

PART FIVE:

SUSTAINABILITY

ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

Disclaimer: The University of Newcastle, Australia recognises that disclosure of climate-related performance is an early adoption delivered ahead of sector-wide guidance being available and therefore there may be limitations to the robustness and consistency of reporting.

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION INTO ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Spanning disciplinary and geographic boundaries, the University is leading innovative research in environmental sustainability across the globe. We partner with industry, harnessing the power of collective expertise to advance research and innovation across energy, biodiversity and the environment. We have actively created and fostered world-leading environmental sustainability research facilities to carry out our sustainability research agenda.

Our research institutes and Priority Research Centres (PRC) that contribute directly to sustainability outcomes for Hunter and Central Coast regions and beyond include:

- Newcastle Institute for Energy and Resources, which is leading the way in energy research, exploring solutions for sustainable production and energy use.
- The Priority Research Centre for Frontier Energy Technologies and Utilisation conducts cutting edge research on emerging energy technologies, with particular focus on the abatement of greenhouse gases and clean and sustainable energy production.
- The Priority Research Centre for Organic Electronics is focused on the scientific challenges in the development of organic photovoltaics for the next generation of environmentally friendly energy sources, photonics and biosensors.
- The Centre for Urban and Regional Studies researchers work collaboratively with Indigenous peoples, social movements, non-governmental organisations, industry and policy-makers locally and in the Asia-Pacific region, to address the spatial dimensions of human and environmental change and to help build spaces of possibility.

LOW IMPACT OPERATIONS

In our Environmental Sustainability Plan 2019-2025 the University of Newcastle committed to achieving carbon neutrality across the University's operations, teaching and research by 2025.

Since implementation of the plan commenced, the University has transitioned to 100% renewable electricity (in 2020) and from the beginning of 2023 implemented use of green gas. As part of the plan the University has implemented several other significant initiatives to reduce scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions, including:

- increased solar use to 1.1MW in the past three years. These PV solar panels make up 3.5% of our total electricity supply and reduce 28.5 kilotons of carbon emissions. The University expects to grow this total over the coming years, particularly as new buildings come online.
- roll-out of energy efficient LED lighting with approximately 12,000 light fitting replacements since 2020. This is part of a wider campus program to support an upgrade of 50,000 light fittings which will reduce our overall energy consumption by at least 20%.

- conversion of fleet to electric vehicles and use of hybrid technology buses including the University participating in a trial of a Battery Electric City Bus (BEV) to assess the suitability of fully electric transportation options for passenger services between University campuses.
- expansion of the EV charging stations across campuses, supporting students, staff and the community with free charging options.
- updating fleet vehicles to achieve 13.5% electric vehicles and a further 15% of vehicles under hybrid fuel. In 2023, 18 electric and 7 hybrid vehicles were added to the fleet. Given our requirement to travel intrastate and particularly in rural areas, the University will be replacing unleaded cars with electric where possible but will also consider hybrid vehicles where EV infrastructure is less supported in the community.
- improved waste management practices diverting food organics and soft plastics from general waste. The University has run a soft plastic recycling program since 2018, partnering with an external organisation to remove over 115,000 pieces of soft plastic. The waste diversion program is being expanded to include a University-wide waste education campaign, including bin labelling and placement to educate staff and students. The University is working to the target of diverting up to 70% of its general waste through an organic recycling program which collects food scraps from resident dining halls and other food and beverage outlets across campuses which is then treated in a specialised industrial food waste disposal facility to create fertiliser and green electricity via a process called anaerobic digestion.

The University's sustainability efforts for Scope 1 and 2 emissions continue to be a focus of activity that is expected to largely remove all emissions from these scopes by 2025. Further reductions are expected to be realised through the continued transition of fleet vehicles and technology advances and asset replacement programs for other emissions such as refrigerants and other mechanical equipment which currently use fuels.

The University continues to work with its major suppliers to reduce scope 3 emissions which are indirect emissions occurring as a result of actions outside of the control of the University, such as purchases of goods and services, business travel and employee commuting.

UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The University of Newcastle is a signatory to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The University's *Looking Ahead Strategic Plan* and Environmental Sustainability Plan are guided by these goals.

In 2023, the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings ranked the University of Newcastle 28th in the world in terms of commitment to the SDGs.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTING

Since 2018 the University has been proactively strengthening its approach to responsible investment, by considering environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues within its portfolios. Supported by the University's investment portfolio manager, Mercer, we monitor performance against the UN sustainable development goals. Mercer is a founding signatory to the Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) and recognised as a global and local leader in responsible investing.

In 2020, the key focus areas were expanded after the initial four areas established in 2018 were successfully exceeded.

At the end of 2023 the University had performed as follows against the key areas:

1. Maintain a total portfolio ESG score that is better than the universe by at least 0.5. In 2023 the University's ESG score was 1.71, an improvement of 0.7% on the prior year and continues to be better than the universe (2.26).
2. Monitor carbon footprint and increase focus on transition risk assessment. The University's portfolio is closely monitored for its carbon footprint with 25% of unlisted infrastructure investments now allocated to renewables.
3. Maintain a fund weighted average carbon intensity (WACI) at 20% below benchmark. The University's portfolio WACI is currently 36.2% below the composite benchmark and has decarbonised by 27.1% since 2020.
4. Increase investments aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The University's portfolio remains well aligned with the UN SDGs with a net impact rating of 1.78 for 2023 compared to the benchmark rating of 0.91.

The University continues to work with Mercer to identify areas of further development in improving its ESG investment approach and in 2023 set new ESG targets for the next three years.

All statistics are either as at 30 June 2023 or over the Financial Year (FY) 2022–2023.

SOCIAL MATTERS

MODERN SLAVERY ACT 2018

The University has an Anti-slavery Working Group with representatives across a wide range of university areas. The group is responsible for the implementation of the University's Modern Slavery Action Plan and is currently reviewing the NSW Anti-slavery Commissioner's Guidance on Reasonable Steps to inform our anti-slavery approach.

A number of key actions were taken in 2023:

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

In late 2023 the University of Newcastle was notified that the vulnerability of international students to modern slavery had been declared a significant issue by the NSW Anti-slavery Commissioner under section 31(1)(a) of the Modern Slavery Act 2018 (NSW). The University of Newcastle recognises that international students face increased risks of exploitation in various aspects like employment, accommodation, and situations involving debt bondage. To address these concerns and mitigate the vulnerabilities faced by our international students, the International Student Support (ISS) Team has implemented a comprehensive Orientation and Onboarding Program, consisting of five thorough pre-arrival modules which students coming to Australia to study are required to complete before their arrival. Additionally, the University's Student Wellbeing Team developed a 47 page 'International Student Survival Guide' in booklet form, that will be provided to arriving students from Semester 1, 2024.

These initiatives aim to provide international students with information to help them understand safe and respectful relationships, avoid arrangements where employment and accommodation leases are linked, avoid cash-in-hand work, understand the Australian regulatory framework governing employment and Awards and their rights as an Australian worker. They are made aware of sources of help such as the internal and external support services available to them, legal services available, and how to contact the Fair Work Ombudsman and International Student Ombudsman.

ISS also partner with the Careers Service, Campus Care and external agencies to support international students who may want to raise issues, be connected with services, or potentially make formal reports related to modern slavery practices or situations. Further specialist support is available to students through the International House Drop-In Centre, Wellbeing Services (counselling and prevention) and other resources such as the Chaplaincy service and medical services.

The University's Modern Slavery Action Plan includes an action to identify staff who have contact with international students to ensure appropriate upskilling and engagement.

As a member of the Australian Universities Procurement Network (AUPN), the University is engaged in a multi-stakeholder project addressing international student worker exploitation risk. There are representatives from the University's Anti-Slavery Working Group involved in this initiative with the Australian Red Cross and Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans, aiming to develop resources to educate international students on working conditions and to educate student-facing staff on signs of exploitation. The project is currently in stage two (materials review stage) with the launch of resulting materials planned for early to mid 2025. It is anticipated that the University's Anti-Slavery Working Group will disseminate information to relevant staff prior to the roll-out of these resources being developed via the AUPN project.

PROCUREMENT

The University aims to develop a more effective and systematic approach to manage supply chain risks in line with statutory obligations and will be guided by the recently released NSW Anti-slavery Commissioner's Guidance on Reasonable Steps (including the associated GRS Inherent Risk Identification Tool).

The University is already undertaking a range of steps to reduce the risk of modern slavery in its supply chain, including:

- embedding modern slavery obligations within standard contracts for suppliers and consultants;
- undertaking detailed due diligence to identify and analyse risks within its supply chain;
- collaborating with the Australian Universities Procurement Network (AUPN) Anti-slavery working group to develop supplier self-assessment questionnaires, aggregate sector procurement data, and implement technological solutions such as the FRDM supply chain risk management software;
- embedding modern slavery risk within its Investment Policy and ESG reviews of its investments;
- increasing awareness amongst staff via an internal Anti-Slavery Working Group; and providing modern slavery training to procurement and other relevant staff.

WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY

The University of Newcastle has continued to make progress against its Wellbeing Health and Safety Strategy 2020 – 2025. We remain committed to a healthy and safe workplace with key programs including upgrade of our reporting technologies, review of Health and Safety Management System Frameworks and a focus on wellbeing and psychosocial health and safety.

At year-end a total of 93% of staff completed the University's Work Health and Safety induction (including casual staff). Our safety culture is reflected in the support of 17 Health and Safety Committees, over 730 safety reviews and more than 3,200 early intervention contacts. There were 6 reports of serious or near miss incidents made to SafeWork NSW involving University staff. A total of 29 claims were accepted for Workers' Compensation due to workplace injury. No prosecutions were made under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011.

WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

EQUITY DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY

In August 2023, the University launched its Equity Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy, which comprises five Action Plans.

This 3-year plan is underpinned by the EDI Framework Principles developed in consultation with staff, students and senior University Leaders. The purpose of the EDI Strategy is to mature the University's approach to EDI by integrating equity, diversity, and inclusion principles across all policies, practices, and activities of the University of Newcastle. This strategy aligns and supports other EDI plans that promote workforce diversity, e.g. the Maligagu Indigenous Employment Strategy, through actions such as workforce planning to assist with meeting diversity targets. In addition to key target groups such as Women and Indigenous, the EDI strategy also identified a number of other equity cohorts and takes an intersectional view to ensure compounding inequity amongst equity cohorts is recognised.

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER

The 'Maligagu' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy and Action Plan identifies four priorities that drive the University's approach to increasing employment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. The Indigenous Employment Committee meets quarterly to monitor the progress of the actions outlined in the 'Maligagu' Strategy.

Priority 1 – Attraction and Recruitment

Current participation rate across the University is 3.11% as of December 2023. Overall, the University is tracking well in this space however there are several factors that may affect continuous progression that will be reviewed by the Executive Leadership Team in 2024. Barriers and challenges will be noted that reflect on the current environment when recruiting suitable candidates, particularly in the academic field.

The School Based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SBAT) program has restarted for 2024 with cadets due to complete by November 2024.

Priority 2 – Environment and Retention

At the end of 2023, 75% of fixed-term and ongoing University staff had completed Cultural Capability training and we maintained our 2022 workforce participation rate of 3.1%.

In 2024, members of the University's Indigenous Staff Network will be invited to participate in network days (4 – 5 planned) with guest speakers aimed at supporting career development and progression. Staff will be surveyed to understand what is important to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff so the University is culturally safe and an attractive employer of choice both nationally and locally.

There is additional team building work taking place to address staffing and retention in some areas. Discussions are occurring around how the University can provide long term job security with contracts usually being 12 months or backfilling positions etc which are not always attractive to those looking at long term job security.

Priority 3 – Development and Advancement

Two staff members recently completed the First Impact Program with Thirri Wirri, a 100% Aboriginal owned business. The program provides an innovative and culturally appropriate experience that reaches across diverse areas such as economic participation, community engagement, governance, social policy and education, environment, and service accountability. The staff members who completed this program provided feedback that it was extremely beneficial and provided confidence and skills to continue growth and development in their leadership journey. Expressions of Interest for 2024 are underway.

Priority 4 – Governance and Leadership

Throughout 2023 we provided input into the University's Athena Swan Cygnet applications and other funding applications and proposals. This included sourcing letters of support from community. We continue to work with HR to review recruitment options and help address forecast barriers regarding succession planning and difficult-to-fill positions. We also provide support to the University's Knowledge Exchange and Enterprise (KEE) unit and renewable energy sector partners with community consultation process, education, and workforce planning. We are also supporting efforts to provide Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) opportunities for students due to a large number of enquiries in this area. We regularly support requests for cultural contributions at University events.

GENDER

The University currently has a KPI of 37.5% by 2025 for Senior Academic Women articulated in the *Looking Ahead Strategic Plan*. As of 30 December 2023, the University achieved 34.9% representation. For Senior Professional Women, the University has a KPI of 50% by 2025, and as of 30 December 2023, the University achieved 55.1% representation.

To support the above gender targets and targets such as increasing the representation of women in STEM, the University participates in key programs such as Athena Swan, a national accreditation program to support women and other under-represented groups. Since receiving Bronze accreditation in 2018 (the entry point for the Athena Swan accreditation program), the University has been on the pathway to Silver Accreditation and received notification in December 2023, that it had successfully received all 5 Cygnets making it eligible to apply for Silver Accreditation in 2024. Cygnets represent removing or reducing barriers to attraction, progression or retention. In addition to Athena Swan, the University continued supporting women through key in-house programs such as the Women in Leadership, Women in Research Fellowships and Mentoring Programs.

DISABILITY

The University's Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2024-2025 (DIAP) contains 33 actions over four focus areas: Inclusive Culture; Equitable Learning; Inclusive Digital Environment; and Accessible Campuses and Facilities.

The DIAP was compiled in partnership with University stakeholders and overseen by the Disability Inclusion Action Plan Subcommittee of the Equity Diversity and Inclusion Committee. After endorsement by the Executive Committee in October 2023, the DIAP was launched to the University community in early December 2023, coinciding with the International Day of People with Disability and an Accessibility Speed Seminar was presented by members of the University's Accessibility Champions Network.

In 2024, the DIAP will deliver an improved student and staff experience. Several actions will enhance inclusive teaching and learning design in course delivery. The DIAP will help bridge the gap between compliance and user-friendly, accessible design by requiring students and staff with disability to be consulted over projects that will impact them. Students and staff with disability will continue to benefit from the continued rollout of the Disability Confidence Training program to University staff. The University's staff recruitment, onboarding and employee support will become more accessible and inclusive through improved connectivity, flexibility and communication around reasonable adjustments.

The University of Newcastle is not obligated to create a Disability Inclusion Action Plan under the Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW).