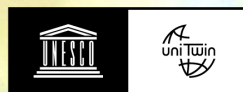


UNESCO CHAIR REPORT

# Mobilising Higher Education for Social Justice

2023 - 2025




**unesco**  
Chair



UNIVERSITY OF  
NEWCASTLE  
AUSTRALIA





*This report was prepared  
on the unceded lands of  
the Awabakal and Worimi  
Peoples. We pay our  
respects to Elders past  
and present.*

*This report captures the first 2.5 years of activity, engagement and impact of the UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education held by Professor Penny Jane Burke at the University of Newcastle. The report will be updated and reissued periodically over the term of the Chair – January 2023 to July 2027.*

*The UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education is located within the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education. The work is interconnected and this report details key projects, programs and methodological innovations from across the Centre and the Chair.*



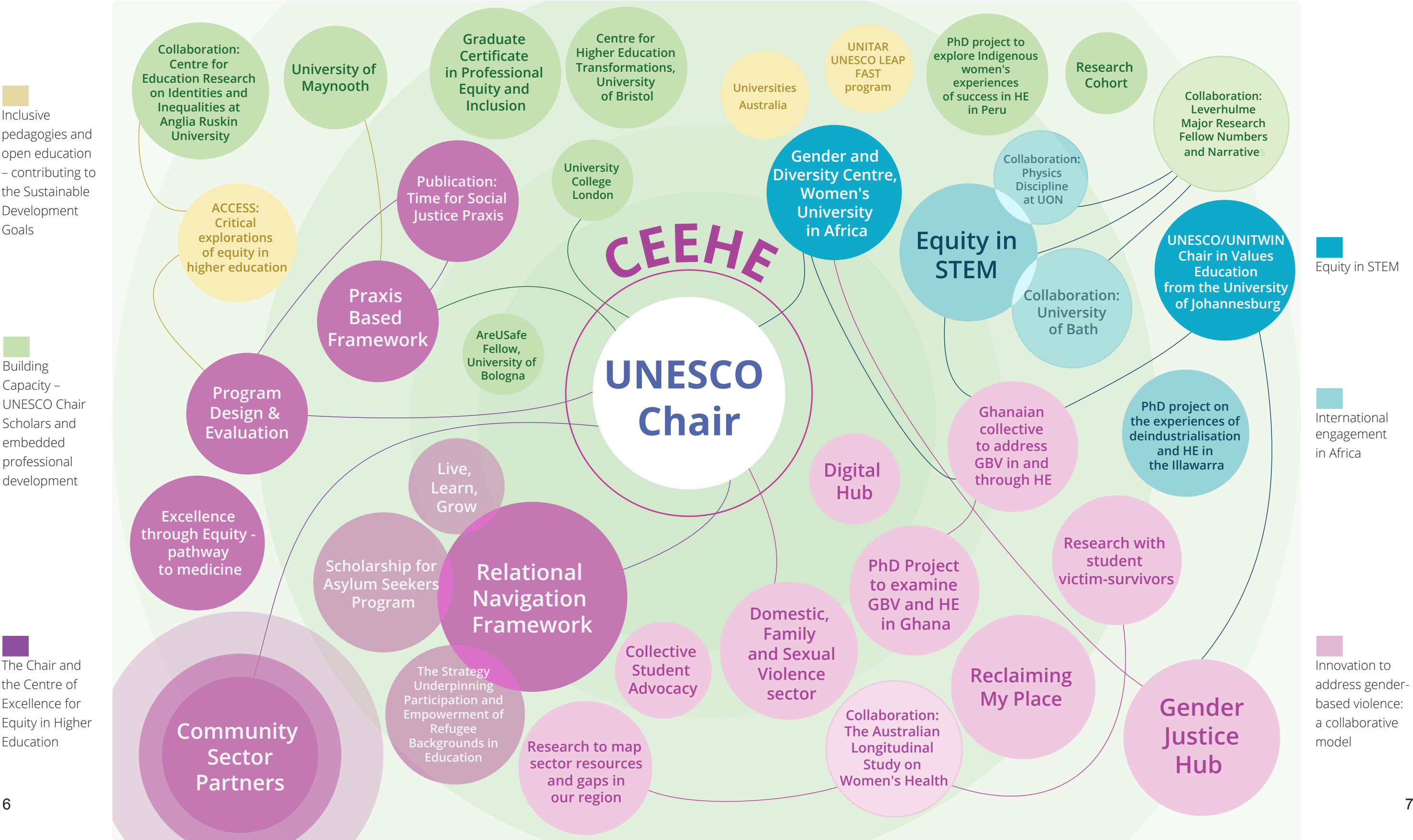
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# Mapping projects, impact and connections

This constellation illustrates the projects, networks and interconnections between them. The colours correspond to the sections within this report - highlighting key activity of the UNESCO Chair and Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education. The green circles in the background reflect the expanding impact of projects and partnerships.





# From the UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education

We are living in a time of multidimensional social and ecological crises, plagued by increasing inequalities, poverty, hunger, exclusion, climate crises, violence and instability, and the diminishing of democracies across the globe. The growing pressures on universities in many parts of the world are leading to a crisis for the arts, humanities and social sciences; disciplinary fields that have a key role to play, in collaboration with the sciences, technologies, engineering, mathematics and medicine, to respond to these challenging and complex problems.

We need more than ever to develop higher education systems, policies, practices and capacities that are responsive to these multidimensional crises. This requires quality resourcing combined with expert knowledge about the complex relationship between social inequalities and ecological concerns, and how these threaten our collective, interdependent human and more-than-human well-being and futures. We need quality resources and expert knowledge as part of a long-term commitment to developing educational systems, policies, practices and capacities for equity, social and ecological justice.

Higher education educates future generations of leaders, professionals, experts and global citizens who have a critical role to play in progressing the social dimensions of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); reducing inequalities, ending poverty and hunger, advancing gender equity, ensuring access to quality education and creating the conditions for peaceful, inclusive and democratic societies. With appropriate resources, knowledge and capacity-building, higher education can be mobilised for equity, social and ecological justice; transforming higher education to become an inclusive and participatory public institution that enables those who have suffered marginalisation to become key change-agents in developing strategies for our collective flourishing and well-being.

The UNESCO Chair and UNITWIN scheme is significant in meeting the challenges of the SDGs by producing collaborations, partnerships and networks across the world. The UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education at the University of Newcastle takes this challenge up, understanding that creating equity in higher education is only one part of a much larger project.

The aim of our collaborative work is to create new social justice frameworks, methodologies and approaches that transform higher education for equity as part of an ongoing commitment to generating sustainable and collective advocacy, agency and action. Our research, evaluation and programs, based in the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education, work in collaboration with our local, regional, national and international partners and networks, with a deep ethics of care and commitment to walk alongside those who are navigating complex inequalities and injustices. Through this, we are creating innovative frameworks co-designed to mobilise higher education for equity and social justice.



*Professor Penny Jane Burke, UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education at the University of Newcastle.*



## From the Vice Chancellor and President

In 2025, the University of Newcastle celebrates our 60th anniversary. Established with and for our regions, our university has sustained a commitment throughout those 60 years to equity of access and participation. We are immensely proud of this history and we are known for it across Australia. For example, the University of Newcastle has the largest and longest running enabling program in the nation. This was recognised by the Minister of Education throughout the Universities Accord process, and our model is now being drawn upon around the country. The Wollotuka Institute is internationally renowned and drives our commitment to embedding Indigenous knowledges into our curriculum and to ensuring that all staff engage in ongoing professional learning for cultural understanding.

2025 also marks 10 years of the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE). Established in 2015 to develop further the University commitment to equity, this centre continues our leadership in producing innovative equity practice and research. The work of CEEHE is extended through the inclusion of the UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education. This report lays out the breadth of work already underway, and I look forward to seeing this continue to unfold.

As the University of Newcastle sets out its next strategic plan, our commitments to equity, justice and sustainability, within our region, nationally and globally, are further strengthened. The UNESCO Chair is important to these goals, as is our broader commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

In 2024, I had the pleasure of participating in the UNITAR/UNESCO leadership dialogue along with Professor Penny Jane Burke. I am pleased to see this work develop and how the innovation and leadership occurring at the University of Newcastle is now embedded within the international course delivered to University leaders around the world.

We welcome your engagement with this report and along with Professor Burke I look forward to continuing to engage with UNESCO and the Chairs network.

*Professor Alex Zelinsky AO, Vice Chancellor of the University of Newcastle*



## From the Deputy Vice Chancellor Engagement and Equity

I'm proud to support the presentation of this report to members of the Unitwin/UNESCO Chairs network, to UNITAR Colleagues, and to members of our academic and civil society communities. As the Deputy Vice Chancellor Engagement and Equity, I have the honour of leading the custodianship of equity and social justice commitments at the University of Newcastle. The UNESCO Chair and Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE) are a key part of this new division, our commitment to supporting underrepresented students, and to making real our support of local communities. CEEHE and the Chair seek to drive global and local change and also take an active role in bridging equity work across our division and University. For the past decade, the Centre has supported the University of Newcastle to deeply understand the inequities students face and how we can implement systemic change. I am excited to be part of this process as we continue and grow this meaningful work.

*Mr Nathan Towney, Deputy Vice Chancellor Engagement and Equity at the University of Newcastle*



The Gender Justice Hub, building on close-up research with over 400 of our students, is a critical strength to our response to the newly legislated Australian National Code to prevent and respond to gender-based violence in higher education. The Code brings a broader understanding of gender-based violence to the policy response to student safety on campus. The work of the Chair in advocating for policy interest and institutional support for students who have experienced gender-based violence across their life-course has a new prominent role in this response, both at our University and across the sector.

In September this year, I shared the stage with Professor Penny Jane Burke (Director CEEHE and Chair) and Professor Katriona O'Sullivan, Maynooth University, Ireland. Together we discussed the role of writing from the margins in enacting policy change. This event had a profound impact on those in attendance. It was a reminder of the realities of the roles that educators can and should play in tackling poverty, exclusion and inequality in our local and global regions. In 2024 I was thrilled to launch the book 'Equity in Higher Education: Time for Social Justice Praxis', written by Professor Penny Jane Burke and Dr Matt Lumb. It's a book that articulates an important new vision for the sector.

The Chair and CEEHE were members of my team on the large-scale project Reimagining Evaluation: A culturally responsive evaluation framework commissioned by the NSW Department of Education. The Chair and CEEHE brought their expertise in ethical methodologies for evaluation, intertwining this with our expertise in Indigenous methodologies and ways of knowing. This project is set to have a massive impact on the way the NSW Department of Education builds and evaluates policies and programs.

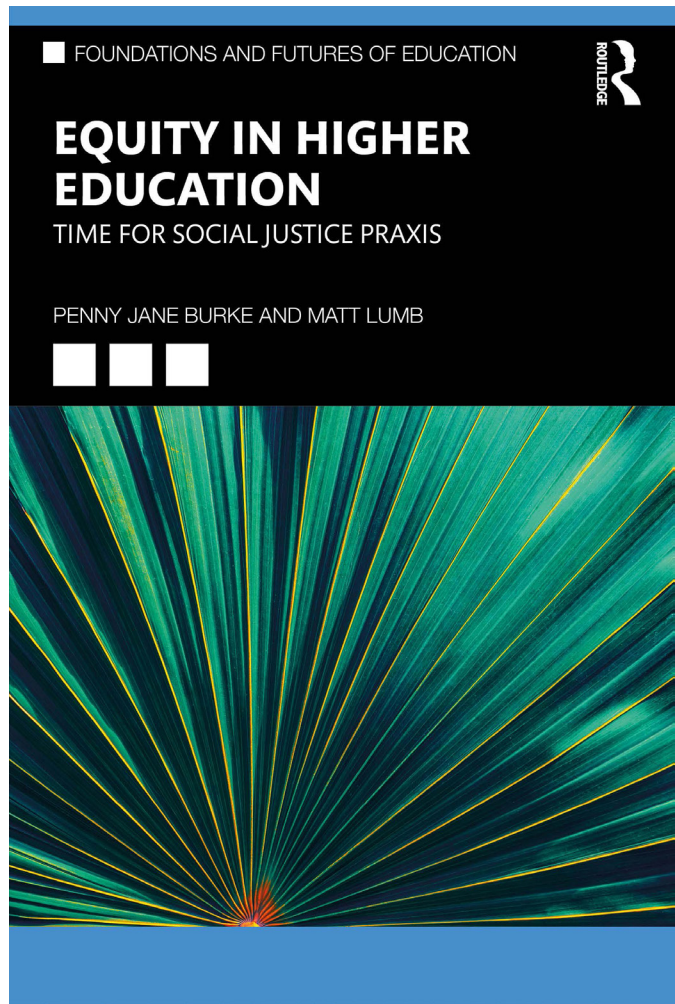
I know the Chair hopes this report will generate further response to and critical engagement with the activity set out within and welcomes future connections.



# The Chair and the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education

The Chair is situated within the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE) at the University of Newcastle in Australia. The program of work set out by the Chair builds upon CEEHE's foundational 'praxis-based approach' and multi-dimensional social justice framework.

This framework draws on critical social justice theories and underpins the conceptualisation and design of projects and activities.



Book cover of *Equity in Higher Education: Time for Social Justice Praxis*

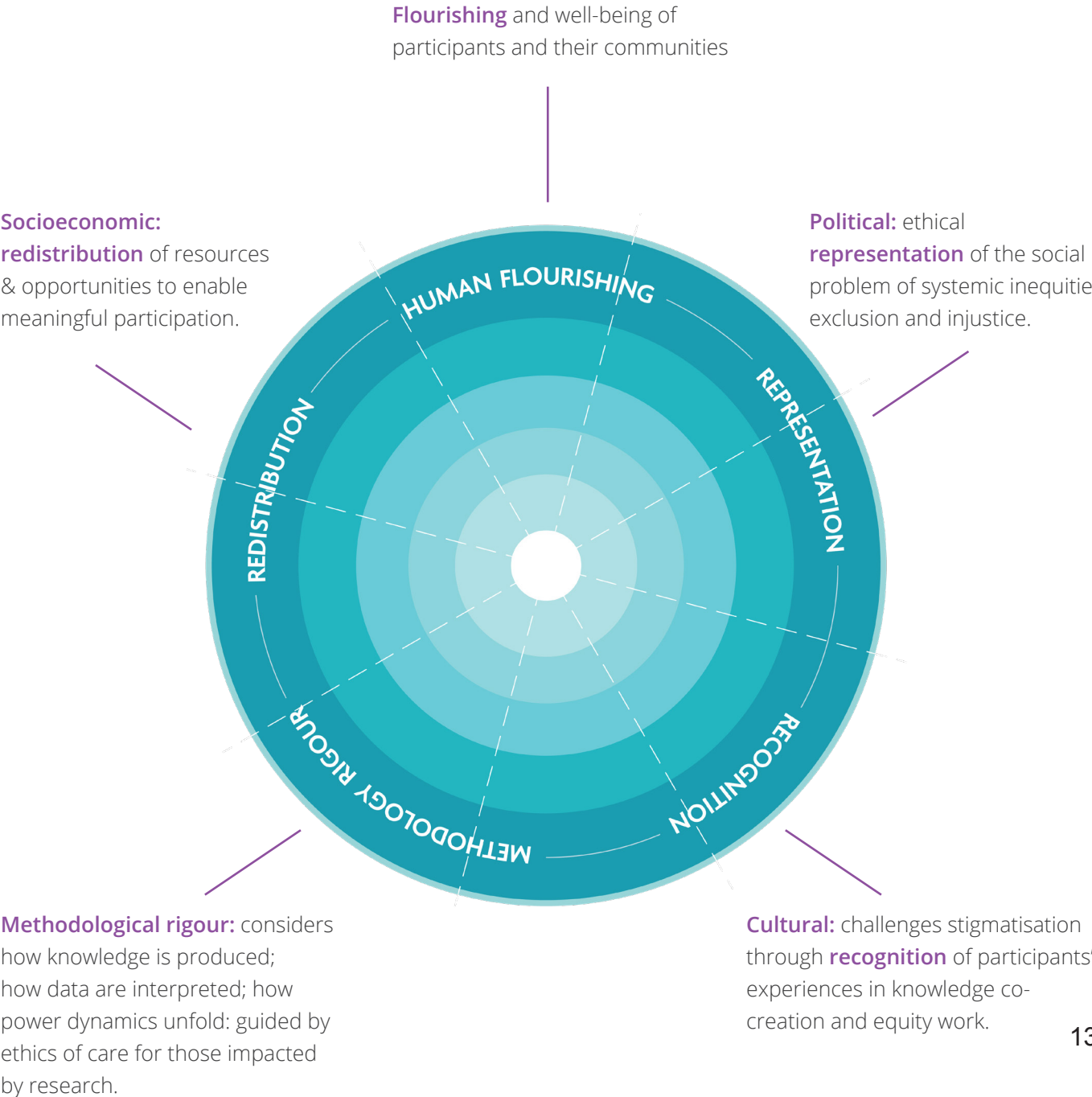
## Celebrating ten years of CEEHE: Time for social justice praxis

In 2024 Professor Penny Jane Burke (the Chair) and Dr Matt Lumb launched 'Equity in Higher Education: Time for Social Justice Praxis'. This book articulates the CEEHE framework, situating it within a wider policy setting. It draws on case studies from across the Centre and the UNESCO Chair's work. The book reflects on ten years of conceptual and innovative program development and testing within CEEHE, with the aim to provide a guide for other institutions to embed equity in and through higher education.

*"This is a book written amongst daily interactions with university students, community members, and colleagues both here at Newcastle and around the globe through our diverse work in CEEHE drawing on important histories of critical thought to reimagine equity practice, making it what Nancy Fraser has called "critical social theorising with practical intent".*  
*Matt Lumb, Author*

'Equity in Higher Education: Time for Social Justice Praxis' argues against monodimensional deficit imaginaries, and welcomes engagement with the framework employed within CEEHE.

We see CEEHE as a community of praxis, aiming to bring to light different concepts of equity thinking and doing. The centre's conception of equity is deeply relational and is understood through a sense of movement (or the collective).







*From left to right: Dr Matt Lumb, Professor Penny Jane Burke, and Deputy Vice-Chancellor Engagement and Equity Nathan Towney at the book launch of *Equity in Higher Education: Time for Social Justice Praxis**

*“Burke and Lumb have produced a work of essential reading for those trying to make sense of and seeking remediation for the persistently stubborn structural inequalities that afflict our University communities and which weaken their contribution in the advocacy and defense of social justice.”*

*Professor Richard Watermeyer*

## Program design

CEEHE approaches program logic modelling and evaluation as more than a technical exercise—it is a process of meaning-making that reflects and reinforces certain values. In social justice-focused programs, evaluation can either support or hinder justice goals, depending on how it is designed and implemented. There is no neutral space in evaluation; every component, from research questions to methods, is shaped by underlying values.

CEEHE’s pedagogical methodology challenges established knowledge hierarchies, creating space for voices often excluded from evaluation processes. Inspired by feminist and critical methodologies, this approach prioritizes participation as a means of knowledge generation. Evaluation is not just a retrospective judgment but a way to imagine and shape new futures. Evaluation frameworks tend to reinforce the perspectives of researchers and policymakers, limiting alternative ways of knowing.

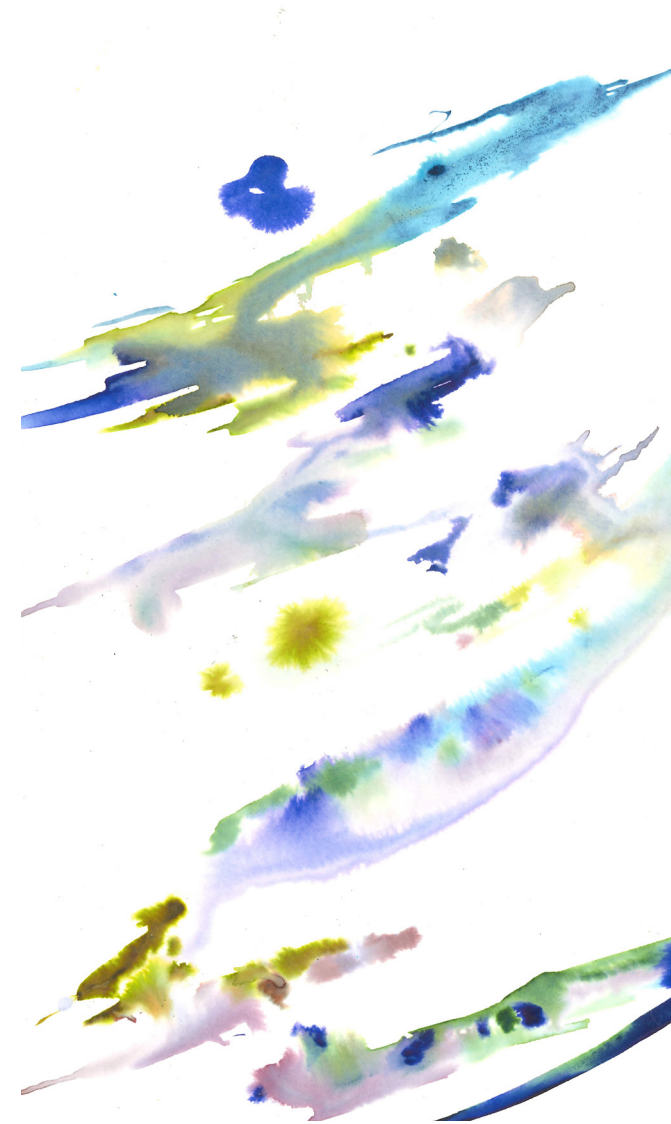
CEEHE seeks to foreground diverse epistemologies, recognizing that knowledge is always situated and shaped by social power relations. The goal is not to create a “level playing field” but to uplift marginalized perspectives, embedding evaluation within program practices rather than treating it as an afterthought.

## Key questions guide this approach:

- How do methods and methodologies interact to advance equity?
- What ethical commitments shape our evaluations?
- To whom is an evaluation process accountable?
- Who is included, and who remains without a voice?

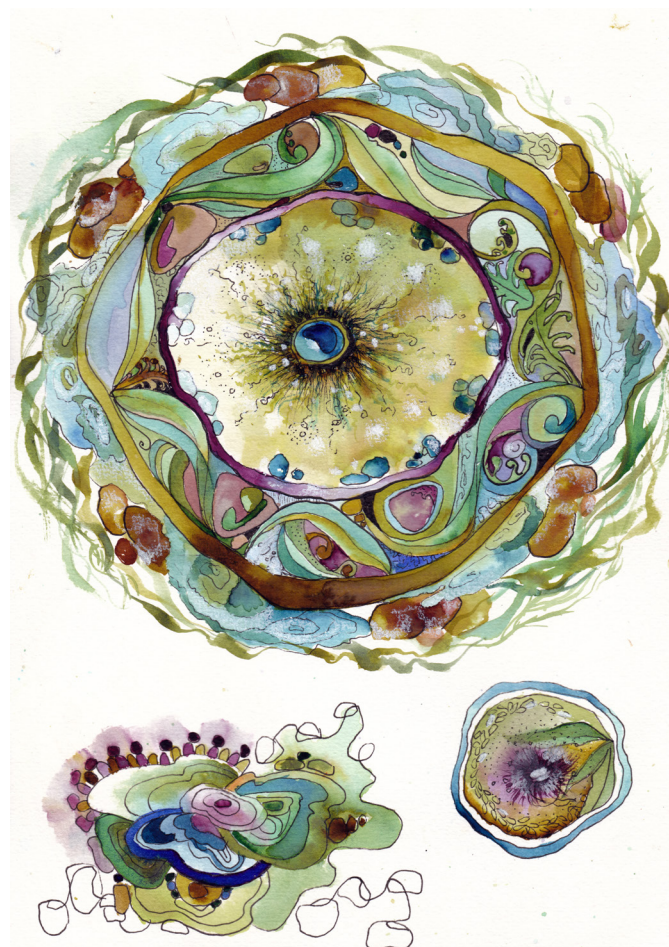
CEEHE views evaluation as an opportunity to cultivate agency and challenge dominant ways the problem of equity in higher education is represented. Participation is not merely an inclusion strategy but a form of radical facilitation that shapes both evaluation processes and their outcomes. In this way, evaluation becomes a dynamic, action-oriented practice that not only assesses past programs but also fosters new possibilities for social justice.

CEEHE works with others to hold open spaces for discussion about policy and program evaluation. Through scholarship we work alongside educational evaluation processes as part of a collective advocacy for justice-oriented approaches to evaluation.



*Details of artwork by CEEHE staff and students.*





*Details of artwork by CEEHE staff and students.*

## The Relational Navigator Framework in Practice

The Relational Navigator accompanies students in the context of their lives, as a partner navigating unwieldy and fragmented domains of social, community, and student services and as an advocate for the student and the wider student community. An ethics of care deeply underpins the relational navigator's approaches. This is a framework that enables co-learning, co-creation and co-design through walking alongside students navigating socioeconomic, cultural and/or political inequities to ensure access to quality resources, services, supports and opportunities.

The aim is to enable discovery of, access to and participation in higher education so that students flourish in, through and beyond their higher education journeys. Through ongoing and proactive co-advocacy to raise awareness of the gaps in services and the implications of these absences for the wellbeing and flourishing of those affected by maldistribution-misrecognition-misrepresentation, higher education policies and practices become open to social justice transformation.

As part of our Relational Navigator suite of programs, we facilitate workshops with key University partners and programs, to provide insight into and to further build collaboration with our higher education communities, and to support participation and collaboration and to co-develop referral and access pathways across higher education and community services.

Arts-based programs are co-developed with student and community partners to provide an inclusive and non-hierarchical environment to generate community, staff and student engagement, support personal and

collective wellbeing, and to enable pathways for under-represented community members to develop their voice and to discover and access resources, pathways and supports.

Community engagement activities and events are designed collaboratively with our community partners and local organisations, to build authentic forms of engagement with children, young people and families in our diverse regional, rural and local communities. These activities helped to build connection with higher education, particularly for communities who may not have had much engagement previously, and to provide information about study options, supports and pathways.

### SUPERBE

The Strategy Underpinning Participation and Empowerment of Refugee Backgrounds in Education (SUPERBE) is a multi-dimensional research and practice based strategy to engage and support community members and current students from refugee and refugee-like backgrounds in education across the Hunter region. The Relational Navigator is actively engaged across community groups and provides a point of connection for students, holding spaces for students to gather and connect. The program advocates and informs institutional recognition and support for students with refugee backgrounds - including through early entry pathway schemes.



*SUPERBE lead Louis Ndagijimana shares insights on the program with colleagues (also pictured are Dr Jean Parker and Dr Matt Lumb)*



## Scholarships for Asylum Seekers Program

The Scholarship for Asylum Seekers Program (SASP) has been established in recognition of the inequalities faced by people seeking asylum in Australia, including in accessing and participating in higher education. The Relational Navigator provides direct student support and advocacy for financial support, including through University fee-waiver scholarships and philanthropic donations.

## Live, Learn, Grow

The first program of its kind in Australia, Live Learn Grow (LLG) provides practical, academic and social support to allow people with an out-of-home care (OOHC) (including e.g. foster, residential or kinship care), background to access and actively participate in higher education. The LLG team has worked to develop a strong network of agencies, universities and policy-makers, providing a framework to support agencies and inform policy and practice.

## Excellence through Equity

Established in 2020, the Excellence through Equity Pathway to Medicine (EtE Pathway) is a collaborative offering by the College of Health, Medicine and Wellbeing (CHMW), CEEHE and Pathways and Academic Learning Support Centre (PALS). It provides up to 6 places annually within the Joint Medical Program for students who have experienced financial hardship and other inequalities. The Relational Navigator provides direct student support and facilitates study support and peer engagement, as well as an annual point of connection with senior leaders at the University as part of an ongoing process of evaluation.



*Details of artwork by CEEHE staff and students.*

## Reclaiming My Place

Reclaiming My Place (RMP) is an arts-based program facilitated in partnership with community-based service providers. The program engages with women who have lived experiences of gender-based violence and stalled education histories. RMP seeks to open up opportunities for engagement in education and lifelong learning pathways. Building on Reclaiming My Place, we have also located the arts-based collective within the University, for student victim-survivors and advocates. This began within the pilot study of the Understanding the impact of gender-based violence on access to and participation in higher education project and is offered in a hybrid online and face to face model.



*Details of artwork by CEEHE staff and students.*



# Inclusive pedagogies and open education – contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals

The UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education aims to effect transformative equity by mobilising higher education as a vehicle for social justice, addressing and challenging the conditions that undermine progress toward reducing inequalities, gender equality and quality education for all.

Since establishment in 2023, the Chair has linked this aim to understanding the interconnection of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) and the importance of opening access to new knowledges and models for change.



Professor Penny Jane Burke led the Inclusive Pedagogies stream at the first program intensive held at Majmaah University from 23 March to 31 March 2025.

**UNITAR UNESCO program of work**  
*“[LEAP-FAST] is creating an inclusive timescape for collaboration and connectedness that will reach far beyond the week’s intensive co-creation workshop. I am excited to see how our collective work unfolds over time.”*  
(Professor Penny Jane Burke)

In her role as the Chair, Professor Penny Jane Burke is leading the inclusive pedagogies stream of the Leaders in Higher Education Alliance and Programme - For Accelerating Sustainability Transformations (LEAP-FAST), as one of four UNESCO Chairs engaged as an expert consultant. LEAP-FAST brings together education leaders from across the world to build their capacity to address the sustainable development goals – with a focus on the socially focussed SDGs where there is still a gap between the current measures and the 2030 targets.

*Students become empowered to influence policy, become change agents and co-develop the actions necessary for sustainability transformations.*

Program development began in 2024 with the group formulating a statement for presentation at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in New York. Meetings were held online over 2024 and 2025 to co-design the 6-week program. The first iteration of the program ended with the face-to-face intensive workshop held for participants in Saudi-Arabia in May 2025. Over 50 participants representing 17 different countries took part in the first edition, Professor Burke will return to Saudi-Arabia in November 2025 for the second delivery of the program.

*“...after starting to follow the certificate online and attending the co-creation workshop, I realised our students – this really stayed in my mind – will lead tomorrow and be the decision makers and need awareness about sustainability and competencies.”*  
(Dr Joyce Govinden Soulangue in University World News)

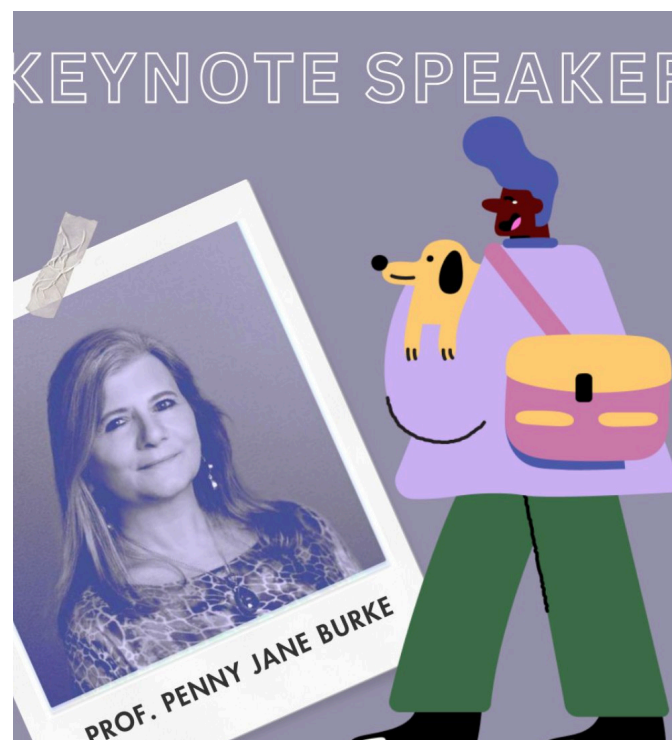


Professor Penny Jane Burke led the Inclusive Pedagogies stream at the first program intensive held at Majmaah University

Professor Burke returned insights from the first workshop and its impact in a forum at the HLPF in July 2025 titled “Innovating across higher education space for more inclusive and sustainable future for all”. At the 2025 HLPF event, she explained:

*“We need a massive shift in thinking about higher education’s relationship to those with lived experiences of inequality, injustice and trauma. Students experiencing inequalities are in the best position to understand how inequality works and how it impacts lives. When fully included as equal peers in the project of change, their voices are enriched and amplified. Students become empowered to influence policy, become change agents and co-develop the actions necessary for sustainability transformations.”*





Professor Penny Jane Burke was a keynote speaker at the Open Education Global Conference.

## Open Education Keynote

In November 2024, Professor Penny Jane Burke presented a keynote at the Open Education Global Conference held in Brisbane. Professor Burke's address "Open to Social Justice Transformation: What has higher education got to do with it?" – explored the concept of "open" to articulate the important role of higher education for social justice and opening awareness of insidious inequalities.

Amongst a range of key themes, she considered the importance of opening spaces of writing as a key dimension of equity development:

*"Writing and publication as an issue of equity is rarely considered. Yet questions in relation to writing are critical to the politics of knowledge and knowing and who has access to this. This includes questions of authorship, authority and who claims a position as knower and what claims are made on behalf of whom and how this is connected to the politics of representation and misrepresentation. Such questions are related to the peripherisation of equity, and of equity and educational practitioners themselves who are often positioned outside of knowledge production processes. This misrecognises the important knowledge that practitioners bring and so opening spaces for their writing is important."*



## ACCESS: Critical Explorations of Equity in Higher Education

Access invites critical debates at the intersection of higher education and inequalities of international interest and significance. Part of the journal's project is to engage an increasing diversity of voices, perspectives, theories and methodologies, critique the practices of research, writing and publication, and disrupt dominant forms of representation of the field. The journal is co-hosted with the Centre for Research on Identities and Inequalities (CERII) at Anglia Ruskin University.

Each year the journal publishes a special issue, with a focus on supporting creative forms of writing/representation; emerging authors; and pedagogical approaches to editorial processes.

In 2024, the Special Issue was titled "Radical disruptions: Regenerating care-full academic norms". Guest edited by Professor Marie-Pierre Moreau and Dr Genine Hook, the issue featured 11 papers from across the globe working in different disciplines. An online launch was held with participating authors where shared commitments for open access knowledge production, that seek to disrupt neo-liberal publishing processes, were expressed.

The 2025 Special Issue will be titled "Evaluation for Equity and Justice". The issue is guest edited by Dr Rhyall Gordon, Praxis Officer in the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education; Dr Matt Lumb, Associate Director in the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education; James Ballangarry, Lecturer in Global Indigenous Studies at the Wollotuka Institute; and Monica McKenzie, Indigenous Evaluation Project Officer in the Office of Indigenous Strategy and Leadership, University of Newcastle.



Cover images from the ACCESS Journal. Each cover features an artist's work. From top: Felicity Cocuzzoli, Caello Jo Brooker, Kira Jovanovski.



“**As a society, we are facing profound and urgent issues of which widening inequalities are a massive challenge and so there is an imperative for us to reimagine higher education and its key role in the face of such confronting social issues.**



Campus Review cover page

#### **Collaboration Feature: Professor Tristan McCowan book launch**

This important book builds new understanding of the impact of higher education on climate change, providing important insights and tools for academics and educational practitioners and policy-makers to make change towards climate action. Professor McCowan considers the role of universities in climate action, including bringing attention to the ways social inequalities are deeply entangled with environmental degradation and climate change. In June 2025, the Chair spoke at the launch of the book, lending direct support for this significant work:

*“I want to reiterate an important underpinning question that the book raises - what is the purpose of higher education? What are the values that drive our understanding of that purpose? And what kind of future and world do we want to nurture through higher education? How can we mobilise higher education not only to build sustainability competencies, but to build a future that recognises our inter-connectedness and the fragilities of our relational social and natural world?”*

#### **Universities Australia Keynote**

The Chair delivered an address on the transformative potential of higher education to approximately 1000 University leaders and delegates at the Universities Australia Solutions Summit, held in Canberra in 2023. She explained that:

*“Equity is not peripheral to higher education practice; it is a profound part of all that we do. The work of equity requires us to reflect deeply on the directions we are taking, and what values underpin these directions. As a society, we are facing profound and urgent issues of which widening inequalities are a massive challenge and so there is an imperative for us to reimagine higher education and its key role in the face of such confronting social issues.”*

“**While calling on governments, policymakers and civil servants to recognise their role in creating such possibilities, universities and their leaders have a key role to play.**

This was a timely event, aligning with the announcement of the Universities Accord report – a large-scale review of the Australian Higher Education system reporting to the Federal government. The Chair’s call to action for higher education to mobilise for social justice has led to further engagement nationally and globally:

*“We urgently require securely and comprehensively funded systems with visionary thinking that expands the view of the purpose of higher education. While calling on governments, policymakers and civil servants to recognise their role in creating such possibilities, universities and their leaders have a key role to play – those with the power to influence change must do everything in their power to create the conditions for equity, and thus for our sustainable futures.”*

The keynote introduced the work on the Gender Justice Hub as a case study, which resonated with audiences across the sector.

Through the collaboration taking place under the UNESCO Chair, which includes research, evaluation, new programs, student advocacy, relational navigation and inter-agency collaboration, we are producing critical knowledge and action to mobilise higher education in its capacity to contribute to gender justice, higher education equity and to challenge gender-based violence. A key role is providing a platform for students to articulate their knowledge and insights to create collective action for social change, and to build capacity for new forms of expertise. The keynote has had considerable impact and was published in full as the cover story in Campus Review.



# Innovation to address gender-based violence: a collaborative model

The research and programmatic agenda to challenge gender-based violence in and through higher education is a primary focus of the UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education. Since the establishment of the UNESCO Chair, the **Gender Justice Hub** has continued to develop, building networks and a digital site to support further collaboration and access to our research and resources.

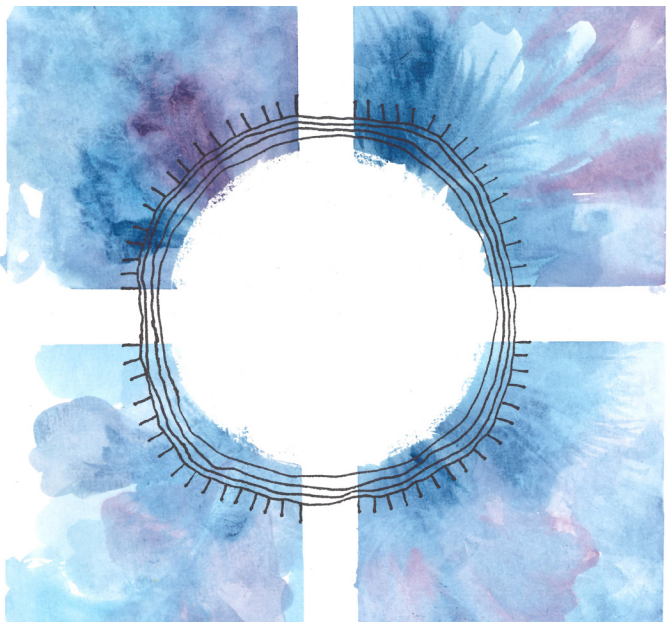
The Hub's partnerships have grown internationally and locally and we have dynamic engagement with students through project placements and arts-based programs.

The Hub has participated in regional Domestic Violence (DV) forums and has supported the Hunter and Central Coast DV Committee in their annual fundraising event. Public events and invited keynotes connect us to new partners and open dialogue around the work. Professor Burke has shared insights and recommendations from the research with students, staff and professionals internationally across 2023, 2024 and 2025.

**Our vision** for the Hub is to build knowledge and skills to activate higher education as an agent for long-term cultural transformation towards gender justice and eradicating gender-based violence.

**Our goals are to:**

- Enable victim-survivors of gender-based violence to access, participate and thrive in and beyond higher education
- Ensure victim-survivors inform a transformed higher education sector that actively contributes to gender justice and challenging gender-based violence
- Prepare the next generation of professionals to understand and challenge gender injustice and its manifestation in gender-based violence
- Help universities and other professional organisations to become change-drivers in the fight against gender-based violence
- Recognise and leverage the knowledge, insight and capacity of student victim-survivors for societal and institutional transformation.



Collaborative artwork from 2024 Claim Our Place participants

“*... victim-survivors are uniquely positioned to drive social change through higher education...*”

**Publication Highlight: New theoretical approach to understand the connection between trauma and agency**

The Gender Justice Hub team has published and presented on different aspects of the research. Most recently, Professor Penny Jane Burke and Dr Stephanie Hardacre have developed an innovative analysis of the research data, which includes accounts provided by 430 students through their participation in a cross-sectional survey. The analysis illuminates how student victim-survivors of gender-based violence harness experiences of shame and trauma to enact change through higher education. This analysis was first presented at the the Gender and Education Association Conference in Manchester in June 2025 and will be published in a special issue, 'Navigating Shame and Resilience in Educational Psychology: From Personal Struggle to Academic Achievement', in *Contemporary Educational Psychology* later this year.

*“We argue victim-survivors are uniquely positioned to drive social change through higher education by continuing their studies alongside and despite adversity, and by using their experiences as catalysts for collective advocacy and generating new knowledge and capacity. By embracing higher education to mitigate similar harms befalling others, victim-survivors reclaim shame as a resource for self-development and advocacy, countering deficit discourses and societal stigmatisation.” (Burke & Hardacre, forthcoming).*



Collaborative artwork from 2024 Claim Our Place participants



*“But there’s nowhere that I am aware of that we can really send people to for support around education...”*

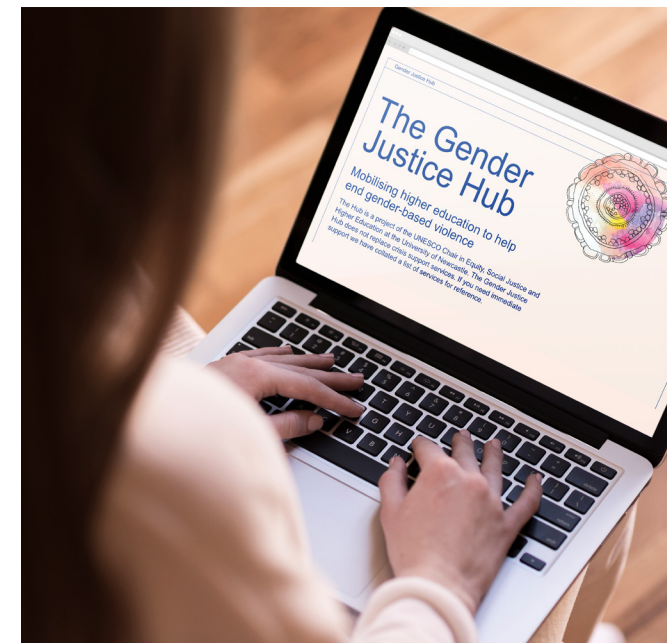
## Collaboration with domestic, family and sexual violence sector workers

As part of our commitment to co-developing the Gender Justice Hub with domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) organisations, the team has undertaken a mapping research project with 14 in-depth interviews and 7 comprehensive survey responses. This project recognises that the DFSV sector includes staff and organisations who hold incredibly valuable knowledge about the nature and impacts of gender-based violence. Important insights about the way other forms of inequality intersect with experiences of GBV and what this means for on the ground services has been a critical insight.

The project has generated insights to inform our continued work in developing the Gender Justice Hub and will be further analysed in collaboration with participants. The work has provided a greater understanding of the post-crisis landscape, including recovery supports and services, in the region. It also provides insight into appropriate arenas for engaging with victim-survivors of GBV who are interested in pursuing higher education and/or lifelong learning opportunities.

*“... what I would say is the people I work with, and I think it’s reflective of the reality, which is that it is incredibly common for gender-based violence to exist. It’s everywhere... the impact of gender-based violence is everywhere...” (Sophie).*

*“It’s very much focused around skill-building and so that’s what you’ll find. Programs out of Got Your Back Sista will run, or different family support services will run around skill-building courses. But there’s nowhere that I’m aware of that we can really send people to for support around education apart from people just turning up to university or TAFE saying that they want to start. But if they have one unhelpful conversation, that could be really off-putting” (Zoe).*

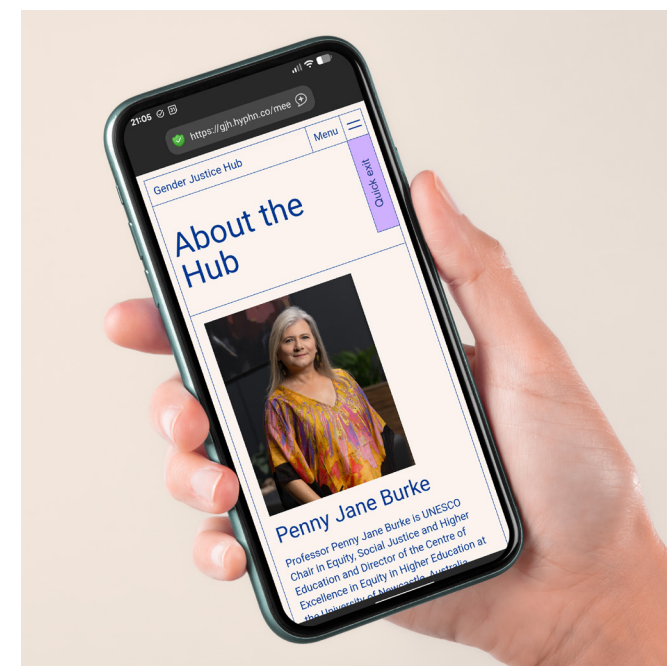


## Digital Hub: increasing access to research and resources

A Gender Justice Hub website has been developed to bring together research and resources, and invite further collaboration from community partners and participants. The site’s visual identity builds on the collaborative artwork designed by participants in the pilot arts-based program Claim Our Place and the website has been tested and improved through feedback by student and community partners.

## Future research to explore the intersection between gender-based violence and higher education

Through the work of the Gender Justice Hub, a new collaborative partnership has developed with Professor Deborah Loxton, Director of the Centre for Women’s Health Research and the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health (ALSWH). Connected through mutual community partners, Professors Burke and Loxton are co-designing an extensive study that will reanalyse existing data from the ALSWH and bring in new voices from victim-survivors who have not explored and/or continued with higher education study. This future research expands the research agendas of both centres and addresses critical gaps in the knowledge needed to inform government policy addressing GBV.



Images of the Gender Justice Hub website



“... it is incredibly common for gender-based violence to exist.

### Arts-based connection: transdisciplinary program delivery and evaluation

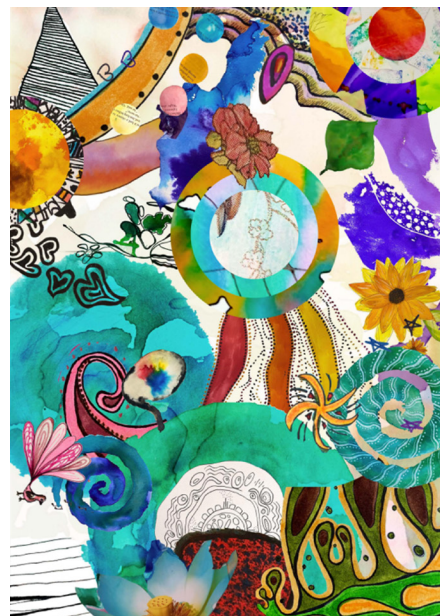
Reclaiming My Place is an eight-week arts-based program for women who have experienced gender-based violence and/or who are engaged with family support services. The program uses art as a tool to build connections and confidence, and open-up possibilities for life-long learning. The program was established in 2018 in partnership with key community services.

In 2024, in partnership with the Family Action Centre and with support from the Department of Communities and Justice, RMP focussed on capacity building with community sector workers. Embedded program evaluation has explored the transformative potential of the program on life-long learning opportunities for participants as well as change to practice for the sector professionals.

*“...this is a mutual space where we are coming together. So [...] it doesn't create an expectation for anyone. We're just entering a space together as two people and I think that alone makes it more comfortable for things to be shared...” (Practitioner).*

In 2025, professional development and network sessions run alongside the program delivery – expanding the program reach and supporting agencies and services to embed elements of Reclaiming My Place into their work. Supported by the Hunter, New England and Central Coast Primary Health Network Healing and Recovery grant the 2025 programs engage further with the primary and allied health services.

Through the relational navigation and student advocacy aspects of the Gender Justice Hub, arts-based connections are also brought to campus.



Collaborative artwork from 2024 community sector worker participants. Collated by Brontë Naylor and the University Galleries.

“She is a trailblazer who is contributing to gender-transformative equity and gender justice in Ghana.

### UNESCO Scholar Ernestina Mambono Nyaaba: PhD project study in Ghana

Ernestina is working to understand the impact of gender-based violence on access to and participation in higher education in remote regions of Ghana. Awarded the funded UNESCO Scholarship in 2023, Ernestina has now returned from field work in Ghana. She visited the Upper Eastern and Northern districts to conduct 25 in-depth interviews with higher education students and staff and non-government agencies supporting girls and women in the region. Ernestina has begun analysis and has identified key areas for reform. Ernestina is driven to create change in Ghana both through her PhD and her work in developing a women's empowerment not-for-profit. Ernestina is an inaugural member of the Ghanaian Feminist Collective, which forms part of the UNESCO Chair. The collaborative ethos and the emphasis on researching, co-learning, reciprocity and peer mentoring are identified by the Collective as key dimensions of struggles for greater gender equity in and beyond higher education, which we hope to sustain over time. The Chair states:

*“I am proud that one of the youngest participants of the Ghanaian Feminist Collective is now a PhD scholar at the University of Newcastle under the UNESCO Chair umbrella. As part of our Gender Justice Hub, which has generated new knowledge about the impact of all forms of gender-based violence on higher education access and participation, Ernestina is extending our Australian-based research in Ghana. She is a trailblazer who is contributing to gender-transformative equity and gender justice in Ghana.”*



PhD Scholar Ernestina Mambono Nyaaba pictured in Ghana during her fieldwork



## International engagement in Africa

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**How can new practices of knowing through difference ... emerge through our collective commitment to transformation?**



Associate Professor  
Gifty Oforiwaa Gyamera

### Partner Feature: Associate Professor Gifty Oforiwaa Gyamera

Associate Professor Gifty Oforiwaa Gyamera is a primary partner of the UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education. Gifty's collaboration with Penny was established during her PhD (completed in 2013 at Roehampton University), where Professor Burke was her principal supervisor. Associate Professor Gyamera now holds a senior role at the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA).

Drawing on a project conducted in 2016, Burke and Gyamera have connected a network of women in leadership roles across higher education and policy. This network first connected in a day long symposium in 2024 and then attended a residential workshop in October 2025. The approach of this network is to engage in feminist, decolonial theory, methodology and praxis and to establish peer-to-peer support and collaboration. The basis of this framework is articulated in the 2022 paper, “Examining the gendered timescapes of higher education: reflections through letter writing as feminist praxis” published in *Gender and Education*. In this article, we conclude with questions emerging from our collective analysis:

*Through our workshops and analysis, key questions emerged, which we share here as a form of conclusion and in the spirit of ongoing and collective reflexivity: how can we sustain a shared commitment over time to trouble persistent but dynamic patterns of inequality through concerted attention to our lived and different experiences? And, through our commitment to this process of transformation, what are the possibilities for challenging gendered inequalities in higher education? How can new practices of knowing through difference (perhaps through a process of exercising ‘un-knowing’ in Lather’s 2009 terms) emerge through our collective commitment to transformation? (Burke, Gyamera and the Feminist Ghanaian Collective, 2022, p. 12).*

Associate Professor Gyamera is the co-supervisor of the UNESCO Chair Scholar Ernestina Mambono Nyaaba whose PhD research (detailed above) is a key element of the Gender Justice Hub.

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**And, through our commitment to this process of transformation, what are the possibilities for challenging gendered inequalities in higher education?**



International Forum of UNESCO Chairs and Partners in September 2024, “Transforming Knowledge for Africa’s Future”.

### UNESCO Chairs and Partners - Ethiopia

Associate Professor Gyamera represented the collaborative work and the broader research collaborations of the UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education at the International Forum of UNESCO Chairs and Partners in September 2024. 650 UNESCO Chairs gathered at this event around the theme “Transforming Knowledge for Africa’s Future”. During the event Professor Gyamera supported the development of key relationships with UNESCO Chairs working in Canada and South Africa.

### Exchange with Women’s University in Africa

Dr Hellen Venganai, from the Women’s University in Africa, was funded for a week-long visit to the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education and the University of Newcastle, as part of the World Technology Universities Network exchange scheme. It was wonderful to connect and discuss the work of the UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education and to learn more from Hellen about the Centre for Gender and Diversity at the Women’s University in Africa. This exchange has led to further connection, including with Associate Professor Gifty Oforiwaa Gyamera based in Ghana. In September 2025, Professor Burke delivered symposium to the Women’s University in Africa.

### Ongoing conversations with the UNITWIN Network

Professor Burke has engaged with Professor Nazreen Dasoo, UNESCO/UNITWIN Chair in Values Education, at the University of Johannesburg. The connection was made by Emeritus Professor Terry Lovat at the University of Newcastle. Nazreen met with UNESCO Chair partner Associate Professor Gifty Oforiwaa Gyamera at the UNESCO Chair event in Ethiopia in 2024. Most recently discussions have begun around the focus on the work of the Gender Justice Hub, with Professor Dasoo connecting us with Dr Ntomboxolo Yamile. Dr Yamile is a Lecturer at the Department Education and Curriculum Studies has conducted research on rural communities and addressing gender-based violence.



**How can new practices of knowing through difference ... emerge through our collective commitment to transformation?**

### Newcastle - Accra engagement

The first hybrid meeting of the network was held in November 2024 in Accra. Thirteen members participated in the program. Participants included administrators and faculty members from: University of Ghana, Valley View university, University of Media, Arts and Communication, Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration and the Akenten Appiah-Menka University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development (AAMUSTED). One participant was a health practitioner and the Head nurse at the Ghana Judicial clinic. The meeting focussed on understanding the prevalence and impact of gender-based violence in the Ghanaian context. The group noted the lack of resources available for addressing gender-based violence within the Ghanaian Higher Education system.

A second residential workshop was held in October 2025 to continue to develop proposals for policy action. This workshop was reported in the Ghanaian Times and via a local TV station.



Participants at the three day workshop in Accra, 2025.

## Building Capacity – UNESCO Chair Scholars, embedded professional development and public programs

The UNESCO Chair builds on and shares the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education's platforms for enhancing research and practice capacity. These platforms include a rich research higher degree environment; a Graduate Certificate in Professional Equity and Inclusion;

an open access journal - co-hosted between the University of Newcastle and Anglia Ruskin University - to support emerging writers and editors; embedded undergraduate and enabling student engagements; visiting scholar opportunities; and informal mentoring and connections.

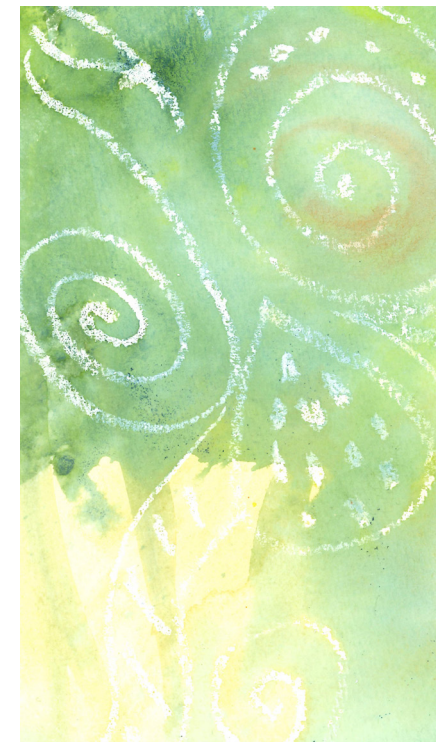
### Professional learning in equity and inclusion

Postgraduate programs aim to critically engage students and professionals in examining the dominant discourses of equity, diversity and inclusion to generate praxis for transformative equity. Courses are a collaboration between the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE) and the School of Humanities, Creative Industries & Social Sciences at the University of Newcastle, NSW, Australia. The courses are connected with the UNESCO Chair and the University of Newcastle CIFAL (through accreditation).

The courses are embedded in the Masters of Social Change and Development at the University of Newcastle. Student projects offer a fascinating insight into Australian and global equity concerns.

### PhD Cohort

The Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education has an active PhD scholar cohort, which includes the three UNESCO Chair Scholars. Recently completed work includes an examination of the experiences of religious women in higher education (Dr Sharon Smith) and an exploration of student success in higher education (Dr Kristin Allen).



Artwork from CEEHE staff and students collaborative project.





Shay Greig with Professor Penny Jane Burke at the Gender and Education Conference.



Image of Luz Gamarra Caballero during her presentation to the Australian Embassy in Peru.

### UNESCO Scholar Shay Greig

UNESCO Scholar Shay Greig has now completed her field work. Her PhD explores the classed and gendered affective experiences of deindustrialisation and higher education in the Illawarra. She is looking at how periods of social and economic change feel for working-class people and understandings of the role and purpose of education.

“Within that bubble, you have to meet certain criteria that are within you, that you inherited”. (Participant quote from Shay Greig’s PhD).

In 2025, Shay presented her thesis at the Gender and Education Association Conference in Manchester. Shay said:

*It was an incredible experience to hear from feminist researchers from around the globe, including Valerie Walkerdine, Alison Phipps, EJ Renold, Fikile Nxumalo, as well as, Jessica Gagnon and Carli-Ria Rowell. In particular, it reinforced the importance of feminist practices, pedagogies and methodologies within the global higher education climate.*

### UNESCO Scholar Luz Gamarra Caballero

Luz Gamarra Caballero is currently in Peru for her fieldwork, examining Indigenous women’s success in higher education. Luz has been invited to share her work at the Australian Embassy in Peru in recognition of the importance of her research in working with Indigenous women in Peru. Her research aims to understand their journeys in navigating inequalities to access, participate and thrive in higher education.

### Collaboration feature: Professor Katriona O’Sullivan

An emerging collaboration is developing with Professor Katriona O’Sullivan at Maynooth University, Dublin. Katriona is launching a new centre at Maynooth focussed on access and equity, and in September travelled to Newcastle to spend time with the UNESCO Chair, and to learn about the establishment of CEEHE. The Chair will be the keynote speaker for the new Centre’s launch in November 2025.

*“Events like this remind me that when we speak from the margins, we open up spaces for empathy, connection and real change.”*

*Professor Katriona O’Sullivan*

Professor O’Sullivan is the author of a best-selling memoir, Poor, and joined the Chair and Deputy Vice Chancellor Engagement and Equity on stage to speak to her experiences and discuss the role of memoir in driving policy change at a public facing event in Newcastle.

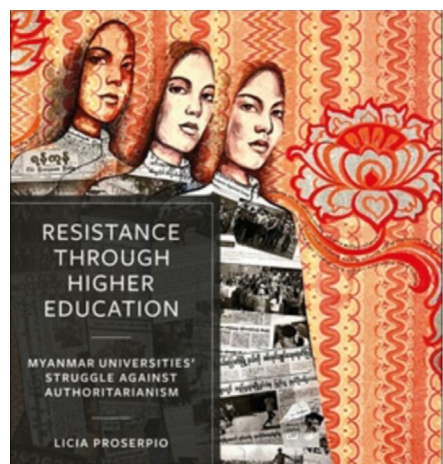


Images from the public event Writing from the margins.





Professor Penny Burke with Dr Licia Proserpio



"Resistance through Higher Education: Myanmar Universities' Struggle against Authoritarianism" published by Bristol University Press.

### Collaboration feature: Dr Licia Proserpio

Dr Licia Proserpio is Junior Assistant Professor at the Department of History and Culture, University of Bologna (Italy) and Adjunct Professor at the School of Liberal and Media Studies, UPES (India).

Currently, she is Principal Investigator of the project "areUsafe" - are universities safe spaces? The project is a multi-sited ethnographic study on the higher education journeys of displaced people in South and South-East Asia, financed by a grant from the Italian Ministry of University and Research. This project supports her travel to Newcastle to receive supervisory support from the UNESCO Chair for her research and to engage in dialogue with members of the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education. The first visit to Newcastle highlighted the synergies between Licia's research and the work of the UNESCO Chair in Equity, Social Justice and Higher Education.

During her visit, Dr Proserpio shared her PhD research with colleagues at the University. Key conclusions, included:

- Alternative, emergent education institutions are re-imagining Myanmar. Their voices must be heard when a "new window of policy change will open".
- Universities around the world enjoy different forms of autonomy to support dis/placed students
- Need of a conversation on how providing HE to dis/placed students is not only a humanitarian response and way to respect their human rights; it is also a way to foster a process of belonging and resistance.

*"Yesterday, the discussion grew into a reflection on what a university truly is, and how we might live authentically within such spaces without losing ourselves in the metrics of quality and excellence, but instead centering the transformative role that universities can and should have for the societies we serve."*

Dr Licia Proserpio

## Equity in STEM

Responding to an identified need to understand the ways in which equity initiatives were understood by staff and students highlighted the need to explore pedagogical approaches that can reflect

the varied disciplinary and personal contexts across institutions. This research agenda addresses the aim of the UNESCO chair to collaborate on and share innovative methodologies.

***[it is] imperative to challenge the hyper-competitive and individualist frameworks that sabotage women's contributions personally and collectively.***

### Partner highlight: University of Bath

Professors Andrea Abbas, Sally Hewlett and Momna Hejmadi at the University of Bath have been foundational partners of the UNESCO Chair. The parallel project exploring equity in sciences was taken up by the University of Bath in 2022. The University of Bath further extended the work through partnership with Nevine El Souefi at the University of Egypt. In 2024, they presented on the methodologies employed through this project at the European Conference for Educational Research. Together they presented on the question "Can we generate equity from within universities?".

The research collected as part of the "understanding equity in the sciences project" across both institutions has highlighted the need for new approaches to embedding equity. These approaches must allow staff to work through equity issues in their specific contexts, and provide the (funded) time and space to do so. Moving beyond the data collection process to working closely with members of the Physics discipline at the University of Newcastle, has further highlighted the pressures of the neo-liberal university, the wide diversity of contexts and equity questions present within an institution, and the incredible insights that emerge from scholars engaging in rigorous discussions.



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**Professor  
Tamboukou’s  
[...] analysis  
demonstrates  
the importance  
of women’s  
relationships,  
friendships,  
solidarity,  
collaboration and  
peer mentorship.**

**Collaboration Highlight: Professor Maria Tamboukou**

Professor Penny Jane Burke attended the Numbers and Narratives research symposium, held in London in May 2025, as a member of the International Advisory Board. The symposium brought together scholars from around the world—including Brazil, France, Greece, Poland, Sweden, the United States, and the United Kingdom—to explore the lives and legacies of women in mathematics. The event was a culmination of the work of Professor Maria Tamboukou’s Leverhulme fellowship. Professor Tamboukou is a key scholar in the field of gender and education, whose work relates directly to Newcastle’s UNESCO Chair.

In response to Professor Tamboukou’s fellowship, Professor Burke considers that:

*“Historical exclusions are so thoroughly enmeshed in contemporary equity configurations that these are almost impossible to see especially in a cultural value order in which only that which is measurable is valued. (...) Professor Tamboukou’s work brings to light the power of women’s collective agency within co-supportive and relational mentoring frameworks. Her analysis demonstrates the importance of women’s relationships, friendships, solidarity, collaboration and peer mentorship. This reinforces the imperative to challenge the hyper-competitive and individualist frameworks that sabotage women’s contributions personally and collectively.”*

## List of Keynotes and Presentations

Voices from Myanmar Seminar, Dr Licia Proserpio, Newcastle, September 2025.

Writing from the Margins, Professor Penny Jane Burke, Professor Katriona O’Sullivan and Deputy Vice-Chancellor Nathan Towney, Newcastle, September 2025.

Award of Society of Research in Higher Education Fellowship, September 2025.

Our Watch Advancing gender equity in university research environments panel, Online August 2025.

Newcastle Charitable Foundations event, August 2025.

Quality Teaching in Practice Conference Keynote, Newcastle, August 2024.

UNITAR/UNESCO program LEAP-FAST Leadership Dialogue and Certificate Program - New York and Saudi Arabia. 2024-2025.

Accra - Newcastle Engagement Day Long Seminar, Accra, November 2024.

Equity Practitioners in Higher Education Australasia Conference, Auckland, November 2024.

Open Education Global Keynote, Brisbane, November 2024.

Launch of Equity in Higher Education: Time for Social Justice Praxis, Newcastle, November 2024.

Times Higher Education Sustainability Forum keynote, Bangkok, June 2024.

Universities Australia Futures Summit keynote, Canberra, February 2024.

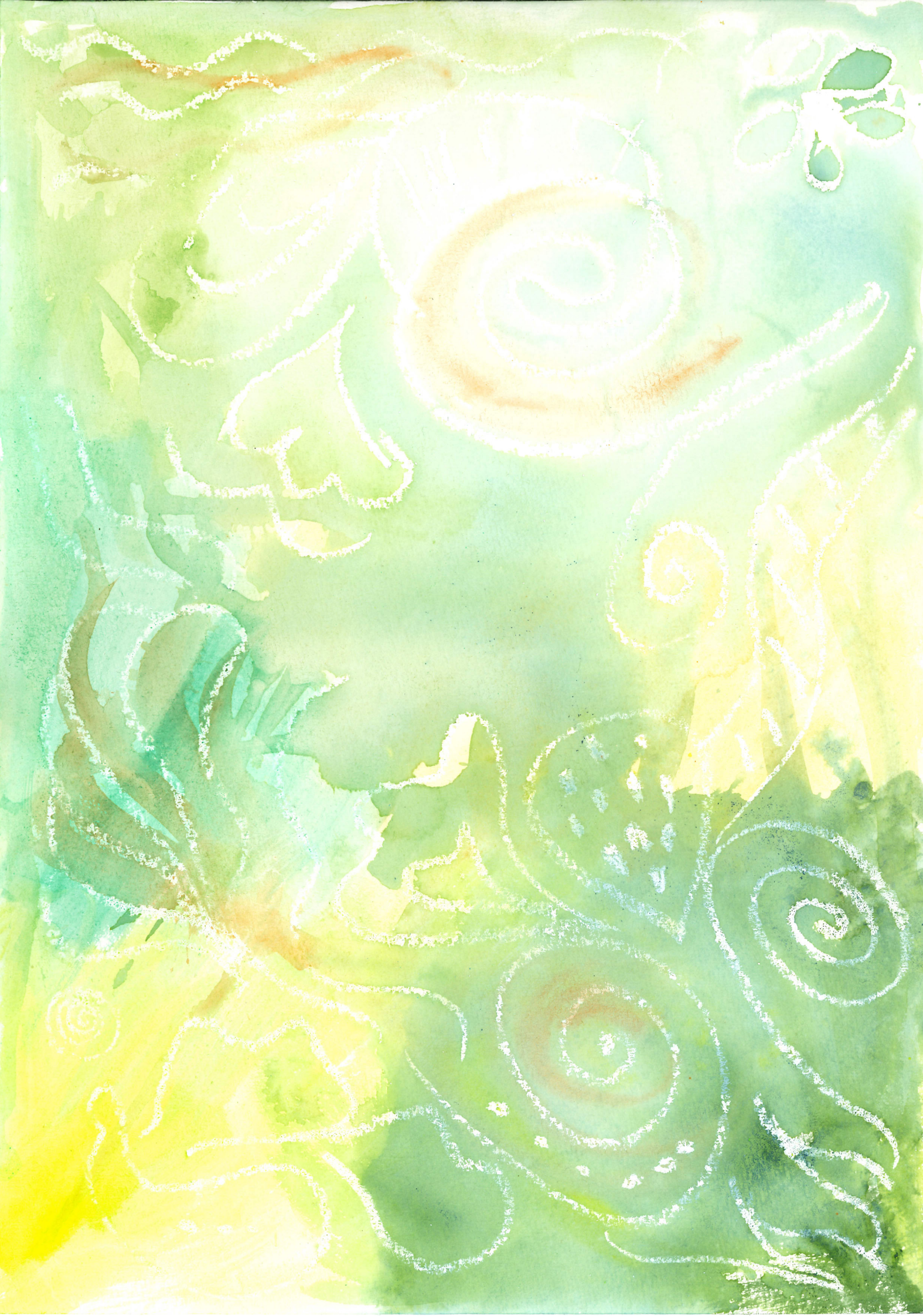
Workshop Delivery, Access, Achievement, Accord 2024 The Australian Equity Symposium, Sydney, May 2024

Changing the Course of Women’s Academic Leadership keynote, Online and Islamabad, October, 2023.

Global Higher Education Conference keynote, Kuala Lumpur, November, 2023.

Looking Ahead Lecture, Newcastle, April, 2023.







*"As a powerful social institution of knowledge formation, deeply entwined with the orientations that shape our present and future directions, we see higher education as entangled in the complex social relations that, when left unchallenged, contribute to the multi-scalar crises of our times...Simultaneously, we recognise that higher education generates knowledge to address these crises...and so we resist falling into the trap of polarising thinking. With a more holistic response-ability of higher education to challenge multidimensional social injustice in mind, we reject the decontextualization of higher education from these urgent societal concerns and we understand equity in higher education as entangled in the complicated dynamics in which these crises have emerged."*

**Burke and Lumb, Equity in Higher Education: Time for Social Justice Praxis 2024**

