI in professional practice.



Target 4.4: By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

USING AI TO ADVANCE RESEARCH



HOW DID THE TURTLE CROSS THE ROAD?

“Our goal is to enhance biodiversity conservation across the state by implementing new technologies where infrastructure and road management practices work together with wildlife protection.”
- Professor Ricky Spencer, Co-Lead 1 Million Turtles

Leveraging AI analysis of dash-mounted camera footage and a dataset of over 25,000 citizen science records from the TurtleSAT app, predictive modelling was employed to reduce road mortality among freshwater turtles. The School of Science and the School of Computing, Mathematics and Data Sciences collaborated with the Transport for NSW M12 Motorway team—linked to the new Western Sydney Airport—and other major Western Sydney roadways to pioneer mitigation strategies. These efforts aim to minimise turtle fatalities and advance biodiversity outcomes across the region.



Target 15.5: Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, and halt the loss of biodiversity.



HOW DO WE CREATE INCLUSIVE AI?

“AI is now everywhere. Smartphones hear and respond to our voices. They capture images and tell us what they see.... Yet, powerful technology issues impede, frustrate or disadvantage some of our communities.” - Professor Karen Soldatic, Institute for Culture and the Environment

The Autonomy, Diversity & Disability Project explores how diverse communities—particularly people with disabilities and those from culturally diverse backgrounds—engage with AI technologies in everyday life. By identifying biases and technological barriers, the project seeks to enhance AI design and promote greater inclusivity. Key partners include Your Side Australia, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, and Microsoft Corporation. The project highlights the innovative ways these communities adapt to technology, advocating for more inclusive AI applications and informing policy to support broader equity and access.



Target 10.2: Empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.



WHAT DOES AI HAVE TO DO WITH SUSTAINABLE RECREATIONAL FISHING PRACTICES?

“Our collaborative research aims to enhance recreational fisheries management through exciting new developments in AI and machine learning.” - Professor Robert Gorkin III, Translational Health Research Institute

Recreational fishing is a globally popular activity, yet its impacts remain relatively under-researched. Computer vision, a branch of AI that uses machine learning to extract meaningful information from visual inputs, offers new opportunities for data collection. This interdisciplinary research explores the potential of AI surveillance at fish cleaning tables to provide inexpensive, accessible, and non-intrusive monitoring. A 24/7 monitoring framework, implemented at boat ramp cleaning stations, can identify fish species and measure individual specimens—offering a significant opportunity to revolutionize data collection in support of effective and sustainable fisheries management.

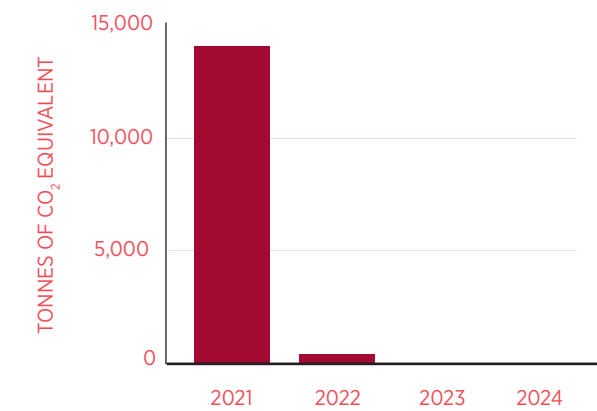


Target 14.4: Effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible.

CAMPUS PERFORMANCE

OUR ELECTRICITY EMISSIONS FOOTPRINT

Western purchases 100% of our electricity from recognised renewable sources, bringing our carbon electricity footprint (Scope 2 emissions under the Climate Active Certification) to zero this year. The University is on track for our aim to be Climate Positive by 2029.



100%
renewable products used in our electricity supply, which reduces our overall campus emissions.



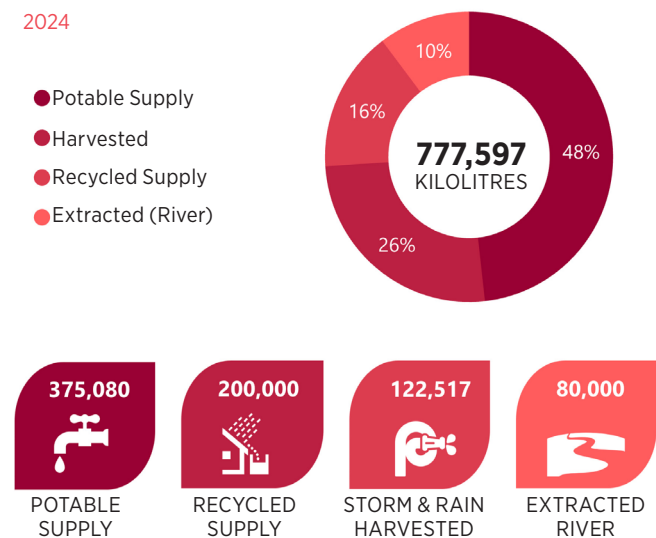
117 hectares
of campus bushland established as a Biodiversity Stewardship site as part of our climate commitments, encouraging more sustainable commuting by our staff, students and the wider community.



Target 7.2: By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix.

OUR WATER CONSUMPTION AND REUSE

Western's water resources for our campuses and landscapes include water recycling from sewerage, harvesting and treating urban stormwater, and capturing rainwater from rooftops. Incorporating Water Sensitive Urban Design is also a key component of our precinct developments.

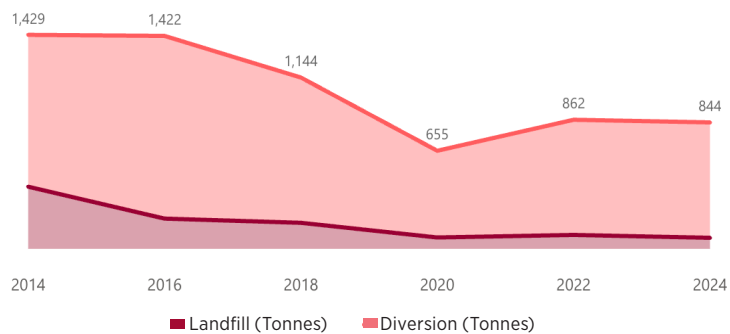


Target 6.5: By 2030, implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate.

OUR WASTE AND DIVERSION

Over the past decade, substantive changes in waste management strategies have been implemented. Management of general waste sources has resulted in 50% reduction in waste volumes, and current waste compaction results in diversion from landfill of almost 90% of our total waste.

**This 10 year waste trend is in line with NSW EPA regulations and reporting*



Target 12.2: By 2030, achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources.
Target 12.5: By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse.

OUR 10-YEAR REFLECTION

A DECADE OF COMMITMENT

OUR SUSTAINABILITY EVOLUTION

TIMELINE

14

2014-2015

Release of our first institutional sustainability report, introducing sustainability as a shared approach across our CORE Framework (Curriculum, Operations, Research and Engagement).

16

2016

Research Theme Program established to support sustainability-focused research and champions, later aligned to the SDGs (addressing SDGs 1, 2, 3, 10, 13 and 15).

17

2017

Became a signatory to the SDSN Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Initiative to support and promote the principles of the SDGs.

Established the Vice-Chancellor's Gender Equity Fund to advance gender equity and inclusion (supporting SDG 5).

19

2019

Participation in the first and newly developed Times Higher Education University Impact Rankings, ranking 11th in the world.

20

2020

Launch of the *Sustainability and Resilience 2030* Decadal Strategy (SRDS), providing an ambitious plan to tackle the challenges of the 21st century.

21

2021

Creation of the Curriculum Design and Approval Policy which supports education to foster graduates who are sustainability advocates, future thinkers, innovative entrepreneurs and global citizens.

Joined the UN-led 'Race to Zero', pledging fast-tracked efforts towards carbon neutrality (supporting SDG 13).

Launch of institutional strategy '*Sustaining Success 2021-26*', putting sustainability at the centre of Western Sydney University.

22

2022

Ranked 1st in the world for our sustainability impact in the Times Higher Education University Impact Rankings (*and again in 2023 and 2024*).

Creation of our Sustainability Education Framework contextualising Education for Sustainability to our new graduate attribute

Rollout of *Sustainability: Think, Care, Do* microcredential providing foundational sustainability understandings for action.

23

2023

Certified as carbon neutral for our 2022 business operations in 2023 under Climate Active (supporting SDGs 7 and 13).

Realigning all short-term student mobility experiences to the SDGs.

Western's Operational Planning Framework aligned to SRDS priorities, each business unit and school identifying two initiatives.

24

2024

Modern Slavery statement and principles embedded in revised Procurement Policy (supporting SDG 16).

Institutional pledge to become Nature Positive by 2029.

Piloted our first student sustainability literacy survey.

OUR SDG PERFORMANCE



#1 UNI IN THE WORLD *
2022, 2023 & 2024



#1 UNI IN THE WORLD *
2019, 2023 & 2024



#1 UNI IN THE WORLD *
2022
2ND IN 2020 & 2023



#2 UNI IN THE WORLD *
2019
3RD IN 2020 & 2023



#1 UNI IN THE WORLD *
2023
2ND IN 2022



#4 UNI IN THE WORLD *
2024
7TH IN 2023



#2 UNI IN THE WORLD *
2020 & 2023
3RD IN 2024



#1 UNI IN THE WORLD *
2023
4TH IN 2024

* As globally ranked in the Times Higher Education University Impact Rankings (2019 - 2024)

ASSESSING STUDENTS' KNOWLEDGE



Target 4.7: By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development.

“This pilot is an exciting first step in our efforts to check our students’ sustainability knowledge and the impact of our programs.”

– Jen Dollin, Sustainability Education and Partnerships

This year we conducted our first-ever university-wide sustainability literacy survey. This survey aimed to assess and understand our students’ knowledge levels across four key sustainability domains; general, ecological, socio-cultural and economic.

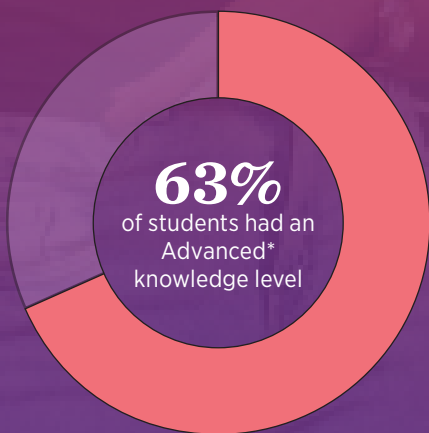
Students from the Schools of Psychology, Humanities and Communication Arts, and Social Science excelled in the Environmental Knowledge domain, reflecting their engagement with environmental and climate justice topics.

Additionally, students from Nursing and Midwifery and Education scored highest in the socio-cultural domain, highlighting the strong regional grounding of these programs.

WE TESTED STUDENTS KNOWLEDGE ABOUT:

- Caring for Country
- Gender equity
- Planetary boundaries
- Net zero emission
- Modern slavery
- Circular economy

SUSTAINABILITY KNOWLEDGE BASELINE FOR 2024



* Acknowledging self-selection survey bias and the small student sample size for this pilot (n = 118). Respondents were mostly undergraduates (72%) and predominately domestic students (67%).



SPOTLIGHT: SUR-SUR KNOWLEDGE SYMPOSIUM

The Diálogos Sur-Sur Southern Knowledges Symposium, *Education, Sustainability and Social Change*, engaged in an enriching dialogue about justice, activism, and political action in pursuit of a sustainable and equitable futures. It offered a critical perspective on social, cultural, and political issues, transcending geographic boundaries. Hosted in September by the School of Education, in partnership with the Universidad de Chile, the Universidad Metropolitana de Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad de Concepción, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Chile and Carlos Chagas Foundation, São Paulo, Brazil the collaborations exemplify the Sur-Sur Dialogue’s commitment to promoting Southern perspectives in addressing global issues.

Immersive and intersectional learning

FUTURE FOCUSSED CURRICULUM

Our students are at the centre of everything we do. As graduates, our students will be ready to embrace the world. Every student will be empowered to excel in a rapidly changing world as global citizens, professionals and leaders.

– PROFESSOR MARYANNE DEVER, DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR, EDUCATION AND STUDENTS

SCHOOL OF SCIENCE: EMBEDDING SDG LEARNING

“I liked the creative problem-solving [the microcredential] inspires within me. Focusing on developing innovative solutions that match up with SDG targets in particularly complex cases has really helped me to begin to understand what sustainability is, rather than as a concept but something a little more actionable.” – Science student

Complex Case Studies in Science is a compulsory undergraduate subject for our Science and Medical Science programs. In support of enhancing student awareness of the SDGs and Indigenous perspectives through group case studies, real-world scenarios and reflective practices, this year over 400 students completed Western’s *Sustainability: Think, Care, Do* microcredential. This microcredential deepened their foundational knowledge of sustainability, change-making, values, and worldviews, linking their case studies to larger global frameworks. The impact of this integrated and committed approach to sustainability education is evident in the 2024 Sustainability Literacy Survey results, where the School of Science scored the highest among all others.

SCHOOL OF HEALTH SCIENCES: IMMERSIVE PLACEMENTS IN INDIA

“At first, our students felt the intensity of the experience, thrown into the deep end, working in unfamiliar communities. But by the end, they were completely immersed. It changed how they viewed public health in practice. This placement didn’t just add value to our degrees. It redefined what we thought we were capable of.” – Dr Nicole Peel, School of Health Sciences

Travelling to Odisha, India, six students studying public health, recreational therapy, and health promotion participated in community-driven health initiatives addressing rural healthcare challenges as part of their Professional Practice subject. Delivered in partnership with Centurion University of Technology and Management, the intensive short-term mobility program provided students with hands-on experience in designing sustainable health interventions, cross-cultural collaboration, and applied learning aligned to the SDGs. Last year, 362 Western Sydney students participated in similar overseas experiences across 14 countries. Over a \$1,000,000 of New Colombo Plan mobility funding supported their learning, access and participation.

SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT: BEYOND ARCHITECTURE EXHIBITION

“Architecture to me is like an art piece that we can step into and explore with real world implications. We have the opportunity to create spaces that enhance the human experience while fostering a profound connection with the natural world.” – Architecture student

Architecture students and staff hosted their second annual exhibition, *Beyond the Horizon*, showcasing innovative works that re-imagine urban landscapes for Western Sydney. Supported by industry and organised by the student-led group ‘Beyond Architecture WSU’, this annual event was attended by academics, local government, and industry experts. It featured a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate student projects, from exploring migration’s impact on architecture to redesigning Parramatta to address gentrification, livelihoods, and connecting people. The student design highlighted creative approaches to sustainable design and urban revitalisation, showcasing these future architects’ vision for Western Sydney.



An ambitious operational agenda DELIVERING IMPACT

By 2029, we aim to stop biodiversity loss and restore nature to pre-2020 levels (Nature Positive) and to not only achieve net zero carbon emissions but also to reduce and remove more greenhouse gases than our organisation emits (Climate Positive).

– BILL PARASIRIS, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY: CARBON TRANSITION PLANNING

“Our institutional Carbon Transition Planning builds on our commitment to sustainability through renewably sourced electricity, solar carports, electric vehicle charging stations, and the development of an Electrification Roadmap for our campus facilities.” – Dr Roger Attwater, Environmental Sustainability

In 2024, the integration of electric vehicle (EV) chargers with solar carports were completed as part of Western’s operational initiatives. EV charging infrastructure is now established on four campuses, Hawkesbury, Kingswood, Campbelltown and Parramatta South, with fast-charge units accessible for all staff and students using EVs. These new installations have increased our total solar generation on campus by 39%.

PROCUREMENT SERVICES: SOCIAL PROCUREMENT FRAMEWORK

“We developed our Social Procurement Framework, reinforcing our commitment to ethical and sustainable procurement. It has a strong focus on Scope 3 emission reduction, addressing the impacts on both people and the planet.” – Jill Camilleri, Procurement Services

Procurement Services collaborated with the Environmental Sustainability team through participation in the NSW Government’s Sustainability Advantage program, *Sustainable Value Chain Leadership Accelerator*. The Framework, along with insights from the Accelerator are guiding supplier engagement across key areas, including emissions from waste and recycling, facilities operation and energy efficiency, construction and fit-out, business services, office consumables, food services, and staff and student travel (business travel, intercampus travel and commuting), noting that intercampus and student travel were excluded from the 2021 baseline.

DIVISION OF FINANCE: RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT

The University invests in the Mercer Sustainable International Shares Fund, of which 65% (up from 50% the year prior) was invested with managers that specifically target sustainability themes or impact investments which further support our commitment to the SDGs. In 2024, the University again ranked in the top third amongst global peers in its approach to responsible investment*.



top third

The University ranked in the top third amongst global peers* in its approach to **responsible investment**.

*Based on Mercer’s proprietary Responsible Investment Total Evaluation (RITE) tool, which evaluates asset owners on a range of responsible investment practices and provides anonymous peer comparison within the sample of entities captured in Mercer’s RITE research.



Target 7.2: By 2030, increase substantially the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix



Target 12.7: Promote public procurement practices that are sustainable, in accordance with national policies and priorities

NATURE AND CLIMATE POSITIVE FUTURES



Target 15.5: Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species.

“Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse is ranked as the third biggest global risk for humanity. Our research reveals that over half of the world’s GDP is highly or moderately dependent on nature and its services, such as clean water, a stable climate, and more.” – World Economic Forum, 2024

In late 2024, Western Sydney University pledged to become Nature Positive by 2029, joining the global Nature Positive Universities network, an initiative led by the United Nations and the University of Oxford. This commitment aligns with the existing Race to Zero initiative, as actions to reduce global warming also support biodiversity and ecosystem health. As a part of our Nature Positive pledge, we developed baseline metrics and strategies that includes citizen science engagement, and mapping of both ecological communities and landscaping across our campuses.

NATURE POSITIVE BASELINE FOR 2024



19,208

trees identified and mapped within the built environment of our campuses



1,899

hours invested into invasive species management on our campuses



413 ha

of protected habitat across our campuses both endangered and critically endangered ecological communities.



365

species identified by our community in our university-wide campus BioBlitz



SPOTLIGHT: GLOBAL NATURE POSITIVE SUMMIT - A WORLD FIRST

Held in October 2024 in NSW, the summit was a first step forward in the global movement towards establishing nature positive economies to accelerate collective action to drive investment in nature.

More than 1,000 leaders and experts from 50 countries attended. In partnership with the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust, the University was selected to host a delegation at Hawkesbury Campus to showcase the Cumberland Plain Bushland Biobanking site. Uncle Lex Dadd highlighted the importance of cultural burns and First Nations values in supporting nature positive outcomes.

WESTERN SYDNEY'S ECONOMIC STRATEGY



Target 8.3: Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises.



Target 9.1: Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all.



Target 11.2: By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.

“Western Sydney is accelerating in terms of population and economy, yet physical and social infrastructure funding and industry funding is not keeping pace, which exacerbates existing inequities.”

- Professor Neil Perry, Centre of Western Sydney

The Centre for Western Sydney launched a 30-year economic blueprint, *Unlimited Potential: Western Sydney's Economic Strategy*, aimed at transforming the region into a national economic powerhouse. The strategy aims to raise the gross regional product by 2036. This transformation is expected to boost annual incomes, reduce travel times, and increase job opportunities in managerial and professional roles. To facilitate this, the report details six strategic actions (referred to as 'leaps') to develop social infrastructure, accelerate innovation and security, while improving quality of life and drive sustainable development in Western Sydney.

HOW DO WE MAKE THE LEAP TO DRIVE ECONOMIC ACCELERATION?

- Create a 30-year Western Sydney Infrastructure Funding Compact.
- Establish a Western Sydney Infrastructure Advisory Council.
- Accelerate technological innovation, digital skills and agility.
- Strengthen capability links into international supply chains.
- Secure a fair share of creative industries funding.
- Benchmark and target investment and infrastructure delivery.

SPOTLIGHT: DRIVING CHANGE WITH EV READY APARTMENTS

“Getting EV chargers into apartment buildings is an important step in supporting a wider and equitable diffusion of EVs. It will enable residents to view EVs as a convenient and viable transport option.” – Dr Thomas Longden, Urban Transformations Research Centre

This JMI Policy Insights Paper highlights key strategies to expand electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure in apartment buildings across NSW. The paper reviews unique challenges for retrofitting apartment buildings and offers solutions to improve accessibility in high-density housing.



Advocacy for a better future, now

RESEARCH AND POLICY

We are committed to sustainable development, research excellence, and partnerships with industry and research leaders to ensure we are actively tackling the world's greatest challenges together.

– PROFESSOR DEBORAH SWEENEY, PROVOST

MARCS INSTITUTE: AGEING WELL IN WESTERN SYDNEY

“In Western Sydney, we are seeing rapid urbanisation within a culturally and linguistically diverse population. This demographic transition brings challenges related to healthcare accessibility, social inclusion, intergenerational equity, ageing in place, and the need for age-friendly environments” – Associate Professor Joyce Siette, Senior Research Theme Fellow (Health and Wellbeing)

Launched in 2024, the white paper *Ageing Well in Western Sydney and Beyond* responds to demographic shifts that demand a reimagining of ageing, aged care, and community support systems. It advocates for the need to adapt to the evolving needs of older adults through integrated care models, expanded telehealth services, and ongoing transdisciplinary research. The paper emphasises the importance of tailoring innovations to the unique needs and cultural diversity of Western Sydney's ageing population. Collaborative partnerships across healthcare, technology, academia, government, and community organisations have been instrumental in advancing progressive ageing practices.

INSTITUTE FOR CULTURE AND SOCIETY: LIVING WITH URBAN HEAT

“Liveability in rapidly warming cities is increasingly a challenge for our communities. By collaborating with culturally diverse social housing residents, we are developing equitable heat adaptive practices through participatory action research and transition design.” – Dr Stephen Healy, Institute of Culture and Society

In partnership with social housing providers and advocacy organisations, this project aims to enhance civic capacity for climate readiness by focusing on the role of social practices in complementing technical and infrastructural cooling solutions. Over 30 residents participated in six design workshops, which included tours of cool outdoor and indoor spaces and discussions on the role of outdoor community events in contributing to cool comfort. The group presented at WSROC's Heat Smart plan, co-convened with Western Sydney University's Urban Transformations Research Centre, and the ADAPT NSW Forum highlighting the role of places and people in climate adaptation and the importance of research in enhancing climate readiness.

WESTERN: FOSTERING INDUSTRY-UNIVERSITY RESEARCH FOR THE SDGs

“These centres will train the next generation of professionals to address climate change and promote environmental sustainability.” – Professor Ian Anderson, PVC Research and Enterprise

Western Sydney University was awarded \$10 million in grant funding from the Australian Research Council to lead two of its six Industrial Transformation Training Centres, aimed at strengthening industry-university research collaboration:

- **Smart and Sustainable Horticulture:** Led by the School of Science and the Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment, this centre focuses on advancing protected horticulture to address food insecurity and mitigate the impacts of climate change.
- **The Industrial Transformation Training Centre in Digital Platforms for Net-Zero Building Ecosystem Lifecycle:** Led by the School of Engineering, Design and Built Environment and the Urban Transformations Research Centre, this centre aims to transform the building and construction sector into a net carbon-zero ecosystem.



Championing outreach and engagement

PARTNERSHIPS FOR CHANGE

The University champions Western Sydney's advantages of cultural and linguistic diversity, entrepreneurialism, youth and dynamism. We are taking the lead and coordinating the region's economic and social transformation to ensure no one is left behind.

– PROFESSOR JENNIFER WESTACOTT AO, CHANCELLOR

LAUNCHPAD: INNOVATING FOR A SUSTAINABLE TOMORROW

"For many of these students, this was more than just a challenge. It was an opportunity to step outside the confines of textbooks and traditional learning... to push their imaginations to the limit and discover what they were capable of when sustainability is at the forefront." – Inu Rana, Launch Pad

This year's EcoHack, hosted at our Surabaya campus in Indonesia, empowered 108 high school students to tackle pressing environmental issues. The hackathon fostered creativity, collaboration, and transformation, with student teams developing solutions for deforestation, waste management, and more. The challenge highlighted the importance of sustainable innovation for the planet's future. First prize was awarded to Team STEMinators from Elyon Christian School, who pitched a radical idea to create a floating dome to grow palm oil trees on the ocean, reducing the need for deforestation. Their innovation aimed to protect inland biodiversity while offering a sustainable and futuristic approach to agriculture.

WESTERN SYDNEY INTERNATIONAL: CLIMATE ACTION BAROMETER FOR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

"To take meaningful action, we need to know where we stand and the Climate Action Barometer will help us understand where we've made good progress and where more action is needed." – Jo Byng, Western Sydney International

Participating in the Climate Action Barometer Global Wave, Western Sydney University is taking steps to mitigate our climate impact through international student mobility and staff travel. Benchmarking against other global and Australian universities, we have advanced significantly since last year's assessment, ranking in the top 6 globally and top 4 in the Australia and New Zealand group in 2024, compared to the previous year's pilot round. We achieved top results (100%) for our strategic context, student sentiment, and engagement for our sustainability and climate commitments. The report also highlighted areas for improvement, including our travel policies.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION: CELEBRATING FAMILIES WEEK

"It was so much fun! My teen boys had an absolute blast. It was so lovely to hear some of the kids talk about [the] campus and how they want to come to Western when they grow up." – Family Week participant

In May, we celebrated Families Week with two free exciting events, as well as an arts competition. Hawkesbury Campus welcomed over 130 attendees for *Science for All Ages Family Fair*, where families explored sustainability, forensic science, conservation, and astronomy. At Campbelltown Campus, *Healthy Families Orienteering* brought together a further 85 participants for outdoor activities, sports, and expert-led discussion advice on healthy lifestyles. These events fostered connection, inspired future students, and showcased sustainability initiatives. Coordinated by Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, Sustainability Education and Partnerships, and the Engaged Parent Network, with support from Campus Provosts, the Schools of Science and Health Sciences, Families Week was a resounding success and acknowledgement of the incredible community at Western Sydney University.



RESILIENT RIVERS FOR RESILIENT PLATYPUS



Target 6.6: Protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes.

“Urban platypus populations are under immense pressure. A major step forward in conservation efforts is the federal government’s investment in the protection of critical habitats in three regions of our catchment.” - Dr Michelle Ryan, Hawkesbury-Nepean Waterkeeper

Funded by the Australian Government’s Urban Rivers and Catchments Program, Western Sydney University in collaboration with the Hawkesbury-Nepean Waterkeeper Alliance, is working to protect our urban platypus populations. The *Resilient Rivers for Resilient Hawkesbury Platypus Populations Project* will establish a network of ‘Platypus Parks’ along the Hawkesbury-Nepean River. The project involves collaboration with First Nations peoples, private landholders, regional stakeholders, and community groups, with more than 60% of the funding dedicated to on-ground initiatives and works to enhance habitat and in-stream connectivity for platypus. In June, the group hosted the Honourable Tanya Plibersek MP and Ms Susan Templeman MP discussing future plans and opportunities.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS



\$1 million

investment from the Australian Government to create **connected and healthy riparian habitat** within the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment



15

external stakeholders working together with the University to guide meaningful impact



3

platypus parks forming a connected network of engaged private landholders and public estates



SPOTLIGHT: WESTERN JOINS INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITIES CLIMATE ALLIANCE

“Western has much expertise to share in climate science adaptation and mitigation.” – Philip Sen, NSW Bushfire and Natural Hazards Research Centre

In 2024 Western joined the International Universities Climate Alliance (IUCA), a network of 38 global members set up to facilitate greater collaboration between research teams, global leaders, policy makers and industry. IUCA is taking a strong advocacy role in the lead up to COP 31 for universities to have a more visible and active presence.

WORKING TOWARDS NATURE POSITIVE



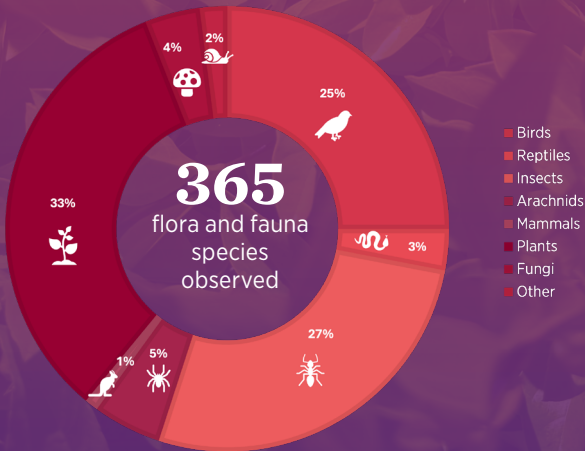
Target 15.5: Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and prevent the extinction of threatened species.

Our first BioBlitz saw staff, students and community members come together as citizen scientists to uncover the hidden biodiversity across our campus network.

A key Nature Positive initiative was the 2024 BioBlitz, held between September and October where staff, students and the wider community used the iNaturalist app to identify and document plant, insect and animal species across our campuses. Co-led by Environmental Sustainability, the student-led Environmental Collective, School of Science and Sustainability Education and Partnerships, over 600 recordings were made with 365 unique species identified by the 46 participants. This BioBlitz contributed to our baseline data for our Nature Positive 2029 ambitions.

Seven 'Campus Champs' were awarded for their contributions, earning a limited-edition prototype trophy made from upcycled plastic waste. Produced by our Teaching and Research Technical Services (TRTS) - Advanced Manufacturing team, using compression moulds, these trophies repurpose single-use plastic waste generated from our teaching and research activities.

BIODIVERSITY BASELINE FOR 2024



SPOTLIGHT: EMBRACING THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Our Teaching and Research Technical Services – Advanced Manufacturing team have diverted an estimated 50 kilograms of single-use plastic waste from landfill. By repurposing discarded engineering student projects, MakerSpace offcuts, and uncontaminated syringe bodies from the School of Nursing and Midwifery’s clinical practicals, the team has developed a variety of innovative prototypes.

 **50kg**
of single-use plastic **diverted from landfill**
and turned into other products

Uncharted waters NOW TO 2030

Our involvement in the East Asia and the Pacific chapter of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network gave us a chance to discuss several critical points regarding the need to rethink and look beyond the current SDGs.

– PROFESSOR KEVIN DUNN, DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR, ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION

“Globally, we need to lift progress against SDG targets and the special mission of universities to contribute to this effort. However, we must also look beyond the current content and framing of the 17 SDGs to address what has been missing since their inception in 2015.”

– Sustainable Development Solution Network, 2024

BEYOND THE SDGs: WHAT’S NEXT?

Western Sydney University participated in the University Presidents’ Meeting of the East Asia and the Pacific chapter of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network last year. This meeting highlighted the need to rethink and look beyond the current SDGs.

Key points included the importance of integrating multiple disciplines to address complex sustainability challenges, focusing on fundamental principles and values, and addressing the use of campuses in the context of housing and food crises. Discussions also covered the financial and ethical implications of divestment from certain industries, the inclusion of gender diversity, and the impact of global political instability on sustainability efforts. Additionally, the challenges and opportunities presented by artificial intelligence, the promotion of open research and data for transparency were also discussed.

Our university also acknowledges the relative neglect of First Nations People within the SDGs. These discussions underscore the need for judicious supplementation within all of the goals to ensure a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to sustainability.

AREAS FOR ONGOING IMPROVEMENT

We acknowledge the gravity of these times, and remain unwavering in our ongoing commitments. We also recognise the need for ongoing efforts and have set ourselves ambitious targets to improve our own institutional performance. Our *big idea* for 2030 is to be Climate and Nature Positive by 2029 in operations, with connections to our teaching and research.

WE HAVE AMBITIONS TO INCREASE OUR RANKINGS ON:



WE ACKNOWLEDGE WORK IS STILL TO BE DONE FOR:



Target 17.16: Enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, in particular developing countries.

A roadmap for sustainability

SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK

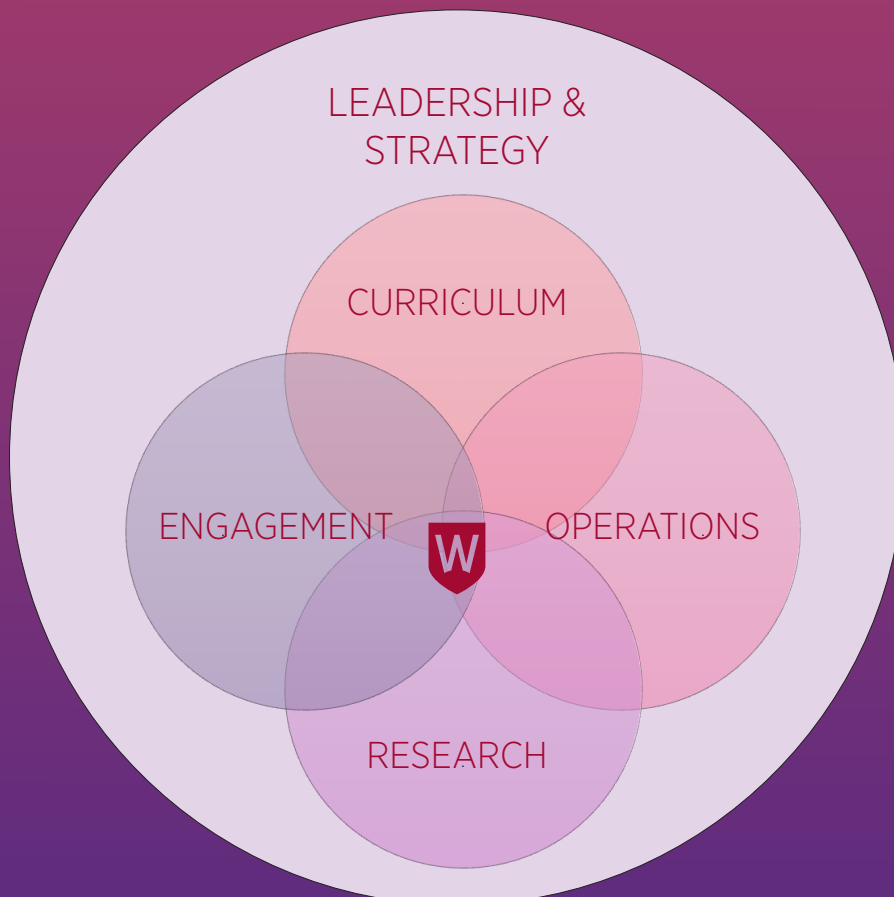
“All organisations now must take seriously the principles and practices of sustainability. These are vital if we are to grow in a way that preserves our environment and adds to the prosperity of everyone. This university is deeply committed to sustainability indeed it is one of our top strategic imperatives.”

– Professor Jennifer Westacott AO,
Chancellor

MAKING SENSE OF SUSTAINABILITY

Western Sydney University’s sustainability framework was built across four pillars Curriculum, Operations, Research, and Engagement (CORE Framework). Strong leadership and strategy has been vital to this work. Through our strategic vision and institutional, regional and international commitments, we have taken action to integrate sustainability initiatives and

climate resilient operations across our CORE framework. This also includes setting ambitious goals, ensuring accountability, and aligning sustainability with the broader mission of the institution. Our diverse and nested leadership across portfolios actively advocates for policy change and supports on ground initiatives that drive systemic sustainability at multiple levels.



FINAL REFLECTIONS



Young people will be disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis. Too often their perspectives are ignored, and they have few opportunities to contribute directly to community and government decision-making on climate action. We are generating engaged and actionable research with young people that is channelled directly into sites of debate and government and industry decision-making.

We will continue to work cooperatively and respectfully with young people of today to deliver a more equitable and sustainable future for tomorrow. Democratic renewal is a key pathway to realise this future.

- YOUNG AND RESILIENT RESEARCH CENTRE

VICE-CHANCELLOR EXCELLENCE IN SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT AWARD WINNER 2024

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This report has been contributed to by almost 60 University staff, students and external partners. For the first time this year we used AI to proofread and copy edit our report. Some errors may remain.

A small quantity of this report have been printed by a local, small family-run business on Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified paper, using print products and printing services at a higher environmental level than the industry standard.

GRAPHICS

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SDG Icons: United Nations Sustainable Development (2025). [online] Available at: https://www.un.org_news_communications-material

The content of this publication has not been approved by the United Nations and does not reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials or Member States.



Read and engage with our Sustainability and Resilience 2030 Decadal Strategy to see more of our activities and initiatives.

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TIMES HIGHER EDUCATION
IMPACT RANKINGS



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