

# 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

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 policymakers locally and in the Asia-Pacific region, to address the spatial dimensions of human and environmental change and to help build spaces of possibility.

### REDUCING THE IMPACT OF OUR OPERATIONS

Sustainability remains one of our core values, and as a university we are committed to taking steps to reduce the impact of our operations. Since our Looking Ahead Strategic Plan was implemented, the University has transitioned to 100% renewable electricity (in 2020) and from the beginning of 2023, implemented use of green gas.

Other activities in 2024 included:

- Net Zero Grand Challenge: gave multi-disciplinary teams the opportunity to propose and develop potential solutions to a problem with local and global significance - achieving net zero emissions.

- We established a new Sustainability Team with a senior manager sustainability and sustainability officer to be recruited in 2025. The team will be responsible for the strategic direction and operationalisation of the University's sustainability goals.
- We completed ongoing bushland regeneration works across 25 hectares of dedicated bushland conservation zones on our campuses. This project continues to improve the biodiversity of our bushland campuses, removing exotic weeds and allowing native vegetation to flourish.
- We developed a new bushfire management plan for our Ourimbah and Callaghan campuses, with a designated project manager to commence implementation in 2025. Mitigating bushfire risk is a key priority for the University in a changing climate. Implementation of these plans will allow for a contemporary approach to mitigating this risk to our built assets, human life, the natural environment and Indigenous sites.
- We developed new Operational Environmental Management Plans (OEMP) for our Ourimbah and Callaghan campuses. Identifying the top 10 environmental aspects and impacts, the University now has clear procedures in place to mitigate this risk and achieve environmental compliance. Through the OEMP process, the University has identified a number of key projects to assist in the protection of our natural environment and waterways.
- After launching a new organic waste collection and composting program in late 2019, we began converting food waste and compostable packaging from our dining hall and other food outlets into fertiliser and green electricity. In its first year, the program collected 7.95 tonnes of organic waste. Since then, this amount has increased steadily, reaching 53.9 tonnes in 2024.

### UNITED NATIONS' SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

The University of Newcastle is a signatory to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The University's Looking Ahead Strategic Plan and Environmental Sustainability Plan are guided by these goals. In 2024, the University ranked 39th in the world in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings. We also ranked 4th in the world for 'Clean Water and Sanitation' and 9th in the world for 'Climate Action'.

### 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 (UN SDGs). Mercer is a founding signatory to the Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI) and recognised as a global and local leader in responsible investing. In 2023, the University established new three-year ESG goals.

At the end of 2024, the University had performed as follows against key targets:

1. Maintained a total portfolio ESG score that is better than the universe by at least 0.5 by 2026. In 2024, the University achieved an ESG score of 1.93, outperforming the industry benchmark average of 2.2.
2. Monitored carbon footprint and increase focus on transition risk assessment. The University's portfolio is closely monitored for its carbon footprint with 22% of unlisted infrastructure investments now allocated to renewables.
3. Decarbonised total portfolio by 25% on a weighted average carbon intensity (WACI) basis, from a 2020 baseline. The University's portfolio WACI is currently 35% below the composite benchmark and has decarbonised by 32.4% since 2020.
4. Increased investments aligned with the UN SDGs. The University's portfolio remains well aligned with the goals with a net impact rating of 1.18 for 2024 compared to the benchmark rating of 0.66.

The University continues to work with Mercer to identify areas of further development in improving its ESG investment approach. All statistics are either as at 30 June 2024 or over the Financial Year (FY) 2023–2024.

## DISABILITY INCLUSION ACTION PLAN

The University's Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) 2024–2025 aims to eliminate existing barriers within the University and create opportunities through equity measures to bridge these gaps gradually. The DIAP progressively enhances accessibility and inclusion across campus infrastructure, the digital environment, teaching and learning, student services, and for professional and academic staff. The DIAP has four focus areas:

1. Inclusive Culture
2. Equitable Learning
3. Inclusive Digital Environment
4. Accessible Campuses and Facilities

Note: The University of Newcastle is not required to create a Disability Inclusion Action Plan under the Disability Inclusion Act 2014 (NSW); therefore, it does not strictly align to priorities created under such legislated plans.

In 2024, the DIAP has delivered on actions striving to improve student and staff experience:

- 259 academic and professional staff completed the Disability Confidence Training program, bringing the total membership of the Accessibility Champions network to 450.
- The University featured many students with disability in future student, alumni and philanthropy campaigns, raising the presence of disability in mainstream marketing and communications.
- Bridging 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.
- Advance Equity in Research Fellowship eligibility was expanded to include a broader range of people from different equity cohorts, including people with disability and chronic health conditions.
- The University introduced a success criterion for all newly procured technology, requiring compliance with accessibility guidelines.

In the final year of the DIAP, action will continue toward improving the University's approach to inclusive teaching and learning to improve retention rates for students.

## STATEMENT OF STEPS TAKEN TO ADDRESS MODERN SLAVERY RISKS IN 2024

The University is committed to combatting modern slavery and has implemented proactive measures to address modern slavery risks. Oversight of this critical area is provided by the University's Anti-Slavery Working Group, which includes representatives from diverse areas of the organisation. This group leads the implementation of the University's Modern Slavery Action Plan and ensures alignment with the NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner's Guidance on Reasonable Steps (GRS).

The University has adopted a robust and systematic approach to managing modern slavery risks in its supply chains, ensuring compliance with statutory obligations and driving continuous improvement. Specific actions taken to ensure goods and services procured are not a product of modern slavery include:

- Modern slavery clauses embedded across all standard forms of contracts with suppliers and service providers.
- A Supplier Code of Conduct that explicitly addresses modern slavery expectations.
- Modern slavery risk assessments conducted for all procurement activities valued over \$250,000 using the NSW Anti-Slavery Commissioner's GRS Inherent Risk Identification Tool. Procurements flagged with a 'heightened' modern slavery risk undergo additional evaluation, including assessment against weighted criteria for supplier responses to Modern Slavery schedules.
- Collaborating with the Australian Universities Procurement Network (AUPN) Anti-Slavery Working Group to:
  - Promote knowledge sharing and strategies for addressing modern slavery;
  - Develop and refine supplier self-assessment questionnaires to deliver consistency across the sector;
  - Aggregate sector wide procurement data for trend analysis and shared risk management; and
  - Leverage sector wide supply chain risk management platforms, to monitor and address inherent risks.
- Integrating modern slavery considerations within the University's Investment Policy and conducting ESG reviews to assess and mitigate risks across the investment portfolio.
- Work undertaken to expand modern slavery training to all staff involved in procurement and contract management.
- Increasing sourcing and partnerships with local, small, and medium enterprises (SMEs) that meet ethical labour standards, supporting community development while reducing modern slavery risks.
- A new partnership established for the provision of cleaning services with a contractor certified under the Cleaning Accountability Framework (CAF) 3-Star Prequalification, ensuring compliance with ethical labour standards, and reducing modern slavery risks within the high-risk cleaning services category.

These actions demonstrate the University's commitment to safeguarding human rights, promoting ethical sourcing, and reducing the risk of modern slavery within its sphere of influence.

The NSW Anti-slavery Commissioner did not notify the University of any significant issue requiring a response in its Annual Report during 2024, however the University did host a visit from the Commissioner in 2024.

## 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 a focus on wellbeing and psychosocial health and safety including case management, upgrades of our reporting technologies and review of laboratory safety inspection programs.

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 750 safety reviews and more than 3,450 early intervention contacts. There were 16 reports of serious or near miss incidents made to SafeWork NSW. A total of 26 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 & INCLUSION

The University's Equity Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2023-2025 aims to enhance the University's approach to EDI by embedding equity, diversity and inclusion principles into all policies, practices, and activities and is based on EDI Framework principles. The EDI Strategy identifies a range of equity cohorts and the potential for intersectionality to exacerbate inequities further. The strategy includes five action plans that address EDI activities not covered by other initiatives, ensuring strategic alignment with complementary plans. The five EDI Strategy Action Plans are:

1. Policy and Procedure Approach
2. Safety for Everyone
3. Inclusive Leadership for Executive and Senior Staff
4. Inclusive Behaviours for Academic and Professional Staff
5. Accessibility

In 2024, the University continued to progress actions from the above five plans, with a particular highlight being the development of a new overarching EDI Policy and the delivery of a suite of Inclusive Leadership training tailored for the Executive Leadership Team, including, but not limited to, the piloting of a Reverse Mentoring program pairing neurodivergent students with executive leaders. In 2025, the University will continue to monitor and report on the progress of actions and will commence consultation for the next iteration of the EDI Strategy and associated action plans.

### ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

The 'Maligagu' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Strategy (2020 - 2025) and Action Plan identifies four priorities that drive the University's approach to increasing employment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff:

- Priority 1 – Attraction and Recruitment
- Priority 2 – Environment and Retention
- Priority 3 – Development and Advancement
- Priority 4 – Governance and Leadership

The University aims to reach 3.9% participation of staff who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander by 2025. As of December 2024, the University had 107 staff members identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, equating to 3.3% representation. The Indigenous Employment Committee meets quarterly to monitor the progress of the actions outlined in the 'Maligagu' Strategy and Action Plan and will continue to do so in 2025.

The University has a long and proud history in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, research and engagement, led by the Wollotuka Institute. Currently the University has the largest full-time equivalent (FTE) Aboriginal student enrolment in the country and has a strong record of success. To continue this success, the University has a strategic focus on improving institutional retention of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Our Indigenous Commitment) with reference to our overall undergraduate and postgraduate cohorts. Revised Indigenous student support and retention strategies will assist with progressing towards the 0% variance target for 2025.

### GENDER EQUITY

In June 2024, the University achieved Athena SWAN Silver accreditation, a KPI under the 'Looking Ahead' initiative. The University proudly shared first place with Edith Cowan University in securing this Silver Accreditation. This journey from Bronze to Silver involved identifying five major barriers, known as 'Cygnetts,' that hinder the attraction, progression, and retention of women and other underrepresented groups. The Silver accreditation is valid for seven years, and the University can apply for Gold accreditation in five years. During this period, the University will implement and evaluate evidence-based actions (Silver Action Plan) to reduce or eliminate key barriers for women and other under-represented groups.

Complementing the Athena Swan work mentioned above, the University also has two gender-based Institutional KPIs where progress was tracked throughout 2024. The first KPI is 40% representation of senior academic women by 2025; as of December 2024, the University achieved 36% representation. For senior professional women, the University has a KPI of 50% by 2025; as of December 2024, the University achieved 59% representation. The University will continue to monitor these KPIs throughout 2025 and continue strategies, particularly in relation to senior academic women, to lift representation further.

### SPIRITUAL SUPPORT AND INCLUSION

In 2024, a Spiritual Support and Inclusion Action Plan was developed and added to the suite of EDI Action Plans to foster a more inclusive and supportive University environment. This plan aims to respect and accommodate diverse spiritual beliefs, provide necessary resources, and promote overall well-being through open dialogue and interfaith understanding. By nurturing such an environment, the University aspires to enhance its community's mental and emotional health.